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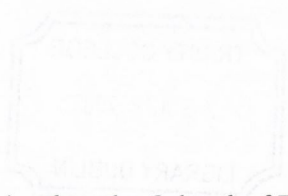
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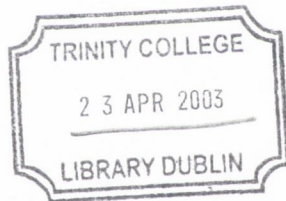
The Look: Ethics and Ontology in Herman Melville's
"The Piazza", "Bartleby, the Scrivener", and "Benito Cereno"

Francesco Bigagli



A Thesis submitted to the School of English at the
University of Dublin, Trinity College, in fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

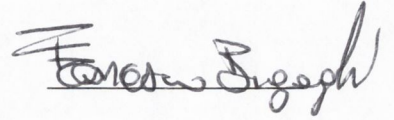
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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Francesco Bigagli". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "F" and a long, sweeping underline.

Francesco Bigagli

Acknowledgements

I shall be brief. I would like to thank my family for the support throughout all these years and especially my mother for financing my academic ambitions. Equally, I am immensely grateful to Stephen Matterson, a great *maestro* and friend.

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A malo libera nos, Domine

Summary

This thesis proposes to answer to the question of the Other and the Other as question in Herman Melville's *The Piazza* (January and February 1856), *Bartleby, the Scrivener; a Story of Wall Street* (November and December 1853) and *Benito Cereno* (October, November and December 1855).

The introduction is organized into three parts. The first one is necessarily dedicated to phenomenology. Necessarily, for phenomenology and its method of investigation is a precious tool of work. Necessary also was the reference to the 'ethical philosophy' (Robert Bernasconi) of Emmanuel Lévinas, whose discourse (discourse that has given new force and vitality to contemporary phenomenology) profoundly animated and most often suggested to me where the analysis of Melville's texts presented a *difficulty of sense*, to borrow the excellent expression of Lévi-Strauss. The third part of the introduction will outline a more detailed synopsis of the subject of research within the aforesaid texts.

In this thesis, the order in which the three tales appeared in (May-June) 1856 with the publication of *The Piazza Tales* will be respected², though for structural reasons the exegesis of the second chapter dedicated to *The Piazza* (chapter six) will be postponed, becoming a sort of epilogue. Similarly, the first chapter concerning this short story should be taken as an extended introduction. *Bartleby, the Scrivener* and *Benito Cereno* comprise the very core of this research. It is in fact only with the second chapter (about *Bartleby, the Scrivener*) that we will get to the heart of our matter. The third chapter in particular (still *Bartleby*), taking strength from the thematical background patiently laid in the first two, proposes to demonstrate the surpassing of the epistemological centrality of the 'I' by force of ethics. The fourth and fifth chapters, dedicated to the long story or short novel *Benito Cereno*, while attesting to the conceptual solidity of the thesis and extending its horizons further, will aim on the other hand, unlike the chapters on *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, at investigating the reasons determining the impossibility on the part of the I to step outside of itself. The problem of envy, which has never been taken into account by Melville's critics, constitutes their thematic nucleus. Further to this, it should be added that it is with chapter five, due to its density and extreme carefulness of the proceeding, that this thesis ultimately reaches its apex.

² That is, *The Piazza*, *Bartleby, the Scrivener* and *Benito Cereno*.

Finally, we shall conclude this summary with a brief mention as to the methodology adopted in this research. In the last twenty years, a consistent number of Melville's critics, starting from the important historical-political studies by Michael Paul Rogin³, aimed at a Marxist reading of the American writer, was more and more concerned with contextualising Melville and his work within a purely historical horizon (Melville and Calvinism⁴; Melville and Marx...). Yet, if on the one side, these studies contributed to 'distract', at least partially, the attention of the critics from that *intellectual burly-burly* (Edward Said) that is deconstructionism (mainly in the United States, under the wing of eminent 'disciples' of Jacques Derrida like Paul de Man and J.Hillis Miller), they dangerously deviated from a reading of the text as such. Our intention is thus that of suspending every historical-political or biographical knowledge we have of Melville's work and life, so as to turn back to the text itself, intended in so much as origin and end of every critical investigation. The analysis will be therefore textually rigorous: a step by step questioning of the order of phenomena, their aetiology, dynamics, the cause/effect relations, the implications to the plane of the plot; with the view patiently to liberate the profound sense of the stories, unearthing, as Husserl would put it, *their diamond, their nugget*. In this regard, it should also be said that the choice to adopt a close reading of the texts in question has been taken especially in consideration of Melville's textual and conceptual richness. The American writer slowly spins the web of his texts, he patiently builds it up, thus taking extreme care of the reader. Yet, he is, in the end, most often thought (and we are referring here in particular to overlooked texts such as *The Piazza* and *Benito Cereno*) to let down his readers, precisely by not delivering in terms of depth. The greatness of his textual architectures may just be thought to put in evidence a discrepancy between form and content. It is then in our interest not only to reverse this view but in fact to suggest the immensity of a thought which utterly surpasses its said, going beyond. Ultimately, patience is the very key-word to get as close as possible to an understanding of this genius.

³ Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville*, Knopf, NY, 1979.

⁴ See for instance T.Walter Herbert, Jr, *Moby Dick and Calvinism*, Rutgers University Press, New Jersey, 1977.

Introduction

(a) Phenomenology:

According to phenomenology, the world exists.¹ It simply 'is': *always already there before any reflection begins, as an unalienable presence*, to borrow Merleau-Ponty's expression.² It is always already there before all production of meaning. In its radicalism, phenomenology aims at going back to the origin of all knowledge, to its roots or foundations: that is, to find again that original and naïve contact with the world, that *wonder* (E.Fink), before it prior to every pre-existing comprehension or assumption we have of it. This is a return to a way of looking, as Edmund Husserl would put it, *ohne-zu-machen*.³ A way of looking in sum *free from presuppositions*. Therefore, where can these roots of knowledge be found? In the 'things' (*Sachen*) themselves, namely phenomena. Phenomenology aims at going back to the things themselves, as we said just now. Phenomenology is somehow an archaeology. The only *modus operandi* in order to dig down to the roots of the phenomena would consist in "putting out of action the general thesis which belonged to the essence of the natural standpoint".⁴ In other words, what the so-called *phenomenological reduction* advocates is the putting in question, the disconnection, the suspension of the phenomena from every existential affiliation we may have with the world, so as to grasp the revealing, the appearing to the surface, almost *sotto voce*, of the essences of the phenomena (*Sachen*); that is, their presence. It can be said that the purpose of phenomenology is the very destruction of the re-presentation: *viser l'objet, se représenter, c'est déjà oublier l'être de sa vérité*, as the French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas asserts. To aim at, to tend to, to see an object does always already imply the turning of what is essentially and thus unalienably other into the same, that is, to re-present. The concept of intentionality comes here into play: along with the turn to the 'things', phenomenologists (first and foremost Husserl) were becoming more and more concerned with turning to the consciousness of the

¹ For an introduction to phenomenology we referred to: Lyotard, J.F., *La Phénoménologie*, Paris, Presse Univ. de France, 1963; Lauer, Q., *Phenomenology: Its Genesis and Prospect*, New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1965; Spiegelberg, H., *The Phenomenological Movement*, third revised and enlarged edition, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994.

² Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Phenomenology of perception*, Colin Smith, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962, p.10.

³ Literally 'without making (something) up'.

⁴ Husserl, Edmund, *Ideas*, Colliers, New York, 1931, p.99.

⁵ 'To aim at an object, to represent it to oneself, it is already to lose the truth of being'. Lévinas, Emmanuel, *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, Paris, Vrin, 1994, p.114, my translation.

perceiving subject. First of all, it is necessary to point out that, as well as positing the existence of the world, phenomenology affirms the existence of Man. Man exists as *Being-in-the-World* (*in-der-Welt-Sein*), to borrow Heidegger's terminology. It is *thrown* in the mundane existent with which it constantly relates or has to relate to. As a *being-in-the-World*, Man is always already in relation with it (the world): it uses its objects, inhabits its spaces and, above all, it interacts with other people. As a result of this, for the phenomenologists there is no hiatus between Man (subject) and the world (object), this latter being in sum nothing less than a complement of Man's consciousness. As Simone de Beauvoir claims: "one of the immense merits of phenomenology consists in having restored to man the right to an authentic existence by abolishing the opposition between the subject and the object. It is impossible to define an object while cutting it off from the subject by which and for which it is object. And the subject reveals itself only through the objects in which it engages itself".⁶ The correlation between subject and object is due to the fact that "*any state of consciousness is in itself consciousness of something.*"⁷ According to phenomenology's watchword each act of consciousness is necessarily intentional: that is, it transcends itself pointing directly to the things themselves (i.e. perception *of* a house, fear *for*...).⁸ In a certain sense, it could be said that the intentional subject is always a transcendental one: Man is a *Being-in-the-world*. Yet, transcendence means here relativity and therefore finiteness. The subject is transcendental within immanence, precisely because it always already tends towards 'something', ultimately naming it, naming the identical. Transcendence is egological: phenomenology thus starts off with the object of re-presentation and turns to its intentional implications, 'denouncing' the egological re-presentation of the phenomena. It questions the theoretical as-similation and therefore possession of 'things' on the part of a perceiving consciousness. That is, as we have said earlier on, it puts into question their reduction to the field of forces of an I in its identity of same. The question posited by phenomenology is somehow that of being. Ontology comprises the very central element of

⁶ Beauvoir, Simone de, *Les Temps Modernes I* (1945), p. 363, my transl.

⁷ Husserl, Edmund, *Cartesian Meditations*, translated by J. Pfeiffer and E. Lévinas, New York, Colliers Books, 1955, p. 93.

⁸ More in particular, the intentionality of any state of consciousness is explained by Edmund Husserl in the *noesis-noema* relationship: "the noesis is the intentional act looked at as a real subjective operation, while the noema is the same act looked at as intentionally structured". Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, *ibid.* The noesis refers to the subject that perceives, thinks, desires, recollects, while the noema is the perceived, the thought, the desired, the recollected. In short, the noesis signifies, the noema is the signified. As to this, Spiegelberg states that: "it is only in his (Husserl's) 'Ideas' that the intentional object is distinguished from the correlate, (i.e. a tree can burn, but it is nonsense to say that the noematic object can burn) and that phenomenology becomes both noetic and noematic phenomenology". Spiegelberg, *The phenomenological movement*, p. 94.

phenomenology: its philosophical quest may be understood as an odyssey. Its 'hero' is definitely Ulysses. Phenomenology is fundamentally marked by a nostalgia for being. A nostalgia which 'pushes' for the breakup of re-presentation.

Yet, what does indeed constitute the very paradox or contradiction of phenomenology is the fact that if, on the one hand, it aims at the very destruction of all representations, at going back to the things themselves by suspending every previous knowledge we have of them, on the other, the act of (already, in itself, intentional) digging down to the roots of phenomena would come to imply, sooner or later, the coincidence with these roots or foundations: their *comprehension* (from Latin *comprehendere*, from *com* 'together' + *prehendere* 'grasp'. Source: New Oxford English Dict.) A coincidence which certainly entails the reaching of a meaning (*sens*): that is, the turning of what is other into the same. Not only that: if Man is in relation with being, that is, its philosophical foundation remains, in the end, the 're-turn-to' being, the intellectual coincidence with it, the authentic understanding of the oneself, does this not come to define the very character of one's existence in terms of a mere solipsism, a solitude, a finitude? Does this not come to exclude always and already the entire intersubjective nature of Man? Does the philosophical wisdom exhaust itself within ontology? Or, is ontology just what maintains our existence away from a non-totalizing relationship with the other?

(b) Emmanuel Lévinas:

What is at stake here is the difference, as Lévinas would put it, the otherness of the other man, construed as the absolute term of all wisdom. The singularity of Lévinas' work can be said to lie in the attempt to move beyond the dynamic of a research wherein the researched is an origin to be rediscovered or the conquering, the com-prehension of an objective. It lies in the effort to radicalize phenomenology by replacing the relationship with being with a relationship with the *Other* (namely, the other person: '*autrui*') and its alterity, and thus, more profoundly, to unstrip phenomenology of every ontological or egological element.

Lévinas moves away from ontology that he defines as 'totalizing'; whereas totalization means here the very denial of the Other's difference and it occurs every time I happen to reduce the Other to a set of logical/ontological categories. Lévinas dislocates his philosophical attention beyond ontology, beyond the humanism of being *qua* egology, advocating the *humanism of the other man*. A displacement which implies the ethical breakup

of ontology. As Lévinas asserts: “the subject is not free as the wind, but already a destiny, that he does not receive from the past or the future, but from the present”.⁹ Namely, from the *presence* of the Other, who appears into my world from nowhere.¹⁰ To my eyes, the Other is certainly a mystery, as its presence cannot be assimilated into a totality *qua* being, into identity: its *face* is the revealing of a transcendence infinitely resisting my (own) being. The revealing of a transcendence that exceeds or exhausts my being-able-to-be-able. My power of re-presentation and my power period. This is a transcendence that does ultimately put me into question and before a question: namely, the question of my *immemorial* (that is, anterior to representation) responsibility for the Other, whose *face* always already, from the very start, expresses the commandment *Thou-Shalt-not-Kill*:

the relation to the Face is both the relation to the absolutely weak – to what is absolutely exposed, what is bare and destitute, the relation with bareness and consequently with what is alone and can undergo the supreme isolation we call death – and there is, consequently, in the Face of the Other always the death of the Other and thus, in some way, an incitement to murder, the temptation to go to the extreme, to completely neglect the other – and at the same time the Face is also the ‘Thou Shalt not Kill’ [...] it is like a calling out to me.¹¹

For Lévinas, the being of the subject only gains its sense in so much as it is responsibility-for-the-other-person: from immemorial time, the other’s transcendence constitutes me. As soon as the other enters into my world, as soon as it summons me I am hostage to (my) responsibility for it, whatever ‘the costs’ of this (un)condition.¹²

⁹ Lévinas, *En découvrant...*, p.189.

¹⁰ According to the French philosopher the world is *my* world: I constitute it through my reasoning and, therefore, it exists only for me.

¹¹ Lévinas, *Entre Nous*, The Athlone Press, London, 1998, p.104.

¹² I am freely borrowing here from Carlo Sini’s “La morale: faccia a faccia con l’altro”, in *L’Unità*, 27 dicembre, 1995. In this concern, Lévinas himself affirms: “Face, already language before words, an original language of the human face stripped of the countenance it gives itself – or puts up with – under the proper names, titles and genera of the world. An original language, already an asking, and precisely as such (from the point of view of the in-itself of being) wretchedness, penury, but also an imperative making me answerable for the mortal, my fellowman, *despite my own death* – a message of difficult holiness, of sacrifice; origin of value and good, the idea of the human order within the order given to the human. The language of the inaudible, the language of the unheard of, the language of the non-said. Scripture!”. Lévinas, “Totality and Infinity: Preface to the German Edition”, in *Entre Nous*, p.199 (my emphasis). In this sense, Lévinas’s eschatology has to be comprehended ethically rather than ontologically: “*this way of demanding me, of putting me in question and of appealing to me, to my responsibility for the death of the other, is so irreducible a meaning that it is in terms of this that the meaning of death must be understood, beyond the abstract dialectic of being and its negation, to which (once violence is reduced to negation and annihilation) death is reduced.* Death signifies in the concreteness of what for me is the impossibility of abandoning the other to his aloneness, in the prohibition addressed to me of that abandonment. Its meaning begins in the inter-human”. *Entre Nous*, p.146 (emphasis added).

It is on this ground that Lévinas's ethical research develops itself. But, let us give a definition of what the French philosopher intends for ethics:

We call ethical a relationship between terms such as are united neither by a synthesis of the understanding nor by a relationship between subject or object, and yet where the one weighs or concerns or is meaningful to the other, where they are bound by a plot which knowing can neither exhaust nor unravel.¹³

The ethical relationship or even relationship of responsibility towards the Other is thus thought beyond the problem of comprehension, *sa-voir*. Beyond ontology. The subjectivity ethically structured precedes and exceeds every subjective interiority, every consciousness 'of': my being would in fact respond to the Other before my knowledge of it. Ethics comes prior to ontology and it comes prior to it starting precisely from what Lévinas calls *declination of the cogito*: my answering for the other does not explicate itself in terms of an intentional act, an act of will that, already confined within an objective horizon, would permit the sovereign perseverance of the Ego within the being of representation but, on the contrary, would precede my own initiative, it would come prior to all intentionality.¹⁴ To put this in other words, my answering for the Other would emerge within myself, yet *despite myself*. A *despite-myself* which is goodness, which is love without concupiscence and which de-termines the very interruption or suspension of the "eternal and irreversible return of the identical to itself and the intangibility of its logical and ontological primacy. Suspension of its ideal priority, denial of every alterity"¹⁵, that forgets the Other and its truth. Proceeding from my nonintentional answering for the Other, the (un)condition (Lévinas) of a relationship wherein the Other comes first would thus be laid: "the only absolute value is the human possibility of giving the other priority", says Levinas.¹⁶ It is about a relationship wherein the I would no longer say 'I (am)', but 'me': *Here I am*¹⁷; signifying the extreme exposition of the subject in (its) *responsibility* for the Other. This is in sum a relationship in which the I would no longer aim at its being through comprehension, assimilation and therefore possession of the other's being. The ethical relation would come to break with the "correlation and correspondence of the rigorous noetic/noematic parallelism of intentionality that

¹³ Lévinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, transl. by A. Lingis, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht/ Boston/ London, 1993, p.116.

¹⁴ For Lévinas, intentionality "also indicates aspiration, finality, and desire, a moment of egotism or egoism and, at all events, of egology". Lévinas, *Entre Nous*, p.159.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ I, Samuel, 3:4.

informs transcendent consciousness in Husserl's admirable work".¹⁸ And it would ultimately break both with the motif of the return-to and the solipsistic unity of the I (solipsism *qua* produce of its intentional activity that permits the restless return of the Ego to itself). As Lévinas makes clear:

in this whole priority of the relationship to the other, there is a break with the great traditional idea of the excellence of unity. The relation would be already a deprivation of this unity. That is the Plotinian tradition. My idea consists in considering sociality as independent of the 'lost' unity.¹⁹

Therefore, in its nonintentional answering for the Other, in its ex-position itself before it, the I would no longer be 'sheltered' within the safe and familiar horizon of its world, within its identity. Rather, it would already be, *anarchically*²⁰, on the way, on the path towards the Other. On the way for the Other 'in the desert without manna' (Sini): as a restless being put into *question* by and for (causative) the always already provocative presence of the other person.

It is now clear that the quest of the subject commanded in responsibility will not consume itself in knowledge, "as in knowledge the object, whether one wants it or not, dissolves itself in the subject, and the duality vanishes. It will not be an ecstasy, for, in ecstasy, the subject dissolves itself in the object and finds itself again in its unity".²¹ On the contrary, it will be about a research without researched, beyond vision and certainty (beyond power), wherein the other reifies itself into the same and consciousness turns bourgeois, to paraphrase Lévinas. A research in which the I does not retake itself, does not rejoin itself: this is indeed an infinite quest, which defines the ethical transcendence of the subject *qua* hostage to (its) responsibility for the Other.

¹⁸ "But in the discourse of 'Totality and Infinity', we have not forgotten the memorable fact that, in his third 'Meditations of First Philosophy', Descartes encountered a thought, a noesis, which was not on the scale of its noema, its cogitatum. An idea which gave the philosopher 'bedazzlement' instead of accomodating itself within the *self-evidence* of intuition. A thought thinking more – or thinking *better* – than it thought according to truth. A thought that also responded *with adoration* to the Infinite of which it was the thought. For the author of 'Totality and Infinity', that was a great source of wonder, after the doctrine of noetic/noematic parallelism in the instruction of his teacher Husserl, who called himself a disciple of Descartes!" Lévinas, *Entre Nous*, p. 200, Lévinas' emphasis.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.112.

²⁰ In *Otherwise than being or, beyond essence* (1974), Lévinas's most mature work, this technical term indicates all that does not depend from an *arkhia*. The nonintentional consciousness is always already anarchical: the subject is no longer in control of himself, he involuntarily responds for the Other.

²¹ Lévinas, *Il Tempo e l' Altro*, Genova, Il Melangolo, 1997, p.18, my trans. from Italian.

Lévinas can thus be said to 'replace' the mythical figure of Ulysses with the biblical one of Abraham²² and, by the same token, to replace the wisdom of knowledge with the wisdom of Goodness and Goodness as wisdom.

(c) Melville's "The Piazza Tales":

And I only am escaped alone to tell thee – Job
The drama's done. Why then here does any step forth? – Because one did survive
the wreck [...] Call me Ishmael²³:

So finishes and commences (recommences?) the Cain-like hunt for the other which is *Moby-Dick or, the whale*. The end is known. Ishmael stands as the sole survivor of the *Pequod*. He stands as a survivor and as a culprit, for the death of his mates (the death of Starbuck, Pip, Daggoo, Tashtego, Queequeg, Ahab himself...) regards him. It is, here and now, Ishmael's business. It is, here and now, his affair and it is his affair proceeding precisely from his outliving.

But, who is Ishmael or better yet who is the Ishmael we encounter after the wreck of the *Pequod*? Is he still a *persona* or is he a subject in responsibility? Is he perhaps Ahab himself after the disaster? After all, *all are Ahab* (p.441)...death of a persona, an *Ego* (One in itself and for itself under Thanatos' star) and birth of a subject we might venture to say. A guilt-bearer subject, hostage to its responsibility for the Other. Ultimately, this is a subject without identity, if to have an identity means to return to oneself. A subject on the way towards the Other in the "desert without manna" of writing: destined to respond for the untimely death of his mates, destined to transmit their stories and *many as real a story*.²⁴ Ishmael's mission is indeed a trans-mission: *and I only am escaped alone to tell thee*. The narrative space becomes the meeting space between two solitudes: from the One to the Other, whereas the Other assumes the face of the reader. Melville's turn, if we are allowed to speak of a turning point (a *Kebrè*) in his work, would begin with and through *Moby-Dick*. It would start with Ishmael and its testimony. In a letter dated 1851 and addressed to his friend and 'fellow-traveller' Hawthorne (to whom Melville's masterpiece

²² "To the myth of Odysseus returning to Ithaca, we wish to oppose the story of Abraham leaving his fatherland forever for a land yet unknown, and forbidding his servant to bring even his son to the point of departure". Lévinas, "The Trace of the Other"; in *Deconstruction in context*, ed. Mark Taylor, Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1986, p.348.

²³ Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983, respectively p. 577 and p. 2 (future references are to this edition).

²⁴ The expression is quoted at the end of *The Piazza*. See *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, London, Everyman's Library, 1997, p.17 (future references are to this edition and given in the text).

was dedicated), Melville affirms:... “my development has been all within a few years past”.²⁵

The theme is that of errancy, research, meeting and communication but beyond ontology (comprehension, *sa-voir* and possession).²⁶ With *The Piazza Tales*, the American writer clearly shifts his attention onto the plane of existence, that is to say, the existence of the Other. On the plane of the interhuman. It is about the other person that Melville is thinking during these years: the Other, namely, the stranger, the poor, the wretched, the sufferer, the socially outcasted, the widow, the orphan; whose names are those of Marianna, Bartleby, Benito, Babo, Hunilla, Merrymusk, Jimmy Rose, Agatha...²⁷ The Other, simply my fellowman, another to be hosted in my house. The Other: what I am not for I am the rich, the possessor, the well-off or merely a happy soul. He thinks the Other starting from the *Same*, starting from the persona (the first-person narrator) rather than the subject or, even better, starting from the persona possibly to come to the subject *hostage* to its responsibility for the Other.

Dostoevskij claims that “to love our neighbor like ourselves accordingly with Christ’s commandment is impossible. On this earth we are bounded by the law of individuality. *Our I is an obstacle to us*”. The law of individuality: that is, the law of one’s autonomy or even freedom. In *The Piazza*, *Bartleby*, *the Scrivener* and *Benito Cereno*, the narrators are from the start situated *chez eux*. In the first tale, of a rural setting, the protagonist, most likely an ex-sailor, is the owner of “an old-fashioned farm-house”, real *axis mundi* of a prospected perfection: “...that in berry time no boy climbs hill or crosses vale without coming upon easels planted in every nook, and sun-burnt painters painting here. A very paradise of painters. The circle of the stars cut by the circle of the mountains. At least, so looks it from the house; though, once upon the mountain, no circle of them can you see”.²⁸ In *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, of urban setting (the subtitle reads *A Story of Wall-Street*), the ‘voice’, an “unambitious lawyer who never addresses a jury, or in any way draws down public applause; but in the cool tranquillity of a snug retreat, do a snug business among rich men’s bonds [...]”(p.18), dwells walled up within an office (in fact “a snug retreat”) whose windows offer but the gloomy view of a “white wall of the interior of a

²⁵ Melville, *Correspondence*, Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, Evanston and Chicago, 1993, p.193.

²⁶ Transcendence in *Moby-Dick* was ontological: a self-destructive chase for knowledge, power, fulfillment and totality.

²⁷ These latter four are the *Others* of stories and fragments of stories respectively titled as *The Norfolk Isle or the Chola widow*, which comprises one of the ten sketches of *The Encantadas, or The Enchanted Isles* (also included in *The Piazza Tales*), *Cock-a-doodle-doo!* (1853); *Jimmy Rose* (1855) and Agatha’s story, a novel Melville intended to write.

spacious sky-light shaft” on the one side and that “of a lofty brick wall, black by age and everlasting shade” (p.19) on the other. Likewise, the *good* captain Amasa Delano, protagonist of the long story or short novel *Benito Cereno*, finds in “the quiet orderliness”(p.60) of his sealer, cleverly baptized *The Bachelor’s Delight*, the “comfortable”(ibid.) foyer “of a family”(ibid.).

All three protagonists are posited within the *nut-shell* of their own being. Their initial position is an immanent one. They exist within themselves, so to speak, and are only for themselves. They constitute what we shall call from now on ‘the same’. They are identical, equal to themselves: nothing matters to them with the exception of their own well-being. Indifference (literally what is without difference) is their *modus vivendi*. To think the same is then to think it in terms of egoism, isolation and estrangement to responsibility that the regard of the Other always already invokes. Yet, *is Ahab, Ahab?* (*Moby-Dick*, p.546) Is the same truly itself? For Melville, the I is not without responsibility. It is (pre)originally for the Other: it is non-indifferent to it. It acquires its uniqueness in so much as responsibility and in responsibility to the calling out of the other person. It gains its sense by nonintentionally exposing itself to the Other.

Our scope is then to investigate whether or not the awakening to humanity, to fraternal love is possible. In other words, is the uprooting from the monological and totalizing space of the I to the space of the Other, space of meeting, relation and communication possible? Is the going beyond ontology by force of ethics possible? Is the exposition, the discourse beyond egology conceivable?

In all the three texts considered, the other breaks into the world from nowhere, its entrance is always, as we shall see, accidental, unexpected, always surprising: “. . .but the vastness and the lonesomeness are so oceanic, and the silence and the sameness, too, that the first peep of *a strange house*, rising beyond the trees, is for all the world like spying, on the Barbary coast, *an unknown sail*. And this recalls my inland voyage to fairy-land” (p.7, my emphasis). This is a voyage that will lead the narrator to the Other space: “. . .Pausing at the threshold, or rather where the threshold once had been, I saw through the open door-way, a lonely girl, sewing at a lonely window. A pale-cheeked girl, and fly-specked window, with wasps about the mended upper panes. I spoke. She shyly started, like some Tahiti girl, secreted for a sacrifice” (pp.12-13). Indeed, nothing is more imperative than her misery (*and fly-specked window, with wasps about the mended upper panes*), than her suffering (*a pale-cheeked girl*), her forlornness and mortal solitude (*secreted for a sacrifice*). From the very

²⁸ Melville, *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, p.5.

beginning, her face commands the *Thou Shall not kill*: the narrator is called out to care for her life. Is he then to respond, is he to expose himself to her?

Equally, in *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, the irruption of this latter into the world of the lawyer is purely fortuitous: "...in answer to my advertisement, a motionless young man one morning, stood upon my office threshold, the door being open, for it was summer. I can see that figure now – pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn! It was Bartleby" (p.24). The advent of Bartleby is certain to upset the narrator's well-protected way of living: *pallidly; pitiably; incurably*. It is certain to put it into question: "...I looked at him steadfastly. His face was leanly composed; his gray eye dimly calm. Not a wrinkle of agitation rippled him. Had there been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience or impertinence in his manner; in other words, had there been any thing ordinarily human about him, doubtless I should have violently dismissed him from the premises" (p.25). The face-to-face with the scrivener is to be sure a face-to-face with a mystery, as his sense infinitely transcends, exceeds or exhausts, as Lévinas would put it, the totality of the calculating (*any thing ordinarily human*) within which the narrator contains himself. Yet, one should not attempt to comprehend the extraordinariness of the other face. Rather, one should give up understanding, as its sense cannot be grasped logically and cannot be grasped period. The Other is not to be comprehended but 'listened to' if we may say so: its face is the expression of a commandment which interdicts all sort of violence (*doubtless I should have violently dismissed him from the premises*) while calling out for love.

Finally, in *Benito Cereno*, Captain Amasa Delano's slumber ("while lying in his berth") on board of his sealer, is suddenly interrupted by the entering the scene of a mysterious ship: "...his mate came below, informing him that a strange sail was coming into bay. Ships were then not so plenty in those waters as now. He rose, dressed, and went on the deck." (p.52) It is the beginning of a restless quest:

"...the true character of the vessel was plain – a Spanish merchantman of the first class; carrying Negro slaves, amongst other valuable freight, from one colonial port to the other. (...) Always upon first boarding a large and populous ship at sea, especially a foreign one, with a nondescript crew such as Lascars or Manilla men, the impression varies in a peculiar way from that produced by first entering a strange house with strange inmates in a strange land. Both house and ship...hoard from view their interiors till the last moment; but in the case of the ship there is an addition; that the living spectacle it contains, upon its sudden and complete disclosure, has, in contrast with the blank ocean which zones it, something of the effect of enchantment." (p.55)

And, just like the victim of an enchantment (an evil one as we shall see), is the Don Quixotesque Captain of *The Bachelor's Delight* once on board of the foreign ship. Will he be able to solve its mystery? In other words, will he be able to face up to the truth about himself?

Chapter 1

First Perceptions:

When I removed into the country, it was to occupy an old-fashioned farm-house, which had no piazza – a deficiency the more regretted, because not only did I like piazzas, as somehow combining the coziness of in-doors with the freedom of out-doors, and it is so pleasant to inspect your thermometer there, but the country round about was such a picture, that in berry time no boy climbs hill or crosses vale without coming upon easels planted in every nook, and sun-burnt painters painting there.¹

Not only does the incipit come to actualise the topical track left open by the title (*The Piazza*), but it activates a textual path which reads, in the first place, the absence of a piazza: *a deficiency the more regretted*; and, in the second place, the implicit want of one. The existence of a piazza would come to materialise the combination between two isotopic figures, apparently irreconcilable: *the coziness of in-doors with the freedom of out-doors*. The presence of the adverb *with* does in fact signal the intention of conjugating (rather than making them simply coexist) two spatio-ontological modalities within a same place. The piazza as the place of this isotopic fusion would thus come to define itself as a sort of *neuter* territory, to borrow Barthes' terminology: as a real spatio-ontological limbo where it would be possible to experience, alternatively or at once, closeness (in) and openness (out), coziness and freedom. There the paradigms, the oppositions would vanish:

I call *Neuter* all that eludes the paradigm. The paradigm is the spring of sense. Where there is sense, there is the paradigm, and *vice versa*. The sense lies upon conflict: it is the choice of a term against another (one), and all conflict is generator of sense. (...) From here, the idea of a structural creation able to undo, that is to say to cancel or thwart, the implacable binary system of the paradigm, by recourse to a third term, amorphous or neuter. Paradigm: a/b; neither a nor b = amorphous term or zero degree; cancels the opposition; a+b = complex degree; complicates the opposition.²

¹ Melville, *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, Everyman's Library, 1997, p.5 (future references are to this edition and given in the text).

² "J'appelle Neutre tout ce qui déjoue le paradigme. Le paradigme est le ressort du sens. Où il y a sens, il y a le paradigme, et inversement [...] Le sens repose sur le conflit: choix d'un terme contre un autre, et tout conflit est générateur de sens [...] D'où la pensée d'une création structurale qui défait, c'est à dire qui annule ou contraire le binarisme implacable du paradigme par le recours à un troisième terme, amorphe ou neutre [...] Paradigme: a/b, ni a ni b = terme amorphe ou dégréé zéro; annule l'opposition; a+b = dégréé complexe, complique l'opposition". Roland Barthes, "Seminar on the Neuter", held at the Collège de

In this sense, if the piazza is to be the (indeterminate) territory of the *neuter*, the want of a piazza is systematically a *neuter's* want, that is to say, a need to make void, literally to *neut(e)ralise* the spatio-ontological either/or, but only to resolve this *neutralisation* by combining the two isotopic modalities: “the Neuter is not what cancels sense, but what combines it, by keeping it present within the subject, at the same time and alternately.”³

It is now necessary to consider the sense of these two isotopes, that is, their spatio-ontological value. First, *the coziness of in-doors*: already the very opening sentence, which tells us of the retirement of the narrator (*When I removed...*), conveys the impression of a movement proceeding from an *outside* (outside the story, outside the text itself) towards an *inside*: into the text/ *into the country*, ultimately pointing towards an inner center, where it comes to firm itself up: *it was to occupy an old fashioned farm house*, so founding the spaces of the discourse and the *fabula*. This is movement which aims at narrowing or confining, as one likes, the spaces of the story. It is a confinement, moreover, which defines both the taking over of an *in-doors*: *to occupy an old-fashioned farm house* and of a space relative and contingent on it: *the country round about*; that is, an *out-doors* of which the house itself is the natural center.

The house is old. Seventy years since, from the heart of the Hearth Stone Hills, they quarried the Kaaba, or Holy Stone, to which, each thanksgiving, the social pilgrims used to come. So long ago, that, in digging the foundation, the workmen used both spade and axe, fighting the Troglodytes of those subterranean parts, sturdy roots of a sturdy wood, encamped upon what is now a long land-slide of sleeping meadow, sloping away off from my poppy-bed. Of that knit wood, but one survivor stands, an elm, lonely through steadfastness. (p.5)

It could be said that the farm house constitutes a sort of *axis mundi*: it is naturally a space of protection against the atmospheric annoyances and against any possible intrusion, past or present, of the outside world in so much as *other*. (...) *the workmen used both spade and axe, fighting the Troglodytes of those subterranean part*; but also a space of protection which has the benefit of a certain stability or permanence, as it materializes a symbiosis with the *terra firma* itself, to which the house is rooted by means of solid foundations, linking past and present, myth and reality: *Seventy years since, from the heart of the Earth Stone Hills, they quarried the Kaaba, or*

France 1977-1978, in Paola Cabibbo, “The Piazza, la parola per non dire”, *Melvilliana*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1983, p.137 (my transl. from French).

³ “Le Neutre ce n’est pas ce qui annulle les sens, mais ce qui les combine, qui les tient présent dans le sujet, en même temps et tour à tour.” Ibid. my trans.

Holy Stone...A past of pilgrimages and barbarism, of which the house itself along with *an elm, lonely through steadfastness*, are the two survivors. Throughout the emphasis of myth and memory, the farm-house acquires a real force of protection, a mythical one, fulfilling what Gaston Bachelard calls *rêveries d'aménagement*⁴, so permitting the subject to feel safe and secure within its new spaces. The house isotopizes then the *in-doors* space, inside which images of protection, security and stability necessarily mature in a real ontology of intimacy and comfort, in an ontology of *coziness*: that of a being finally feeling *at-home*.

Beside this, as the narrator previously points out, the farm house is also a prospective *axis mundi*:

The circle of the stars cut by the circle of the mountains. At least, so looks it from the house; though, once upon the mountains, no circle of them can you see. Had the site been chosen five rods off, this charmed ring would not have been. (p.5)

His dwelling is, in fact, not only at the center of a prospective perfection, but it is rather the epicenter of it, since the perceptive charm takes form exclusively from *here*, from the *in-doors* which the house itself delineates. Whereas the outside, that is to say beyond the magic ring, configures itself systematically as the space of disenchantment. Precisely for this reason, the *out-doors* is not an outside, but rather the spatial extension of the *in-doors*: its natural horizon, its *world*. It follows that the ontology of the *out-doors*, intended as *freedom* of perceptive spatialization, cannot but actualize itself on the basis and in relation to the spatio-ontological epicenter constituted by the house in so much as *in-doors*. The *freedom of out-doors for those who might desire to feast upon the view and take their time and ease about it* (p.5), is in fact a need to be enjoyed in all comfort and peacefulness: *beauty is like piety, you cannot run and read it; tranquillity and constancy with, now-a-days, an easy chair, are needed* (p.5). Ultimately, if it is true that there can't be any beauty or enchantment without a cozy shelter, it is equally true that there is no protection and coziness without freedom: "The dialectics of refuge needs opening. One wants to be protected, not imprisoned. The human being knows both the values of the outside and inside", as Bachelard sharply puts it.⁵ Without the *freedom of out-doors*, the *in-doors* would soon reveal itself as a prison. That is exactly why *a piazza must be had*. The existence of

⁴ Literally "fitting out reveries". See Gaston Bachelard, *La Terre et les rêveries du repos*, Paris, José Corti, 1971, p.133.

⁵ "La dialectique du refuge a besoin de l'ouverture. On veut être protégé, mais on veut pas être enfermé. L'être humain sait à la fois les valeurs du dehors et du dedans". Bachelard, *ibid.*, p.188 (my transl).

a piazza would then come to insure protection and coziness, but not total closeness, and freedom.

The house was wide - my fortune narrow; so that, to build a panoramic piazza, one round and round, it could not be - although, indeed, considering the matter by rule and square, the carpenters, in the kindest way, were anxious to gratify my furthest wishes, at I've forgotten how much a foot.

Upon but one of the four sides would prudence grant me what I wanted. Now, which side? (p.6)

The choice of the narrator is, without any shadow of doubt, a very prudent one. Let's consider why: *to the east*, in fact, the look is free to spatialize towards *that long camp of the Earth Stone Hills, fading far away towards Quito [...]* *Goodly sight, but to the north is Charlemagne [...]*⁶

To the south: [...] *Apple-trees are there. Pleasant, of a balmy morning, in the month of May, to sit and see that orchard, white budded, as for a bridal; and, in October, one green arsenal yard; such piles of ruddy shot. Very fine I grant; but to the north is Charlemagne [...]*

To the west: [...] *An upland pasture, alleying away into a maple wood at top. Sweet, in opening spring [...]* *Sweet, indeed, I can't deny it; but to the north is Charlemagne.* (p.7)

All the three sides rejected have but one common denominator: they offer to the onlooker an open, infinite prospective horizon. They activate a perceptive vanishing point, which is negated on the north side, where in all its majesty rises the grand mass of Greylock: *So Charlemagne, he carried it.* (p.7)

The exigency to circumscribe the visual horizon, by subordinating it to a point of view (that of the piazza itself) which is already, by nature, limited and limiting, must make us reflect. The presence of Greylock, *with all his hills about him*, can be said to draw, all around the north side of the farm house, a sort of umbilical cord, which in the end comes to materialize the finite and perfect geometries of a circle: *the circle of the mountains cut by the circle of the stars*. Now, the 'existence' of this circle⁷ should not only suggest renewed protection and, not necessarily, we would say, closeness; but, first and foremost, spatial concentration; as if the choice of the narrator were guided by the necessity spatially to concentrate rather than disperse and to contain any spatializing intentions within an inward space, so to say,

⁶ Nothing other than the Mount Greylock itself, *with all his hills about him, like Charlemagne among his peers* (p.5).

⁷ Remember that the circle is also the archetypal symbol of being. See Bachelard, *La terre et les Rêveries du Repos*, pp. 129-163.

instead of spreading them outwards. It is about an involutive impulse rather than an evolutive one, which, once again, attests to a need for intimacy, tranquillity, solitude and, above all, separation from the outside world.

In conclusion, the existence of a piazza facing the north does come to permit the satisfaction of all the ontological needs at once. It allows a contained exposition, so to speak, respecting the ontological necessities of both the 'in' and the 'out': not only does it benefit from an almost total protection, backed up internally by the house and externally by Greylock, which systematically activates all the static values of the inside; but it also consents, though within a limited space, a perceptive openness, actualizing the dynamic values of the out-doors. Hence a piazza to the north:

That was in the lion month of March. Not forgotten are the blue noses of the carpenters, and how they scouted at the greenness of the cit, who would build his sole piazza to the north. But March don't last forever; patience, and August comes. And then, in the cool elysium of my northern bower, I, Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, cast down the hill a pitying glance on poor old Dives, tormented in the purgatory of his piazza to the south. (p.7)

At this point, after having considered the sense of this spatio-ontological combination within the piazza, it is time to investigate how these two isotopic modalities actually work together and, first and foremost, what their interplay comes to produce:

But, even in December, this northern piazza does not repel – nipping cold and gusty though it be, and the north wind, like any miller, bolting by the snow, in finest flour, for then, once more, with frosted beard, I pace the sleety deck, weathering Cape Horn. (ibid.)

This very last phrase is worth attention: the image is tensed between a sense of contraction that pushes inwards and a sense of expansion, stretching outwards, between containment and dispersion, coziness and freedom. A spatio-ontological tension, constituting the framework upon which is founded the *neuter* experience of the *rêverie*: a situation in which a “wandering” I, forgetful of its own contingent reality, benefits from a freedom similar to that of dreams (*rêves*), as well as of the tranquillity, relaxation and coziness of the awakening.⁸

⁸ In dreams, one can in fact have unpleasant encounters. The dream, as Bachelard makes clear, is always *autre*, foreign and possibly hostile. Bachelard, *The poetics of the rêverie*, New York, Orion Press, 1969.

A state in between consciousness and unconsciousness, sleeping and awakening during which the chronotopic boundaries are magically transcended, suddenly forgotten, bracketed: the piazza becomes here *the sleety deck* of memory's phantasmatic vessel, while *the country round about* the ocean off Cape Horn, nothing else than the omnipresent Greylock itself, *weathered* under the mighty tempest of the *rêverie*. The image has indeed a cosmic force, linking the dreamer and (his) world: as the narrator *is* not just the world that he oneirically perceives, but is rather the creator of what he sees. Reality can be said to have been completely assimilated: that is, purged from all alterity. As Bachelard states: "from the moment it is considered in all its simplicity, it is perfectly evident that reverie bears witness to a normal, useful irreality function *which keeps the human psyche on the fringe of all the brutality of a hostile and foreign non-self*".⁹ Hence, a reality doubled in a dream without hiatus: a dream that brings together, synthetically, the present and the past, the subject and the object, the *In-itself* and the *For-itself*, to borrow Sartre's terminology.¹⁰

In conclusion, not only does the reverie come to materialize a very secure, protected and cozy *ir-reality*, free from reality's coercions and hostilities; but it structures the universe of the narrator in so much as a universe of *sameness*.

In summer, too, Canute-like, sitting here, one is often reminded of the sea. For not only do long ground-swells roll the slanting grain, and little wavelets of the grass ripple over upon the low piazza, as their beach, and blown down of dandelions is wafted like the spray, and the purple of the mountains is just the purple of the billows, and a still August noon broods upon the deep meadows, as a calm upon the Line; but the vastness and the lonesomeness are so oceanic, and the silence and the sameness, too, that the first peep of a strange house, rising beyond the trees, is for all the world like spying, on the Barbary coast, an unknown sail. (p.7)

This passage is particularly significant: it is an image silently subdivided in two scenes that, though sharing the same scenario, so to speak, are separated by the presence of the adversative "*but*", which functions as a sort of interdiscursive elastic: while charging and

⁹ Bachelard, *The poetics of the rêverie*, p.13, my emphasis.

¹⁰ A coincidence that realizes the ipseity (Selbstheit) of the I: its identity of same. A coincidence also that, in Sartre's own terms, would combine the *being-in-itself* (*être-en-soi*) with the *being-for-itself* (*être-pour-soi*): A1- The being-in-itself is the non-conscious Being. It is the being of the phenomenon and overflows the knowledge we have of it. It is a plenitude, and strictly speaking we can say of it only that it is. A2- The being-for-itself is the nihilation of Being-in-itself; consciousness conceived as a lack of being, a desire for Being, a relation to Being. The explanation of Sartre's terminology is by Hazel E. Barnes in: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Methuen, London, 1969, p. 630.

keeping in tension the first scene, it opens for the advent of the second one. The first scene is dominated by sameness, the second one by alterity.

The incipit of the first picture materializes, once again, an intentional thread that weaves or reconciles, as one likes, past and present, imagination and memory with the reality of a summer day in the country: *sitting here, one is often reminded of the sea*. This scene does certainly arouse a sense of tranquillity, relaxation but also freedom. It is a passive *rêverie* given by the interaction of static inputs, let's call them *contractive*, and dynamic outputs, which we shall term *expansive*: earth-images, so to speak, framed with water's ones. The earth-imagery, in this case linking to reality itself (*the country round about*), offers stability, consistence and permanence to the *rêverie*. The earth-images have *roots*, so to speak: they give oneiric protection and security to the dreamer, thus activating all the static values of the *in-doors*. We could also say that they *contain*, stem the plastic, expansive volume of the water-images: *little wavelets of the grass ripple over upon the low piazza, as their beach*. This passage, for instance, is an alternation of the two images. It starts in expansion: *little wavelets*, and it closes up in contraction, with an earth-image that brakes, strands a water one: *the low piazza, as their beach*. To follow further this phenomenology, one may venture to say that the earth-images have an oneiric-containing function: they 'keep' under control the oneiric freedom of which the water-images avail themselves. Water, in fact, allows an almost total oneiric freedom: the freedom of *formlessness*. Beside this, let's not forget that water permits the illusion of reflection: that is to say, a redoubling that 'justifies' the possession of the image by the dreamer. Thanks to the presence of water, the image is *faithful* to its model.¹¹

In-doors and out-doors, coziness and freedom are therefore, once again, not only assimilated, but resolved within the ecstatic experience of the *rêverie*, where one can also find all the qualities and typical traits that are constituent and contingent its *ir-reality*: namely, *vastness, lonesomeness, silence* and above all *sameness*.¹² The universe of the narrator is in fact, as we have said just now, a universe defined in terms of sameness: it is therefore a universe where nothing *really* happens. It is a very tedious and boring one, suddenly interrupted *by the first peep of a strange house, rising beyond the trees (which) is for all the world like spying on the Barbary coast, an unknown sail*. The sameness is broken by alterity, by the entering the scene of *the other*

¹¹ As to the water-reveries see Bachelard, *L'eau et les rêves*, Paris, José Corti, 1942; as to the earth-ones: see, again, Bachelard, *La terre et les rêveries du repos*, Paris, José Corti, 1948.

¹² According to Bachelard, these are the essential 'ingredients' for a 'respectable' reverie. Vide *The poetics of reverie*, especially chap. I.

in so much as *strange, unknown*. Now, what is necessary to consider here, is *how* the narrator actually perceives this advent. As a matter of fact, the presence of the substantive *peep* could suggest, at first sight and to some extent, eagerness and desire towards what appears to be a new and very particular object. Despite this, the use of the verb *to spy*, soon comes to crystallize the idea that, in the first place, it is about a very circumspect and prudent¹³ way of looking. Our theory of suspicion is also supported by a very significant historical-geographical datum: the majority of the inhabitants of the *Barbary coast*¹⁴, skillful sailors, were in fact, still at the beginning of 19th century, devoted to piracy. It is now clear that the arrival of the *other* is not just perceived with suspicion but it is thought to represent a possible menace: it epitomizes, first and foremost, the intrusion of what is *strange* and *unknown*, of what does remain, at dawn of its coming, non-transcended and thus unforeseeable. It suddenly appears within the world of the narrator but without being part of it, therefore opening up a real passage of indetermination, a vanishing point: the universe of *sameness* experiences then a moment of *dispersion*, so to speak, rather than containment and concentration. In this sense, we may say that not only does the other come to compromise the ego's (fragile) spatio-ontological equilibriums but it determines, as we shall show presently, the breaking up of the coincidence between the In-itself and the for-itself. Precisely for this reason, the voyage that is about to be narrated: *my inland voyage to fairy-land. A true voyage; but take it all in all, interesting as if invented* (p.7), should be considered, in the first place, as a voyage in the attempt to define and assimilate *the other* in terms of *same* and subsequently to heal up the openness, within the universe of *sameness*, determined by the advent of the other.

From the piazza, some uncertain object I had caught, mysteriously snugged away, to all appearance, in a sort of purpled breast-pocket, high up in a hopper-like hollow, or sunken angle, among the north - western mountains – yet, whether, really, it was on a mountain-side, or a mountain-top, could not be determined. (...) from the piazza, a nigher and lower mountain will, in most states of the atmosphere, effacingly shade itself away into a higher and further one; that an object, bleak on the former's crest, will, for all that, appear nested in the latter's flank. These mountains, somehow, they play at hide-and-seek, and all before one's eyes. (pp.7-8)

¹³ Let's not forget that the narrator is a *prudent* man.

¹⁴ Comprehending today's region of Maghreb: that is the states of Lybia, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco.

The object is here perceived in all its alterity, so to say: both the adjective *uncertain* and the qualitative adverb *mysteriously*, denote its eluding all identification. All re-presentation: *snuggled away to all appearance*. First, its position cannot be established for sure: *yet, whether, really, it was on a mountain-side, or a mountain-top, could not be determined*; second, it is about a rather (in)-visible object:

but, be that as it may, the spot in question was, at all events, so situated as to be only visible, and then but vaguely, under certain witching conditions of light and shadow.
(p.8)

In this regard, the French philosopher Clément Rosset states that: “the more an object is real, the more it is unidentifiable (...) The more the sentiment of reality is intense, the more it is indescribable and obscure”.¹⁵ *Strange, unknown, uncertain, mysterious*: all traits and qualities then that connote the high coefficient of reality of the object, that is to say, its being unique, ‘idiôtés’.¹⁶ In short, its being irreducibly *other*. It follows that any project or intention to render its *otherness* same, is, in principle, destined to *ir*-reality.

Indeed, for a year or more, I knew not there was such a spot, and might, perhaps, have never known, had it not been for a wizard afternoon in autumn – late in autumn – a mad poet’s afternoon; (...) the sky was ominous as Hecate’s cauldron – and two sportsmen, crossing a red stubble buck-wheat field, seemed guilty Macbeth, and foreboding Banquo; and the hermit-sun, huddled in an Adullam cave, well towards the south, according to his season, did little else but, by indirect reflection of narrow rays shot down a Simplon pass among the clouds, just steadily paint one small, round strawberry mole upon the wan cheek of northwestern hills. Signal as a candle. One spot of radiance, where all else was shade. Fairies there, thought I; some haunted ring where fairies dance. (p.8)

The *uncertain* and *mysterious* object, becomes ipso facto *some haunted ring where fairies dance*. The real object is hypostatized into an imaginary one; though, to the eyes of the narrator, as real as its model. Throughout the complicity of a double, the other is reduced to the same (we shall come back to this). The image, nourished with literature and poetry, is made familiar,

¹⁵ “plus un objet est réel, plus il est inidentifiable and plus le sentiment du réel est intense plus il est indescriptible et obscur”. Clément, Rosset, *L’Objet Singulier*, Paris, Minuit, 1979, p.33, my transl.

¹⁶ To refer to a terminology and a concept formulated by Rosset: the term *idiôtés* would, if taken etymologically, define what is without reason, stupid, simple, and thus unique, precisely because it can’t be assimilated within a system of thought. Indeed, it resists one’s comprehension. Rosset, *Le Réel: Traité de l’Idiotie*, Minuit, 1977.

domestic, known: “through imagination, thanks to the subtleties of the irreality function, we re-enter the world of confidence, the world of the confidence being, which is the proper world for reverie.”¹⁷ A re-entering, so it seems, into a relaxed and tranquil world: a world of beauty and oneiric freedom. Consider moreover that, unlike the reveries previously analyzed, this is an *expansive* reverie, for the simple reason that the object, better yet, its imaginary and idealized double, is immediately idealizing:

Time passed; and the following May, after a gentle shower upon the mountains – a little shower islanded in misty seas of sunshine; (...) I saw a rainbow, resting its further end just where, in autumn, I had marked the mole. Fairies there, thought I; remembering that rainbows bring out the blooms, and that, if one can but get to the rainbow’s end, his fortune is made of gold. Yon rainbow’s end, would I were there, thought I. And none the less I wished it, for now first noticing what seemed some sort of glen, or grotto, in the mountain-side; at least whatever it was, viewed through the rainbow’s medium, it glowed like the Potosi mine. But a work-a-day neighbor said, no doubt it was but some old barn – an abandoned one, its broadside beaten in, the acclivity its back - ground. But I, though I had never been there, I knew better. (pp.8-9)

Haunted ring, fairies, rainbow’s end, bag of gold, Potosi mine: the reverie gives life to a real ideal universe that ends up in seducing, dangerously enough, its own creator: *would I were there, thought I*. This is an utopia of intellectual, bookish as well as material and economic desire. Notice also how, to the very practical and empirical certainty of the *work-day neighbour*, the narrator opposes, or better, superimposes an ideal, imaginary conviction, based on, I would say, mere intuition: *But I, though I had never been there, I knew better*. As if the reverie had the power to illuminate (to blind?) and guide its *devotees*; founding, *in these times of failing faith and feeble knees* (p.6), a real religion that has its *pew* of transcendence within the piazza itself. Not only that: its power, its force (of revelation? of illusion?) is such that *some old barn, an abandoned one*, does become for sure, to the eyes of the narrator, a cottage: *it must be a cottage...this very spring magically fitted up and glazed* (p.9). The ugliness of reality, its eidetic poverty is somehow *neut(e)ralized* and forthwith resolved into a dream of beauty, richness, light and life:

Again, one noon, in the same direction, I marked, over dimmed tops of terraced foliage, a broader gleam, as of a silver buckler, held sunwards over some croucher’s head; which gleam, experience in like cases taught, must come from a roof newly

¹⁷ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*, p.14.

shingled. This, to me, made pretty sure the recent occupancy of that far cot in fairy land. (p.9)

At this point, before going ahead with the textual analysis, it is necessary to consider, more closely, the desire expressed by the narrator to reach fairy-land: *Yon rainbow's end, would I were there*. Believe it or not, the *elsewhere*¹⁸ is now more attractive than the *here* (namely, the piazza). Why? What does, originally, produce the narrator's wish to be there? First of all, we should define or at least try to define what desire is. According to Sartre, desire is born of a *lack of being*¹⁹: an ontological void. If we are to follow Sartre here, what does then determine this lack of being and, what does it necessarily come to reveal? We answer, most likely, that it is caused by the advent of the other.

As a matter of fact, the entrance of the *strange sail* comes to activate (despite its being organized in a rather simple, elementary sequentiality) the production of a linear, infinite temporality. A temporality that was, up to now, absent: *time passed; and the following May...; A few days later, a cheery sunrise...; Again, one noon, in the same direction...; Day after day, full of interest...; At length, when pretty well again...*(pp.8-9) The presence of these temporal occurrences, scanning the spotting of the *haunted ring*, delineates a linear kind of temporality. This is very interesting: with the exception of a rather isolated and apparently insignificant reference to the year 1848²⁰, the time of the *fabula* was in fact, up to the very advent of the other, uniquely regulated by a cyclical, closed and finite sort of temporality. This temporality can now be identified. We should consider, on the one hand, the existence of an *external* or cyclical time, founded upon a non-historical present; and, on the other, the presence of an

¹⁸ It should be clear that this *elsewhere* is nothing but a sort of *ici amélioré* or *absolu* (a bettered or absolute here), to borrow Rosset's own words. The French philosopher states: "the romantic voyager is not bound for the uncertain but for the certain, not at all for the elsewhere but rather for a sort of absolute here, capable of resisting to all form of alteration (le voyageur romantique a donc pour destination non l'incertain mais le certain, pas du tout l'ailleurs mais bien une sorte d'ici absolu, capable de résister à toute forme d'altération)" Rosset, *Le Philosophe et les Sortilèges*, Paris, Minuit, 1985, p.64, my transl.

¹⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 575.

²⁰ *It was not long after 1848; and, somehow, about that time, all round the world, these kings, they had the casting vote, and voted for themselves*, p. 8 The allusion to the year 1848 refers to the democratic and popular upheavals that inflamed Europe in the attempt to obtain the constitutions. The majority of these insurrections led but to provisional victories or even ended up in failures. Now, Melville's allusion to the year 1848, though apparently pleonastic, is here very important: we know, first of all, that *The Piazza* was meant to 'introduce' the *Piazza Tales* themselves. We also know that the quest of the narrator in *The Piazza* is a quest destined to fail. Not only that: *Bartleby's* story can be considered, in every respect, as a non-successful rebellion against the dehumanizing system of Wall Street's materialistic way of life; while in *Benito Cereno*, the mutiny organized by hand of the slaves will end in bloodshed. Finally, one should not

internal time, constituted by a mythical or legendary past (*seventy years since, from the heart of the Hearth Stone Hills, they quarried the Kaaba, or Holy Stone, to which, each Thanksgiving, the social pilgrims used to come...*p.5) and by the narrator's own recollections (his *Erlebnis* 'lived').²¹

Not only that: both the *external* and *internal* time, were assimilated and resolved within involitional reveries, that, as a result of this, were founded temporally upon a non-historical present (external time) but in fact actualized within retrospection, within anteriority. The temporal framework of the reveries previously analyzed, was thus fundamentally organized according to a movement *à rebours* in the past of memory. A movement that permitted the coincidence between the 'In-itself' and the 'for-itself'²², that is, the definition of the universe of the narrator as a *same*, identical one. It was about a universe free from any vanishing points, any negativities, any lack of being. In sum, free from desire.

Now, the entering the scene of the other within the ego's circle or circuit of being interrupts the imperialism of the cyclical time on the one hand and of the immanent time of memory on the other; ultimately opening to transcendence and therefore to the future itself. It opens a passage in time. Quite reasonably however, one may argue that the sequentiality activated by the other is a very simple and basic one. This is due, we say, to the fact that the other in so much as *event*, is immediately assimilated within the oneiric oblivion of the I in its identity of same; that is, within the timeless, neuter "temporality" of the reverie.²³ However, despite its *internal* timelessness, the reverie undergoes, *volens nolens*, the temporal (and indeed spatial) framework of the *strange sail*. It is in fact subjected to the chronotopic alterity of the other: spatially, it projects itself towards an *elsewhere* rather than concentrating on the *here*, and, temporally, it is brought *ipso facto* into transcendence, into prospection, rather than producing itself within immanence and retrospection. Now, precisely for the fact that the reverie gets its new structure from the future (from the other), it ends up producing an

forget that the year 1848 also saw the publication of one of the greatest political tracts ever written, that is to say, *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

²¹ [...] *for then, once more, with frosted beard, I pace the sleety deck, weathering Cape Horn / In summer, too, Canute-like, sitting here, one is often reminded of the sea.*

²²As Sartre claims: "The relation of being which I have to sustain with the past is a relation of the type of the In-itself, that is, an identification with itself ." And also: "By means of its Past, the For-itself founds itself in the In-itself [...] this means that there is a coincidence for one of the temporal dimensions between the ekstastic temporality which I have to be and the time of the world as a pure given nothingness. It is through the past that I belong to universal temporality; it is through the present and the future that I escape from it". *Being and Nothingness*, p.116 and p. 208.

²³ According to Bachelard, within the reverie one forgets the existence of time. For the French philosopher, the reverie is essentially the experience of timelessness, or, as he puts it, the experience of *detemporalisation*.

ontological division within the totality of being: the advent of *the other* does in fact break, first and foremost, with the unity between the In-itself and the self; a unity, let's recall it, born of the coincidence between a non-linear present and the past of memory. In short, within a universe devoid of any alterity.²⁴ This ontological *breakdown* is then deadened throughout the assimilation of the *other* and its temporality on the part of the *same*. That is, throughout the reverie, which, itself undergoing this breakdown, ultimately actualizes a separation between the In-Itself and an ideal Self.²⁵

The desire of the narrator, its sudden lack of being²⁶ is therefore the result of this ontological diaspora, this separation, activated by *the other* but assimilated within the *Same*: only by getting *to the rainbow's end*, only by possessing the *elsewhere*, it would be possible to fill this lack of being, to heal up the fissure now present within the identity of the ego. As a matter of fact, the voyage of the narrator is *an inland voyage to fairy land*. *Inland*: that is, first and foremost, a quest for the Self within sameness. A longing for total identity.

The following sequences are not only marked by a renewed interest for *fairy land* and by the sickness of the narrator: *Day after day, now, full of interest in my discovery, what time I could spare from reading The Midsummer Night's Dream, and all about Titania, wishfully I gazed off towards the hills; but in vain...I was sorry; the more so, because I had to keep my chamber for some time after, which chamber did not face those hills* (p.9); but also by a rather undesired discovery:

At length, when pretty well again, and sitting out, in the September morning, upon the piazza, and thinking to myself, when, just after a little flock of sheep, the farmers' banded children passed, a-nutting, and said, 'How sweet a day' – it was, after all, but what their fathers call a weather-breeder – and, indeed, was become so sensitive through my illness, as that I could bear to look upon a Chinese creeper of my adoption, and which, to my delight, climbing a post of the piazza, had burst out in

²⁴ That is, of the other *qua* event, transcendence and thus future.

²⁵ According to Sartre in the present and in the future, our Self always escapes us. These two temporalities define a separation, a hiatus. See *Being and Nothingness*, pp.107-170; pp. 204-218.

²⁶ In a certain sense, it could be said that the narrator, to borrow Sartre's terminology once again, is no longer coincident to itself. He is now *present to itself*: "this presence to itself has often been taken for a plenitude of existence, and a strong prejudice prevalent among philosophers causes them to attribute to consciousness the highest rank of being. But this postulate can not be maintained after a more thorough description of the notion of presence. Actually presence to always implies duality, at least virtual separation. The presence of being to itself implies a detachment on the part of being in relation to itself. The coincidence of identity is the veritable plenitude of being exactly because in this coincidence there is left no place for any negativity (read alterity)[...] The principle of identity is the negation of every species of relation at the heart of being-in-itself. Presence to self, on the contrary, supposes that an impalpable fissure has slipped into being. If being is present to itself, it is because it is not wholly itself. Presence is an immediate deterioration of coincidence, for it supposes separation." Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 77.

starry bloom, but now, if you removed the leaves a little, showed millions of strange, cankerous worms, which, feeding upon those blossoms, so shared their blessed hue, as to make it unblessed evermore – worms, whose germs had doubtless lurked in the very bulb which, so hopefully, I had planted... (p.10)

The narrator claims he cannot bear the sight of an exotic plant²⁷ that, under a *starry bloom*, hides in reality *millions of strange, cankerous worms*. Let us establish, first of all, the main cause of this perceptive intolerance: it is true, in fact, that the hyper-sensibility of the protagonist, due to his recent illness, is here, at the most, a subsidiary cause of the problem. The perceived object is anything but reassuring: we confront ourselves with an image of death, that is, with the image of the other *par excellence*.²⁸ It suffices here to say that the sickness of the plant, its infection refers, by way of analogy, to the narrator's own illness, thus setting up a real specularity of death or, to speak more properly, foreboding death.²⁹ Notice also that the subject speaks of: *a plant of my adoption*. The creeper is in fact not simply related to the I: *of*. Rather, it is (a) part of it (*my*): surprisingly enough, it has been (maliciously) inhabiting its spaces from the very start: *whose germs, had doubtless lurked in the very bulb, which, so hopefully, I had planted...* The end of a whole world (of enjoyment) has thus been forecasted: the other not only comes to disfigure and obscure for good its beauty and radiance (*unblessed evermore*), to compromise its appearances and magic, to profane the "sacrality" of the piazza itself (*climbing a post of the piazzà*), but it also reminds the narrator of his death to come. The intolerable presence of the *cankerous worms* can be said to act as a sort of wake up call, sobering up the I from its ontological *forgetfulness* ('remember that you have to die').

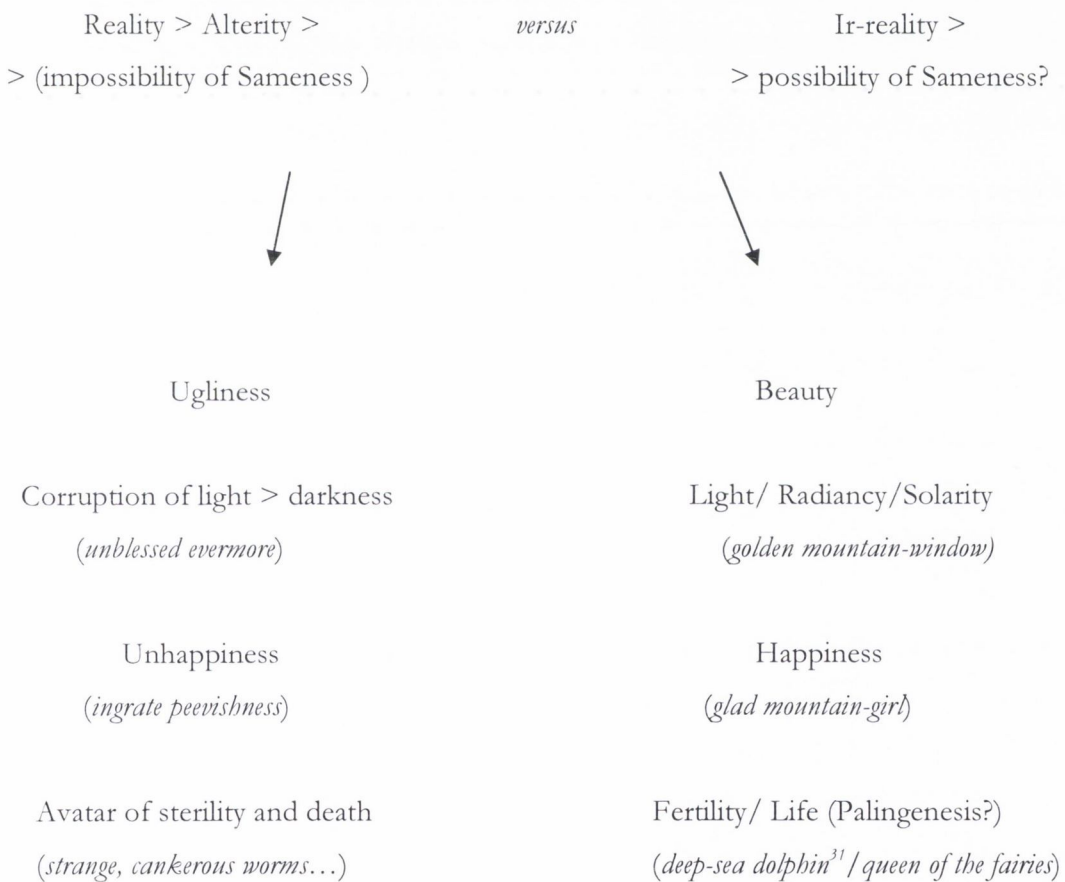
In this ingrate peevishness of my weary convalescence, was I sitting there; when, suddenly looking off, I saw the golden mountain-window, dazzling like a deep-sea dolphin. Fairies there, thought I, once more; the queen of fairies at her fairy-window; at any rate, some glad mountain-girl; it will do me good, it will cure this weariness, to look on her. (p.10)

²⁷ Perhaps the *Smilax China*, as Ruggero Bianchi suggests. Bianchi, "Il narratore come attore dialettico ed il suicidio nominalistico", in *I racconti della Veranda di Herman Melville*, Mursia, Milano, 1991, p. 13.

²⁸ As the French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas points out: "This approach of death indicates that we are in relation with something that is absolutely other, something bearing alterity not as a provisional determination we can assimilate through enjoyment, but as something whose very existence is made of alterity". Lévinas, *Time and the Other*, Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1987, p. 43.

²⁹ Although it is not said, there is no doubt as to the fact that the protagonist is an elderly man: he is retiring into the country, probably after a life spent as a sailor.

The obscure, hostile and death-like image is now contrasted with a very pleasant, solar and vital one: nothing but the result of the peaceful oneirism of the reverie wherein, as Bachelard claims, *one does not die* [...].³⁰ The unbearable sight of the creeper, its inalienable presence, necessarily causes the want to look elsewhere (*suddenly looking off*), to dislocate one's attention in the direction of a more secure, protected and beautiful (ir)reality. The two images are played upon the *chiaroscuro*, the contraposition of antagonistic values and isotopes. The following scheme can be drawn:



³⁰ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*, p. 111.

³¹ The figure of the dolphin is here noteworthy: “the fish that symbolized their faith to the early Christians was often represented as a dolphin, as was the ‘great fish’ that swallowed Jonah. *The latter theme was seen as a prefiguration of Christ’s death and resurrection and, probably for this reason, the dolphin came to be its symbol.* The dolphin in classical themes is the attribute of Neptune, of Venus who was born of the sea, of Water personified, one of the Four Elements [...] Sailors leaping overboard also change into dolphins.”

Observe the central value of the female figure: real *anima* of the reverie, as Bachelard would say. To the bewitched eyes of the narrator, she is no doubt the embodiment of an ontology of tranquillity, peacefulness and beauty. But above all, in so much as a woman, she is the representation of life and the power to give life: her force is solar, revitalizing and thus fundamentally curative: *it will do me good, it will cure this weariness, to look on her...* A dream of perceptive thaumaturgy, in the end, that would hopefully relieve the I of its weariness, of its existential nausea:

No more; I'll launch my yawl – ho, cheerly, heart! And push away for fairy-land – for rainbow's end, in fairy-land. (p.10)

James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, London, John Murray Publ., 1996, p.106, my emphasis.

Chapter 2

In the Name of the I:

There's something ever egoistical in mountains-tops and towers, and all other grand and lofty things; look here, three peaks as proud as Lucifer. The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; all are Ahab [...]

Moby-Dick, chap.99

(a) The lawyer:

I am a rather elderly man. The nature of my avocations for the last thirty years has brought me into more than ordinary contact with what would seem an interesting and somewhat singular set of men, of whom as yet nothing that I know of has ever been written: I mean the law-copyists or scribes. I have known many of them [...] But I waive the biographies of all other scribes for a few passages in the life of Bartleby, who was a scribe the strangest I ever saw or heard of. While of other law-copyists I might write the complete life, of Bartleby nothing of that sort can be done.

I believe that no materials exist for a full and satisfactory biography of this man. It is an irreparable loss to literature. Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources, and in his case those are very small.

What my astonished eyes saw of Bartleby, that is all I know of him, except, indeed, one vague report which will appear in the sequel.(p.18)

Let's start from where one should always start: that is, the title (they are not there for nothing...): "Bartleby, The Scribe". Bartleby...is this the name of a person? And if so, what kind of name is it? Quite uncommon, that is for sure. Does anyone know of anybody called Bartleby? Personally, I don't. In fairness, I never heard of a name like that before. I do now though, and I will never forget it: this is a name that doesn't let itself be forgotten easily. This is a name, one might say, that holds on, that holds one's memory hostage, that keeps haunting one just like an unresolved and unresolvable riddle. This is indeed a very enigmatic, mysterious name and also an odd one to pronounce. How in fact do you pronounce it? How does anybody pronounce it? I should mention here that I had more than one discussion on this topic with an ex-professor of mine: she would emphasize the 'l' sound, missing the following 'e' sound, more or less to this round effect: 'Bartelbi' (it goes without saying that I am not very good at spelling phonetics...); while I would read it the way it is written, like

one does for the German or Italian languages. We still disagree on this. Yet, she would agree with me that it wasn't a popular name: as a matter of fact, it was for her like it was for me, the strangest name we had ever heard. To be sure, this is a name "that adheres to what it names, in a way wholly different from the common name, which brightened up by the system of language, designs a species but does not adhere to the individual and resolves it, if it is allowed to say so, within indifference".¹ This is in sum a *proper* name, in the etymological sense of the word. This is a proper and, therefore, always already a foreign name. This name names what is foreign, what is unknown, what does not *belong* here: it names the stranger, the foreigner, the *xenos*. It names the Other. The story that follows is the story of an extraordinary encounter:

Ere introducing the scrivener, as he first appeared to me, it is fit I make some mention of myself, my employés, my business, my chambers and general surroundings; because some such description is indispensable to an adequate understanding of the chief character about to be presented.

Imprimis: I am a man who, from his youth upwards, has been filled with a profound conviction that the easiest way of life is the best. Hence, though I belong to a profession proverbially energetic and nervous, even to turbulence, at times, yet nothing of that sort have I ever suffered to invade my peace. I am one of those unambitious lawyers who never addresses a jury, or in any way draws down public applause; but in the cool tranquillity of a snug retreat, do a snug business among rich men's bonds and mortgages and titledeeds. All who know me, consider me an eminently safe man. The late John Jacob Astor, a personage little given to poetic enthusiasm, had no hesitation in pronouncing my first grand point to be prudence; my next, method. I do not speak it in vanity, but simply record the fact [...] (pp.18-19)

The narrator considers himself and he is considered to be a safe, prudent and very methodical (read logical) man. As a lawyer, he describes himself as an *unambitious* one: for some reason, he doesn't like to be exposed to the attention, the judgement or the opinion of juries and the public. He is too coy to be directly involved with an 'outside', so to speak, preferring *the cool tranquillity of a snug retreat*, and the security of a business *among rich men's bonds and mortgages and titledeeds*. This is certainly a man who wants to be left alone and who is determined to defend, at all costs, his privacy from unwanted visits or even *invasions*, as he puts it: *nothing of that sort have I ever suffered to invade my peace*. His motto could be a *noli me tangere* or even a *noli me videre*. As a matter of fact, one can consider that he does not provide of

¹ Lévinas, *L'aldilà del versetto*, Guida, Napoli, 1986, p. 204, my translation from Italian.

himself any “identikit”: apart from the note on the age, to a physiognomical plane, he remains unidentifiable. Not only that: as he is not just unidentifiable, but unnamable; whereas to name oneself, one would agree, constitutes the most natural, spontaneous act of any presentation. In this case, to the nominal “Who is he?”, it is possible to answer only by recurring to a sort of professional mask, identifying the *persona* rather than the man. Who is speaking is *the lawyer*. Or, even better, *a lawyer*: one amongst many. The nominal singularity, conceived as the primary distinctive sign of one’s own identity, is here (prudently) dissolved within anonymity or homonymy. What does then this voluntary subtraction from the system of nominal values mean? Starobinski claims: ‘our identities, which bind us to our names, also deliver us as *hostages* to alien consciousness. *They leave us defenseless in the face of public judgement. The egotist seeks to regain possession of himself. He destroys the name that leaves him feeling vulnerable in the part of himself that reflects the onlooker’s gaze*’.² The destruction of one’s own name should therefore be considered as a necessary device in order to insure the protection, the tranquillity and internal peace of an ego in its autonomy of same.

Moreover, shifting from an ontological to a socio-political plane, to annul one’s name is certainly to cancel all trace of oneself as a subject in law: as a social subject, so to speak. By deleting my name and by substituting it with a false one or even, as is the case here, with a pseudonym, I can no longer be accounted for any crime I have done or might do to society and, more profoundly still, I can no longer be compelled to be responsible for my fellow people. The logic of the nominal dissolution is to be sure a logic of pure egoism, indifference and irresponsibility towards the other, to whom I would now be exclusively bonded or related on economic terms (*do a snug business among rich men’s bonds* [...]: “no one is responsible who cannot be called by name and compelled to respond. If my name no longer refers to me, then I no longer have anything to answer for except to the person who still possesses the right and power to give me a name: “I answer to myself alone” [...] *the mask and the*

² Starobinski, Jean, *The Living Eye*, trans. by A. Goldhammer, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1989, p. 81 (my emphasis). In relation to this, Sartre asserts: ‘to be looked at is to apprehend oneself as the unknown object of unknowable appraisals, in particular, of value judgements [...] a judgement is the transcendental act of a free being. Thus being-seen constitutes me as a defenseless being for a freedom which is not my freedom. It is in this sense that we consider ourselves as “slaves” in so far as we appear to the Other. [...] In so far as I am the object of values which comes to qualify me without my being able to act on this qualification or even to know it, I am enslaved. *By the same token in so far as I am the instrument of possibilities which are not my possibilities, whose pure presence beyond my being I can not even glimpse, and which deny my transcendence in order to constitute me as a means to ends of which I am ignorant – I am in danger*’. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp.267-268 (my emphasis).

pseudonym generate a dynamic of pure irresponsibility."³ By destroying my name I (am free to) answer to and for myself alone: I value myself as the only being worthy of care. No one else counts but 'my self': I am engaged or I *participate* in the maintenance or preservation of myself only.⁴ In this concern, Lévinas argues: 'participation is a way of referring to the other: it is to have and unfold one's own being without at any point losing contact with the other. To break with participation is, to be sure, to maintain contact, but no longer derive one's being from this contact: *it is to see without being seen*, like Gyges'.⁵ To-see-without-being-seen, or of invisibility, we may say; whereas to be invisible is certainly to gain total mastery and possession over oneself as well as to have absolute dominion over the other: ultimately, it might be said that he who lives non-recognized always finds himself in a position of power, control and dominance.

(b) The dwelling:

My chambers were up stairs at N°- Wall-Street. At one end they looked upon the white wall of the interior of a spacious sky-light shaft, penetrating the building from top to bottom. This view might have been considered rather tame than otherwise, deficient in what landscape painters call "life". But if so the view from the other end of my chambers offered, at least, a contrast if nothing more. In that direction my windows commanded an unobstructed view from a lofty brick wall, black by age and everlasting shade; which wall required no spy-glass to bring out its lurking beauties, but for the benefit of all near-sighted spectators, was pushed up to within ten feet of my window panes. Owing to the great height of the surrounding buildings, and my chambers being on the second floor, the interval between this wall and mine not a little resembled a huge square cistern. (p.19)

³ Starobinski, *The Living Eye*, p. 82 (my emphasis).

⁴ This 'affectability for one's own self' or narcissism is what *effects* the I in its identity of same. As Petrosino claims referring to Lévinas: "the subject's own is experienced in so much as property and the first word of the I is not I but 'mine', and the I is nothing but the effect of this 'mine'. Petrosino, Silvano, *La fenomenologia dell'unico: le tesi di Lévinas*, in Lévinas, *Totalità e Infinito*, Jaca Book, Milano, 1998, p.xliii (my trans. From Italian). In this sense, the Ego would be the product of an economic operation, entailing the assimilation and hence possession of all what is other within its (the I) field of forces: "the possibility of possessing, that is, of suspending the very alterity of what is only at first other, and other relative to me, is the way of the same [...] possession is preeminently the form in which the other becomes the same by becoming mine". Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, Duquesne Univ. Press, Pittsburgh, 1969, p.38 and p.46. The dynamic of this operation will be soon discussed.

⁵ Lévinas footnotes this same passage by declaring: "by contrast the things may poetically be called "blind persons". A few lines down, the French philosopher also states: "*the myth of Gyges is the very myth of the I and interiority, which exist non-recognized*. They are, to be sure, the eventuality of all unpunished crimes but such is the price of separation". Ibid. p. 61 (my emphasis).

It certainly doesn't take much imagination to figure out where the narrator resides: as obsessed as he is with protecting himself, he practically lives walled up within a sort of a bunker.⁶ The "enceinte" of walls⁷ defending this self-contained space is in fact both internal, meaning the outer walls of the edifice itself, and external: *the white wall of the interior of a spacious sky-light shaft [...]* and the *lofty brick wall, black by age and everlasting shade*. Yet, instead of arousing, as it would, a sense of obstruction and suffocation, the presence of these walls can be said to suit the lawyer's ontological requirements in terms of protection, safety and isolation. In a work dedicated to the symbolism of the house in literature, Bachelard interestingly lingers over some threshold figures conjugating the values of the outside and inside. As to the door, he affirms it to be: "an archetype and a concept at the same time: it totalizes unconscious securities with conscious ones. It materializes the guardian of the threshold".⁸ This concept may here, more or less legitimately, be extended to the windows of the office, though with an addition: namely, if these latter are to embody what the French phenomenologist calls the "guardian of the threshold", the opposite walls can be said to reinforce the 'naturalness' of this very vigilance. Maybe then, the only drawback concerning the existence of this double palisade would be the fact that the view on both ends is *quasi* null: it is in effect *deficient in what landscape painters call "life"* on one side and facing an

⁶ The following textual segment, apparently pleonastic, should contribute to an explanation: "Some time prior to the period at which this little story begins, my avocations had been largely increased. The good old office, now extinct in the State of New-York, of a Master in Chancery, had been conferred upon me. It was not a very arduous office, but very pleasantly remunerative. I seldom lose my temper; much more seldom indulge in dangerous indignation at wrongs and outrages; but I must be permitted to be rash here and declare, that I consider the sudden and violent abrogation of the office of master in Chancery, by the new Constitution, as a...premature act; inasmuch as I had counted upon a life-lease of the profits, whereas I only received those of a few short years. But this is by the way" (p.19). Although he considers himself as a peaceful person, the lawyer has, in this very occasion, lost his self-control. The decision to abrogate his office as Master in Chancery is defined as a *sudden, violent ...premature act*, whereas the adjective *premature*, highlighted by the dots, clearly indicates the undergoing of a traumatic condition. This abrupt removal, equivalent to an eradication (and similar, amongst other things, to Bartleby's removal: "the report was this: that Bartleby had been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington, from which he had been suddenly removed by a change in the administration", p.51), decided by the *outside*, not only comes to shatter the narrator's prospect of a financial stability, but can be said to undermine his ontological equilibriums: his need for tranquillity, peace and isolation.

⁷ Note that 'Wall-Street' was named after a palisade (1653) circumscribing the southern part of Manhattan, so as to defend it from the attacks of the Indian population.

⁸ "La porte est à la fois un archétype et un concept: elle totalise des sécurités incoscientes et de sécurités conscientes. Elle matérialise le gardien du seuil." Bachelard, *La Terre et les Rêveries du Repos*, José corti, Paris, 1971, p. 186 (my transl. from French).

*unobstructed view of a lofty brick wall*⁹ on the other. Yet again, the lawyer doesn't seem to be much bothered about this either, for the same reasons as before. That is, the very presence of the opposite walls guarantees to him a *certain* perceptive invisibility: he can see without being seen.¹⁰ The legal office could then be easily described as a “contre-univers ou un univers du contre”, to borrow Bachelard's formula.¹¹ It is in sum the expression of a very selfish, unwelcoming and therefore very much hostile being with regards to an outside as the ‘locus’ of the other.

Now, before going ahead with the text, there is one final question that needs to be answered: in effect, how should one read the *presence* of other people (namely, other “onlookers”) within the office? Is it possible to speak of a co-existence with the employés? And if so, on which terms is this co-habitation being established? Suffice here to take into consideration the following passage:

I should have stated before that ground glass folding-doors divided my premises into two parts, one of which was occupied by my scribes, the other by myself. According to my humor I threw open these doors, or closed them. (p.24)

This ulterior dichotomy between public space (locus of the other) and private space (locus of the same) further attests to the correctness of our analysis: thanks to the presence of the *ground glass folding-doors*, functioning as guardians of an internal threshold, the lawyer is, once again, in a safe, protected and isolated position. Moreover, by governing the communication between these two “territories” (*according to my humor I threw open these doors or closed them*), he is also able to impose a transitional diktat that bars the entrance to his space and that puts him in control of the situation beyond this very barricade.

(c) Economy, or of house-management:

At the period just preceding the advent of Bartleby, I had two persons as copyists in my employment, and a promising lad as an office-boy. First Turkey; second Nippers [...] (p.19)

⁹ And the use of an adjective like *unobstructed* is noteworthy for a perceptive outlet which is, *de facto*, obstructed: “which wall required no spy-glass to bring out its lurking beauties, but for the benefit of all near-sighted spectators, was pushed up to within ten feet of my window panes”.

¹⁰ Scopically speaking and on the basis of what we are told, the perception from the chambers is in fact still possible: ten feet is the distance separating the lawyer's building from the opposite dead wall. Though minimal, this distance does still permit to see sideways: to see obliquely rather than directly, so to speak.

¹¹ Bachelard, *ibid.*, p. 112.

Turkey was a short, pousy Englishman of about my own age, that is, somewhere not far from sixty. In the morning, one might say, his face was of a fine florid hue, but after twelve o'clock, meridian, his dinner hour, it blazed like a grate full of Christmas coals, and continued blazing, but, as it were, with a gradual wane – till 6 o'clock, p.m. or thereabouts, after which I saw no more of the proprietor of his face, which gaining its meridian with the sun, seemed to set with it, to rise, culminate, and decline the following day [...] exactly when Turkey displayed his fullest beams from his red and radiant countenance, just then, too, at that critical moment, began the daily period when I considered his business capacities as seriously disturbed for the remainder of the twenty-four hours [...] (p.20)

Nippers, the second on my list, was a whiskered, sallow, and, upon the whole, rather piratical-looking young man of about five and twenty. I always deemed him the victim of two evil powers, ambition and indigestion. The ambition was evinced by a certain impatience of the duties of a mere copyist, an unwarrantable usurpation of strictly professional affairs, such as the original drawing up of legal documents. The indigestion seemed betokened in an occasional nervous testiness and grinning irritability, causing the teeth to audibly grind together over mistakes committed in copying, unnecessary maledictions, hissed rather than spoken, in the heat of business, and especially by a continual discontent with the height of the table where he worked[...] (p.21)

Clumsy to the grotesque, eccentric to the aberrant, unnatural to the mechanical, Turkey and Nippers can be said to have been perceived “avec le parti pri des choses”, to borrow Francis Ponge’s expression. The description the narrator gives us of the two copyists is no doubt comical: these two cartoon-like characters are certainly meant to make us laugh. Yet, their comicality or even grotesqueness is to hide a very sad reality, as we shall soon point out. To put this in an overly schematic way, one might argue that the two scribes are not human beings, that is, they are not seen as such by their master: they are *present* to him only as mere objects he can dispose of, (ab)use and arrange according to his multiple needs: *Turkey was in many ways a most valuable person to me / Nippers, like his compatriot Turkey, was a very useful man to me, wrote a neat, swift hand* (p.22). The relation (the absence of one?) established with the other is purely business related: it is a ‘commercium’. Martin Buber would call it an *I-it* combination¹² The other person, in sum, would only exist as a constituting element of the ego’s world: it is being subjected to its law, to the law of the house, that is, etymologically, to an economy. Yet, within this self-centered universe where all otherness is being rendered same, assimilated and thus transvalued, how should the ec-centric behaviour of the two copyists be interpreted? And, more originally, how does the lawyer perceive this

¹² Buber, Martin, *I and Thou*, T&T Clark, Edimbrough, 1996.

decentralization? It is a fact that just when Turkey and Nippers are in their *idiosyncratic* phase, they show a certain unaptness for their duties of copyists. With regard to Turkey, we are told:

there are many singular coincidences I have known in the course of my life, not the least among which was the fact that exactly when Turkey displayed his fullest beams from his red and radiant countenance, just then, too, at that critical moment, began the daily period when I considered his business capacities as seriously disturbed[...] (p.20)

In effect, it is not that Turkey refuses to accomplish his work, but he seems to be *altogether too energetic* about it. As the narrator points out:

there was a strange, inflamed, flurried, flighty recklessness of activity about him. He would be incautious in dipping his pen into his inkstand. All his blots upon my documents, were dropped after twelve o'clock, meridian [...] (Ibid)

As to Nippers, he can be said to act out the effects of indigestion by *an occasional nervous testiness and grinning irritability, causing the teeth to audibly grind together over mistakes committed in copying* [...] (p.21). It is then clear that the two of them no longer copy as they should, that is, not with the attention, efficiency and abnegation that normally distinguish them. Turkey, for instance, when the eccentricities are latent, is considered *the quickest, steadiest creature* [...] *accomplishing a great deal of work in a style not to be matched* [...] (p.21). If we are then to perceive them as mere tools or equipments, we may say that they disfunction, that something within their internal mechanics gets damaged, failing as they do to comply with the deontological diktats imposed onto them by their host, who would now grasp them as quasi *un-ready-to-hand* equipments.¹³ The *un-readiness-to-hand* of the equipment may therefore be said to be revelatory, within what was already in every respect functional, of an alteration. This is certainly an alteration which brings to light the impertinence, the insolence and unrespectfulness of the other in so much as a 'disobedient' and 'untameable' tool¹⁴: (with regard to Turkey) *though the civilest, nay, the blandest and most reverential of men in the morning, yet in*

¹³ "The tools turns out to be damaged, or the material unsuitable. In each of these cases equipment is here, ready-to-hand. We discover its unusability, however, not by looking at it and establishing its properties, but rather by the circumspection of the dealings in which we use it [...]. When its unusability is thus discovered, equipment becomes conspicuous. This conspicuousness presents the ready-to-hand equipment as in a certain unreadiness-to-hand". Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1973, p.103.

¹⁴ 'Anything which is un-ready-to-hand in this way is disturbing to us, and enables us to see the obstinacy of that we must concern ourselves in the first instance before we do anything else'. Heidegger, pp.103-104. Note that Turkey is often described as a 'rash, restive horse'.

the afternoon he was disposed [...] to be slightly rash with his tongue, in fact, insolent (p.20). He would also:

T1- be reckless and sadly given to making blots in the afternoon, but some days he went further and was rather noisy [...]

T2- (make) an unpleasant racket with his chair [...]

T3- in mending his pens, impatiently split them them all to pieces [...]

T4- (box) his papers about in a most indecorous manner, very sad to behold in an elderly man like him [...] (p.20)

On the other hand, Nipper's "ambition was evinced by a certain impatience of the duties [...]", leading him to hiss rather than speak "unnecessary maledictions" and sometimes to "impatiently rise from his seat", "amid the stillness of my chambers" (pp.21-23). This is curious. I mean, it is curious, for example, that while in the afternoon Turkey behaves in an indecent, ungrateful and noisy way, before his dinner hour, he is *the quickest steadiest creature* as well as *the civilest, nay, the blandest and most reverential of men*. That is, his conduct is not only professionally exceptional but totally (ego)-syntonic with the narrator's one. Now, how should the singularity of this phenomenon be construed? My claim is that exactly when the scrivener's idiosyncrasies are absent, they function as mere mirrors or even as photocopy machines. Starobinski argues: "to become a mirror is to reduce oneself to a reflective surface: the vitrified consciousness experiences reflection in a passive way. It can only undergo, in order to return their reflection, the forms and creatures that offer themselves to its look."¹⁵ If we are to follow the French thinker here, one might argue that the identity of the I in its sameness is effected precisely as a result of a 'vitrifying operation', whereby Turkey and Nippers alternatively play the roles of reflective surfaces. When not disfunctioning, they are in fact the *same* of the same, so to speak. Throughout the mediation of a "reverential" *doppelgänger*, the lawyer can be said to be himself and for-himself: that is, he would see no one else but himself and would see without being seen. During their 'on' phase, the two copyists are being blindly subjected to the ascendancy, will-power and domination of their master's look.

Yet, what does happen in the mode of disfunctionality, namely, when the two scribes are in their *idiosyncratic* mood? At first sight, one might be led to think that exactly when they disfunction, the totality historically constituted between the lawyer and and two copyists

¹⁵ Starobinski, *La mélancholie au miroir*, Julliard, Paris, 1989, p.35 (my transl.).

is being interrupted. To a closer look, however, things turn out to be a little bit more complicated. The complication does in effect arise from the fact that the otherness (*otherness* with respect to what was before perceived as *sameness*) of the other is a false one, in the sense that the alterity that is here encountered is but a relative one, so to speak, being individuated by dialectical opposition or negation: *insolent, indecorous, impatient, noisy, unpleasant*. The heterology is but a reverse of the identity, the negative of the same. Nothing but the product of the process of the identification of the I.¹⁶ It should therefore be clear that, whether the I wants it or not, it is the same also with regard to this other non-same, to whom it dialectically comes to coincide by means of negation. The antithesis does in effect recall the thesis, it puts it back into play: “Being and not-being”, as Lévinas affirms, “illuminate one another, and unfold a speculative dialectic which is a determination of being.”¹⁷ The unfolding of a speculative dialectic, to retake Lévinas’s words, goes some way to explaining then the uneasiness of the lawyer before Turkey: *indecorous manner very sad to behold in an elderly man like him*. The scrivener is in fact perceived as a degraded and thus intolerable double:

now, valuing his morning services as I did, and resolved not to lose them; *yet, at the same time made uncomfortable* by his inflamed ways after twelve o’clock [...] I took upon me, one Saturday noon (he was always worse on Saturdays) to hint to him, very kindly, that perhaps now that he was growing old, it might be well to abridge his labors; in short, he need not to come to my chambers after twelve o’clock [...] But no; he insisted upon his afternoon devotions [...] (pp.20-21)

After having considered the *ec-centricities* from the point of view of the narrator our analysis hasn’t as yet answered the question: what, in the end, do they signify? There is no doubt as to the fact that the two characters’ ‘on’ behaviour is the expression of a rebellion to the routine and, in particular, to their role of mere passive reproducers of their master. The

¹⁶ “To be I is, over and beyond any individuation that can be derived from a system of references, to have identity as one’s content. The I is not a being that always remains the same, but is the being whose existing consists in identifying himself, in recovering its identity throughout all that happens to it. It is the primal identity, the primordial work of identification. The I is identical in its very alterations. It represents them to itself and thinks them [...]”; Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 36 On Lévinas, Derrida also writes: “the I is the same. The alterity or the I’s internal negativity, the interior difference is nothing but an appearance: an illusion, a ‘play of the Same’[...]”; Derrida, Jacques, *Violence et métaphisique, essai sur la pensée d’Emmanuel Lévinas*, Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale, 1964, p.322 (my trans.) The distinction between false and pure heterology is here deemed to be necessary for a better understanding of Bartleby in so much as the absolutely other.

¹⁷ Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence*, transl. by Alphonso Lingis, Duquesne Univ. Press, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, (third edn) 2000, p.3. More precisely, in *Totality and Infinity*, Lévinas declares:

theme of refusal, of opposition is clearly evinced by their *incautious* targeting of the lawyer's precious documents¹⁸ and, in general, by their violent and destructive behaviour:

Turkey 1- (he) spilled his sand-box, in mending his pens, impatiently split them all to pieces, and threw them on the floor in a sudden passion; stood up and leaned over his table, boxing his papers[...]

Nippers 1- (he) would sometimes impatiently rise from his seat, and stooping over his table, spread his arms wide apart, seize the whole desk, and move it and jerk it, with a grim, grinding motion on the floor, as if the table were a perverse voluntary agent, intent on thwarting and vexing him[...]

Nippers 2- Nippers knew not what he wanted. Or, if he wanted anything it was to get rid of a scivener's table altogether (p.20 and pp.22-23).

What can we infer from these passages? And, more precisely, what does originally determine their violent conduct? As a point of clarification, one might argue here that the nature of their aggressivity is exogenous, rather than being endogenous. Namely, their aggressivity would be the result of the subtle and somehow “educated” violence to which they are both being subjected within the office: *as if the table were a perverse voluntary agent, intent on thwarting and vexing him* [...]. To the production of violence does follow, quite naturally, its reproduction. It is a vicious-circle: violence breeds violence. The violence we are talking about, however, is anything but corporeal, yet it is a violence of pure psychic constriction: “une violence carcérant”, as Barthes would put it.¹⁹ It is the violence of impositions, restraints and the laws of an egosystem within which all differences are being suppressed; whereas suppression means here totalization in the way we have understood this term.²⁰

Finally and beside this, it could be added that Turkey and Nipper's aggressive impulse has still a quite positive side to it. Far from being a simple sign of destruction for destruction's sake, namely a token of death, their behaviour is a sign of life. In its radicality, it does connote a certain creativity (a certain humanity, one may call it):

“thesis and antithesis, in repelling one another, call one another. They appear in opposition to a synoptic gaze that encompasses them; they already form a totality [...]”, p.53.

¹⁸ “All his (Turkey) blots upon my documents, were dropped there after twelve o'clock[...]/ (Nippers’) “indigestion seemed betokened in an occasional nervous testiness and grinning irritability, causing the teeth to audibly grind together over mistakes committed in copying [...]”, pp.20-21.

¹⁹ Literally “prison-like violence”. Barthes, “Propos sur la violence”, in *Le Grain de la Voix*, Seuil, Paris, 1981, p.287.

²⁰ See our introduction.

T1-“With submission, sir,” said Turkey on this occasion, “I consider myself your right-hand man. In the morning I but marshal and deploy my columns, but in the afternoon I put myself at their head, and gallantly charge the foe, thus!” – and he made a violent thrust with the ruler. (p.21)

N1- the ambition was evinced by a certain impatience of the duties of a mere copyist, an unwarrantable usurpation of strictly professional affairs, such as the original drawing up of legal documents[...]

N2- Among the manifestations of his diseased ambition was a fondness he had for receiving visits from certain ambiguous-looking fellows in seedy coats, whom he called his clients[...]

N3- I have good reason to believe, however, that one individual who called upon him at my chambers, and who, with a grand air, he insisted was his client, was no other than a dun[...](pp.21-22).

Both Turkey and Nippers play at being what they are not, creating scenarios and plots where they are the very protagonists. To a closer look, however, it is not only significant that Turkey’s linguistic register imitates that of the lawyer (especially in the use of expressions pertaining to the militaristic imagery²¹), and that the position the scrivener dreams of is one of command and power, but also Nippers seems to identify himself with his boss by dealing with imaginary clients, underwriting original documents as well as dressing in a *gentlemanly sort of way* [...]. The irony, a bitter one indeed, lies in the fact that, while opposing or negating their factual reality, they do always and already come to reaffirm it to an oneiric plane. In short, if they dream of a different life they still dream it in terms of sameness: they cannot help copying. Lévinas explains: “the resistance is still within the same [...] the negator and the negated are posited together, form a system, that is, a totality. The doctor who missed an engineering career, the poor man who longs for wealth, the patient who suffers, the melancholic who is bored for nothing oppose their condition while remaining attached to its horizons”.²²

In the mode of disfunctionality, we ultimately assist the mad apotheosis of a system whose ‘parts’ over(re)produce (*the difficulty was, he was apt to be altogether too energetic. There was a strange, inflamed, flurried, flighty reckless of activity about him*), rather than passively reproducing the same, so to speak. Consequentially, the very conventions of copyright would be violated: *unwarrantable usurpation of strictly professional affair, such as the original drawing up of legal documents.*

²¹ To a careful reading the text is strewn with bellicose and war-like allusions, starting with that *nothing of that sort have I ever suffered to invade my peace*, to the definition of the *employés* as a *corps of copyists* and still further to the expression *standing at the head of my seated column of clerks* and again to lexemes such as *retreat; rebellion, resistance, disarmed* [...].

²² Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.41.

This is, one might claim, a violation which, failing firm resolutions, could end up provoking the very dissolution of all distinction between the original and the copy, the master and the *employés*. That which is in danger here is the very order of hierarchies. And thus, by the same token, the lawyer's ontological assets. Yet,

It was fortunate for me that, owing to its peculiar cause –indigestion – the irritability and consequent nervousness of Nippers, were mainly observable in the morning, while in the afternoon he was comparatively mild. So that Turkey's paroxysms only coming on about twelve o'clock, I never had to do with their eccentricities at one time. Their fits relieved each other like guards. When Nippers was on, Turkey's was off; and viceversa. This was a good natural arrangement under the circumstances. (p.23)

Turkey and Nippers' energetic disfunctions are cleverly taken care of: when one is on, the other is off.²³ By exploiting their *natural* oppositions in terms of temporal alternance, the (ego-)system can continue to function, to reproduce. Its economic (or equally ontological) stability is guaranteed despite, better yet, thanks to its internal negativities.²⁴ The lawyer's "philosophy" within the office is indeed an egology; a logic uniquely aimed at the safeguard and preservation of the I's integrity and stability. At the satisfaction of its needs (safety, tranquillity, peace, isolation) and interests (control, power). It is therefore a violent, "imperialistic" and totalitarian logic: based, as we have seen, on will-power, mastery, constriction, exploitation and systematic reduction of the other to the same.²⁵ And it is, to conclude, an unjust philosophy leaning as it does on the suppression of the Other in so much as another, namely, on the suppression of its critical presence.

²³ The two scribes work just like a mechanical instrument (*on/off*).

²⁴ "Turkey and Nippers (that is to say the two negative morphemes of the double negation) remain neurotic and alienated; it is however thanks to them that the office can go on functioning, precisely by assimilating, better yet, exploiting, the opposition", say Paola Cabibbo and Paola Ludovici, in "Bartleby: il sistema semantico della doppia negazione", *Melvilliana*, p.64 (my transl. from Italian).

²⁵ As Lévinas states: "ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power. It issues in the State and in the non-violence of the totality, without securing itself against the violence from which this non-violence lives, and which appear in the tyranny of the State [...]", Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.46.

Bartleby:

And who are thou, boy? I see not my
reflection in the vacant pupils of thy eyes.

Ahab to Pip in *Moby-Dick*

Now my original business – that of a conveyancer and title hunter and drawer-up of recondite documents of all sorts – was considerably increased by receiving the master’s office. There was now a great work for scribes. Not only must I push the clerks already with me, but I must have additional help. In answer to my advertisement, a motionless young man one morning, stood upon my office threshold, the door being open, for it was summer. (p.24)

The simplicity and at the same time the depth of the very last phrase make us think of an haiku. And, just like an haiku, the quartain does not seem to conclude itself. It rather hangs on, it hovers on the edge, on the border of its own saying:...*for it was summer*. It remains beautifully suspended in its metaphor, as if stuck in time, in a time of its own. In this epiphany, the absolutely other, the other *as such* can be said to be *present*:

I can see that figure now – pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn. It was Bartleby. (ibid.)

As Buber claims: “[The present] arises only in virtue of the fact that the Thou becomes present. The I of the primary word I-it, that is, the I faced by no Thou, but surrounded by a multitude of ‘contents’, has no present, only the past. Put in another way, in so far as man rests satisfied with the things that he experiences and uses, he lives in the past, and *his moment has no present content*. He has nothing but objects.”⁷⁵ Indeed, the (re)appearing of the other is absolutely presentational: Bartleby (re)appears to the narrator not as a representation, so to speak, but as a (haunting or even ghosting, for that matter) *presentation*: “I can see that figure *now* [...] *It was* Bartleby”. Better yet, though putting this in more difficult and rather enigmatic terms for the moment (yet isn’t the enigmatic *of* the other?), it may be said that Bartleby is present (is present here and now at the instant of one’s testimonial writing) as the ever present coming back of a non-representational past, that is, a past that never became and never can become (not even *now*) graspable as an identifying present (we shall soon cast light on this). Yet again in other words and anticipating here what shall be discussed later on, we

⁷⁵ Buber, *I and Thou*, p.26, my emphasis.

say that the other and, more particularly, the significance of the mortal other as *face* is the exposition or even expression, as Lévinas words it, of a never old commandment (*Thou Shall Not Kill*), time after time but always for the *first* time summoning the onlooker to (– his – *antique*, that is, immemorial, non-representational) *response-ability* for it: “pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn”.⁷⁶ Although in a very exceptional way, the other can therefore be said to be of the present, of an absolute present always already communicating with an immemorial past for an inexhaustible, infinite future (a future which is not simply a present-to-come, an *a-venir*). He is of what remains (*demeure*) critically tensed between these two temporalities exceeding the historical time of an I and, to stretch (more or less legitimately) this metaphor further, of what stands in between the *here* (of life) and the *there* (of death), between the *in* and the *out* and literally between all dialectical figures (including of course and problematically so the presence and absence dyad: see footnote at the beginning of the next page), whereas by dialectics we intend to designate that very process by which an opposition is brought forth (we shall also come back to this). Hence, if the other is of the present, he is also of the border, of the edge, of the limit and, more particularly here, we say that he is of the *limen*: “a motionless young man one morning, stood upon my office threshold”. The other is of the present and of the *limen*: a threshold across which the foreigner or equally the *hostis* (guest/host) is invited to come in, and across which the host may as well be asked to depart, to paraphrase Llewelyn.⁷⁷ Yet, even prior to any invitation to enter and despite his concrete and motionless abidance (*de-meurance*, as Derrida would put it⁷⁸) upon the threshold, the mortal other is always already virtually on the move: that is, always already subtly addressing the master of the house to (his) responsibility.⁷⁹ As we suggested a moment ago, the face is ex-position, an ever present coming towards (*venir vers*) in the manner of an

⁷⁶ “The manifestation of the other is *face*”, says Lévinas; the quotation is in *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl and Heidegger*, p.194. The face is an indivisible combination of gaze and speech.

⁷⁷ See Llewelyn, J., “The Impossibility of Levinas’s Death”, in *The Limits of Death*, ed. by J. Morra, Manchester Univ. Press, Manchester and New York, 2000, p.38. In this concern, Bachtin also asserts: “the word ‘threshold’, already in its linguistic existence (close to its real significance) has gained a metaphorical meaning, being associated with the turning point in one’s life, with the crisis, with the decision that changes the path of one’s existence (or with the uncertainty, with the fear of getting through a threshold). Further down, talking of a chronotope of the threshold, the Russian theoretician says: “in this chronotope time is an instant that seems devoid of duration and detached from the normal flux of biographical time”. Bachtin, *Estetica e Romanzo*, Einaudi, Torino, 1979, p. 396 (my trans.)

⁷⁸ “Where the signifying form *demeure* plays on what dies [...] but also with what stays on and maintains itself through time [...]”, says Derrida, in Blanchot, M., *The Instant of my Death* and Derrida, J., *Demeure, Fiction and Testimony*, trans. by E. Rottemberg, Stanford Univ. Press, Stanford, California, 2000, p.77.

unspoken question questioning the I in its egological persistence in being-at-home-with-itself (unto its own death: the I maintains itself within the economic horizon of *its* time, which is always the time of *its own* death). This coming-forward-and-toward (*se présenter et venir vers*) ultimately comprises its (ethical) *sense* (both direction and signification). The other is then always already in the first *place* a trespasser: he tacitly comes in prior to any bid or invitation, thus not only breaking with the law of the house, illegally (yet not unjustly) disrupting one's wordly eco-nomy, but also, at the same time, critically disempowering the host of its hosting power, so to speak.

Moreover and to shed further light on this, precisely because he is always already virtually on the move, the other can be said to be constantly "dis-figuring" itself: it destroys and exceeds "in its very punctuality" "the plastic image" (Lévinas) he leaves behind in his (tres)passing. In other words, his extraordinary mobility is properly what guarantees against his being enclosed within the field of semantic attraction of the onlooker (whereas enclosure means here the very negation of the other's life, which is his mobility itself), against his being rendered same, against his being copied, so to speak, and, by the same token, is what insures, time after time, the retention of his telling alterity, of his immediate significance. As a matter of fact and despite the narrator's claim ("I can see that figure now [...]"), the mortal other *qua* face is certainly not seen (and thus understood, according to the signifying form *sa-voir*), that is, not phenomenally seen (it is not the assemblage of a nose, a mouth...it escapes the *Figuregebung*, it absolutely evades the order of sign systems, unlike Turkey and Nippers for instance⁸⁰), and therefore it does not make sense in the ordinary kind of way (namely, by means of mediation, agency): Bartleby, let's repeat it, is present in an extremely distinctive manner, "by and according to himself" *only*, as if *directing* his very manifestation and as if directing it *independently* of every point of view the onlooker would have taken in its regard, to paraphrase Lévinas.⁸¹ He is ultimately present in so far as he breaks with the present *qua* time

⁷⁹ The other's presence is at the same time proximal and distal. As a matter of fact, there wouldn't be any otherness without a *certain* distance.

⁸⁰ Peperzak says: "as long as we think in terms of phenomenal beings that have a place and function in texts and contexts, the Other is a *hole* or *absence*: in contrast to the phenomena that I can observe, the Other whom I meet as Other is *invisible*. According to Levinas, to whom phenomenality, as we have seen, is equivalent with the possibility of being identified and thematized, *the Other is not a phenomenon but an enigma*". Peperzak, A.T., *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1999, p.63, my emphasis. The face would ultimately give rise to the rupture of phenomenology.

⁸¹ Lévinas defines the appearance of the other person in so much as the manifestation of the *kath'auto*: "in which a being concerns us without slipping away and without betraying itself does not consist in its being

of the I, as he breaks with this latter's present, so to speak, and consequently with its power of representation.

The scrivener is in sum not what the lawyer would have expected to see upon his office threshold: that is, a *neat* and *respectable* person like he is. Bartleby does infinitely surprise the world of his expectations: he is the unexpected guest.

After a few words touching his qualifications, I engaged him, glad to have among my corps of copyists a man of so singularly sedate an aspect, which I thought might operate beneficially upon the flighty temper of Turkey, and the fiery one of Nippers. (p.24)

Despite the young man's complete strangeness and *sans aucune référence*, as Deleuze argues⁸², the lawyer hires him. He likes Bartleby and, more particularly, what he seems to like of him is his cool appearance: *glad to have among my corps of copyists a man of so singularly sedate an aspect*. The narrator is in fact well aware of the very precarious stability of his 'ego-system' and, consequently, aware that any inappropriate addition and change to it may be ruinous. This is precisely why Bartleby has been employed: primarily, with the view to not altering the already frail economic equilibrium of the office⁸³ and, secondarily, with the intent of reinforcing it, using the scrivener's presence as a sort of 'homeopathic' tranquilizer: *which I thought might operate beneficially upon the flighty temper of Turkey, and the fiery one of Nippers*. But let's now move on to the collocation of the scrivener within the chambers:

disclosed, its being exposed to the gaze that would take it as a theme for interpretation, and would command an absolute position dominating the object. *Manifestation kath'auto consists in a being telling itself to us independently of every position we would have taken in its regard, expressing itself*. Here, contrary to all conditions for the visibility of objects, a being is not placed in the light of another but presents itself in the manifestation that should announce it; *it is present as directing this very manifestation – present before the manifestation, which only manifests it*. The absolute experience is not disclosure but revelation; a coinciding of the expressed with him who expresses, which is the privileged manifestation of the Other, the manifestation of a face over and beyond form. Form – incessantly betraying its own manifestation, congealing into a plastic form, for it is adequate to the same, alienates the exteriority of the other". Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.66, my emphasis. Commenting on this, Petrosino suggests, "it is not the I to grasp, to see the face, but it is the face to surprise the I". Petrosino, "La Fenomenologia dell'unico", LII, my transl. Precisely because it is the face to surprise the I and not *vice versa*, the other can be said to leave open, at all times, a passage to its time, which is always a non-intentional, non-historical or non-representational one.

⁸² Deleuze, G., "Bartleby ou la formule", in *Critique et Clinique*, Minuit, Paris, 1993, p.97.

⁸³ Had the lawyer chosen a nervous person, the whole stability of the ego-system would have certainly collapsed: Bartleby would then function as a real counterpoise within a complicated system of weights and levers.

I resolved to assign Bartleby a corner by the folding doors, but on my side of them, so as to have this quiet man *within easy call*, in case any trifling thing was to be done [...] (p.24, my emphasis)

And:

One object I had in placing Bartleby *so handy to me* behind the screen, was to avail myself of his service [...] (ibid.)

And:

I placed his desk close up to a small side-window in that part of the room, a window which originally had afforded a lateral view of certain grimy back-yards and bricks, but which, owing to subsequent erections, commanded at present no view at all, though it gave some light. Within three feet of the panes was a wall, and the light came down from far above, between two lofty buildings, as from a very small opening in a dome. Still further to a satisfactory arrangement, I procured a high green folding screen, *which might entirely isolate Bartleby from my sight, though not remove him from my voice*. (ibid.)

Bartleby's working station has certainly been carefully planned, and reasonably so, as we shall now find out. First of all, his presence just beside the folding doors may be easily construed in terms of a presentness-to-hand-of-the-equipment. As Heidegger states: "What is ready-to-hand in our everyday dealings has the character of closeness. To be exact, this closeness of equipment has already been intimated in the term 'readiness-to-hand', which expresses the Being of the equipment".⁸⁴ Second of all, being Bartleby being a complete stranger (Who is he? Where does he come from?...) and thereby *knowing* (order of power, possession: order of the same) *not*, as yet, what his strangeness may conceal (Are his intentions peaceful? What is he getting at here?...), the lawyer's move completely to isolate him from his sight shouldn't surprise us. What is an issue here is in fact nothing less than the power of the host over the guest, the power of the host *qua* mastery, subjectivity, ipseity. Without the "high green folding screen", ultimate defensive guardian of the threshold, the narrator would systematically find himself in danger: under the threat of another's look, under the threat of being delivered (in his turn) as hostage to him, to paraphrase Starobinski's echoing of Sartre.

⁸⁴ "Every entity that is 'to hand' has a different closeness, which is not to be ascertained by measuring distances. This closeness regulates itself in terms of circumspectively 'calculative' manipulating and using. At the same time what is close in this way gets established by the circumspection of concern, with regard to the direction, in which the equipment is accessible at any time. When this closeness of the equipment has been given directionality, this signifies merely that the equipment has its position in space as present-at-hand somewhere, but also that as equipment it has been essentially fitted up and installed, set up, and put to rights." Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.135

As this latter himself points out: “with the other’s look the ‘situation’ escapes me [...] I am no longer master of the situation [...] *The Other is the hidden death of my possibilities*”.⁸⁵ The addition of an extra palisade is therefore necessary, ontologically necessary in order to dissimulate one’s own objectivity before the other and, by the same token, to continue to affirm oneself as a subject, as the one who sees without being seen, as the one who is in control: *though not to remove him from my voice* [...]:

And thus, in a manner, privacy and society are conjoined (p.24).

Moreover and in the light of what we have said up to now, one can consider that Bartleby is not just being isolated from the sight of the lawyer, but also, by means of the ground-glass folding doors, from that of the other copyists. If to this we add the fact that his desk has been positioned (*I placed his desk*) near to *a small side window which commanded at present no view at all*, his seclusion can be said to be total. The narrator’s overall intent is ultimately clear: to completely restrain his mobility, which is the same as saying to kill him as another, to destroy properly what comprises his otherness. His threat is in effect not to be underestimated: one’s wordly economy may be at risk.

At first Bartleby did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. He ran a day and night line, copying by sun-light and by candle light. I should have been quite delighted with his application, had he been cheerfully industrious. But he wrote on silent^{ly}, pale^{ly}, mechanical^{ly}. (p.24, my emphasis)

⁸⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp.264-265. Let’s briefly remember that in Sartre’s phenomenology the essence of the other is negation itself: the other’s look limits and thus negates me (it does negate me in so much as freedom, projectivity, mastery: subjectivity). He can objectify me as much as I can turn him into another object of my world. Whereas for Sartre the relation between the I and the Other is constitutively conflictual or even antagonistic, for Lévinas this is not always the case, far from it. If on the one hand the Other *qua* face limits my power, my autonomy (*autos* ‘self’+ *nomos* ‘law’) to selfishly persist in my effort to be (myself and for myself alone) that forgets and kills the other, on the other, precisely by limiting my will to power, that is, my power to kill, it at the same time empowers *me* with a power beyond *my* power (to choose or not) to respond for it (“Goodness is always older than choice”, Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being or beyond essence*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis, Duquesne Univ. Press, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1998, p.57), to say: “*me voicî*” – “See *me*, here and now”. As Petrosino sharply puts it: “it is only in this responsible activity within an absolute constitutive passivity that ethics reveals its most profound structure...in the ethical responsibility, the passivity of the I [before the Other *qua* face, *qua* expression of the “Thou Shall Not Kill”) becomes the activity of its most authentic identity”. Petrosino, “La Fenomenologia dell’Unico”, LXVI, my transl. In sum, while for Sartre the Other negates me, for Lévinas it instead affirms *me* (it addresses and affirms uniquely *me* and what is unique, exceptional of this *me*) and not the universal idea of the ego. We shall return to this.

“I would prefer not to”:

For all men who say yes, lie; and all men who say no...cross the frontiers into Eternity with nothing but a carpetbag – that is to say, the Ego.

Melville⁸⁶

It is, of course, an indispensable part of a scrivener's business to verify the accuracy of his copy, word by word. Where there are two or more scribes in an office, they assist each other in this examination, one reading from the copy, the other holding the original. [...] It was on the third day, I think, of his being with me, and before any necessity had arisen for having his own writing examined that, *being much hurried* to complete a small affair I had in hand, I *abruptly* called to Bartleby. *In my haste and natural expectancy of instant compliance*, I sat with my head bent over the original on my desk, and my right hand sideways, and somewhat *nervously* extended with the copy, so that *immediately* upon emerging from his retreat, Bartleby might snatch it and proceed to business *without the least delay*. In this very attitude did I sit when I called him, *rapidly* stating what it was I wanted him to do [...] imagine my surprise, nay, my consternation, *when without moving from his privacy*, Bartleby in *singularly mild voice*, replied, “I would prefer not to”. *I sat awhile in perfect silence, rallying* my stunned faculties. [...] I repeated my request in the clearest tone I could assume. But in *quiet* as clear a one came the previous reply, “I would prefer not to.” (p.25, my emphasis)

This is the first time that Bartleby says, *literally* saying it, something and, truth to tell, what he will be saying, what he literally will be saying in the future isn't a lot: he will be more or less repeating the 'same' odd formula with the 'same' odd tone of voice (a mild and a firm one), just like a magician up to some mysterious ritual or alchemical performance. Bartleby is certainly not much of a talkative man, not a man of *spoken* words, so to speak. Nor, for that matter, as we shall see, is he a man of (*hand*)written ones. He is in sum not a man of words but rather, as we suggested earlier on, one of *expressions*: he expresses himself. The formula, to say this too quickly for the moment, can in fact be construed as the voiced version of the saying always already performed by the face, in so much as a unique combination of gaze and speech. Without wanting here to enter into a round of speculations as to the reasons behind Bartleby's decision not to confront (*faire face*) the narrator directly but instead to speak out his enigmatic formula (it is, though, as if the scrivener were protesting against his unjust detention), it would be worth, however, considering how things, in a rather ironical way, have ultimately turned out for the lawyer. As a matter of fact, despite having had the scrivener removed from his sight but *not* from his voice, it is Bartleby still to have control

over him, to have control over him precisely by *voicing* his preference from behind his corner. But let's investigate this more closely. Imagine the whole scenario: there is frantic activity in the office, nerves are tensed and things are running late, there is some work still to be accomplished, all the other scribes are at their desks ready to participate in the collation business, everything is here and now finally set up and put to rights, everything in order and ordered: "Bartleby, Bartleby..." [...] *without moving from his privacy* [...] *in singularly mild voice* (he) *replied – I would prefer not to*. Taken all in all, the scene is very funny, not to say comical. Yet, our prime interest lies in what can be described as a time discrepancy between the lawyer's temporality and Bartleby's (the comicality of the situation would be borne out of this very asynchrony or even diachrony). The scrivener's unexpected saying does not only in fact come to interrupt the intentional time of the I but it comes to interrupt it for some *time*, so to speak: "I sat awhile in perfect silence, rallying my stunned faculties". The unexpected is ultimately not surprising just because unexpected per se but also because what has now become *present* as the unexpected *still* baffles representation, semiosis, calculation:

'Prefer not to,' echoed I, *rising in high excitement*, and crossing the room *with a stride*.⁸⁶ What do you mean? Are you moonstruck? I want you to help me compare this sheet here – take it,' and I *thrust it* towards him.

'I would prefer not to,' said he. I looked at him steadfastly. His face was leanly composed; his gray eye dimly calm. Not a wrinkle of agitation rippled him. Had there been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience or impertinence in his manner; in other words, had there been anything ordinarily human about him, doubtless I should have violently dismissed him from my premises. But as it was, I should have as soon thought of turning my pale plaster-of-paris bust of Cicero out of doors [...] This is very strange, thought I. (p.26, my emphasis)

It still baffles representation, as if time, the time of the I in its *I think*, in its identity or totality of same, were out of joint, disjointed, off the hinges. It is as if a passage in time, "to the time of the other"⁸⁷, had suddenly opened and, ultimately, it is as if in this time still out of joint, in this time still 'still', the other were present, as if he were still present by and somehow 'as' this stillness itself: "his face was leanly composed, his gray eye dimly calm, not a wrinkle of agitation rippled him". Yet, despite his still presence, despite his motionlessness, the other is still on the move, always already passing, trespassing the edge, the border line dividing life from death, always already moving in in the mode of a question questioning the onlooker to

⁸⁶ Letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne [16 April?] 1851, in *Correspondence*, Northwestern Univ. Press and The Newberry Library, Evanston and Chicago, 1993, p.186.

(his) responsibility for his (the other's) death *still* to come: "had there been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience or impertinence in his manner; in other words [always in *other* words, as Derrida would say], had there been anything ordinarily human about him, doubtless I should have violently dismissed him from my premises...this is very strange, thought I." The alterity that is here encountered is clearly not a relative or thetical one, it is not, as it was the case with Turkey and Nippers, the negative of the same: what is present cannot be individuated by distinction or dialectical opposition. It simply exceeds and exhausts all logological determination and thus, let's repeat it, it does not make sense in the ordinary kind of way. The face simply means otherwise. As Heidegger states: "calculative thinking compels itself into a compulsion to master everything on the basis of the consequential correctness of its procedure. It is unable to foresee that everything calculable by calculation...is already a whole, a whole whose unity indeed belongs to the incalculable that withdraws itself and its uncanniness from the claws of calculation".⁸⁸ The number of the other is in sum incalculable, unaccountable: it is the number '∞'. This is indeed the number or the beyond number of the infinite itself. In this sense, one might venture to argue that the relation to the other, that cannot be reduced to understanding, comprehension, is a relation to the infinite, to what does surpass the time-horizon of the I, which is always, *in the end*, the time of its own (meaningless) death. Ultimately, the relationship to the other as other is always already a relationship to a future which is not *my* future (to a future whose meaning goes beyond my death): to a time which is not the representable or historical time of immanence (and, by the same token, a relationship to a past which is not my past⁸⁹). But we

⁸⁷ Lévinas, *En découvrant...*, p.192, my transl.

⁸⁸ Heidegger, Postscript to 'What is Metaphysics?', in *Pathmarks*; Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.235.

⁸⁹ Lévinas (and before him Melville as we shall see) goes as far as conceiving a responsibility which does *also* entail (my)-being-responsible for something that was never my own doing: "Here I am in this responsibility, thrown back toward something that was never my fault or my own doing, something was never within my power or my freedom, something that never was my presence and never came to me through memory. There is an ethical significance in that responsibility – without the remembered present of any past commitment – in that an-archic responsibility. It is the significance of a past that concerns me, that 'regards me' and is 'my business', beyond all reminiscence, re-tention, re-presentation, reference to a remembered present. The significance, based on responsibility for the other man, of an immemorial past, which has come into the heteronomy of an order. *My nonintentional participation in the history of humanity, in the past of the others* [...]". Lévinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, transl. by M.B. Smith and Barbara Harshav, The Athlone Press, London, 1998, pp.170-171, my emphasis. In this concern, Eskin says: "Through the other's interpellation I become response-able; the other forces me to assume responsibility for 'the other's misery and failure and even the responsibility which the other may have for me' (AQE 185). My response-ability and, consequently, my factual responsibility to and for the other are always greater than the other's responsibility for me: 'being oneself [...] always means to be more

are going too far, at least for the moment. Just now we said: the face means otherwise and at the very beginning of our analysis we proposed to think the significance of the mortal other as an exposure, an expression: the other signifies by itself and, more particularly, it *affirms* itself *as* he defies the onlooker's efforts to *com-prehend* him, as he infinitely exceeds and ultimately exhausts this latter's power, which is always already, thought to the extreme, the power to kill him (the Other), to kill him as another: "had there been anything ordinarily human, doubtless I should have *violently* [...] *This is very strange, thought P*". Indeed, a commandment has been heard, understood: "understood by the *I* in its very obedience, as if obedience were its very accession to hearing the prescription, as if the *I* obeyed before having heard, *as if the intrigue of alterity were woven prior to knowledge*."⁹⁰ It says: "do not kill" and, consequently, "you are responsible, you are responsible for my death still to come, you are responsible whether you want it or not and you are responsible beyond reason, logic, (common) sense."⁹¹ It should be ultimately clear that despite all his efforts to protect himself

response-able [than the other(s)], to be responsible for the responsibility of the other' (pp.185-6). Lévinas calls this insurmountable surplus of responsibility 'substitution'. Ethically, I substitute myself for, that is, I am always more response-able than the other(s), while remaining infinitely separated from the other(s)." Eskin, Michael, *Ethics and Dialogue in the Works of Levinas, Bakhtin, Mandel'shtam and Celan*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, pp.28-29.

⁹⁰ Lévinas, *Entre Nous*, p.166, my emphasis. As Alphonso Lingis comments: "This is the situation of an idea put into me for which I had no capacity to contain it in myself. Alterity comes to me from without, and comes by exceeding my capacities – like the idea of infinity in Descartes, which is put into me, which I could not have accounted for out of myself – and whose very reality as infinity is in this exceeding of any capacity. It is then not to an apprehensive or comprehensive initiative that alterity is given, but to sensibility. One is passive with regard to the approach of alterity, one sustains its impact without being able to assimilate it, one is open to it, exposed in its direction, to its sense, susceptible to being affected, being exalted and being pained. These terms locate the impact with alterity in the sensibility, but in a sensibility that is no longer being conceived as the receptive side of a synthetic and double event, where receptivity is receptive only in already being comprehensively grasped, where the receptive entity continually regains possession of itself by synoptically apprehending what affects it [...] Thus Levinas conceives the register upon which the ethical imperative makes its impact on subjectivity not as a cognitive sensibility, but as sensuality, susceptibility to being affected, vulnerability with regard to pleasure and pain." Lingis, A., "Introduction to *Otherwise than being or beyond essence*", pp.xxiii-xxiv.

⁹¹ The other's look is an accusing one. The other does prosecute me as if we were in a court of law (yet, aren't we here in a legal office? Are we not dealing with legal matters here? Is not Bartleby acting here in the role of a prosecutor? And is not the lawyer, by a trick of fate, the one under indictment?). The other's look is an accusing and a summoning one: he says "you are responsible", meaning first that I have to answer, quite extraordinarily, not so much for something that I have said or done as for something that I have never said or done, for something, as we suggested, that is older than *my* past and thus something for which I wouldn't be able to justify myself by giving an account, a reason for it, by *assuming* (order of power, possession, auto-nomy) my responsibility towards it. As a matter of fact, the responsibility we are talking about does not amount to a self-responsibility, where the I in its "I think" would still be in control (still representing the present – to come –, still making its economy work). Instead, it would about a responsibility going beyond or even coming prior to the self-sufficiency of a law that I simply grant to myself, where the response to be given would not only precede every to-be-said or the to-be-done by the I in its "I think", but it would also precede deliberation. Therefore, the question is: who is ultimately

from being seen, from being exposed, that is, originally to protect his right to be master at home, Bartleby does “regard” the lawyer: namely, he concerns him in the mode of an affection that precedes and excludes mediation and from which, as we shall see, he won’t be able to wrest himself free.⁹²

A few days later, a similar situation arises. Once again, Bartleby expresses his preference:

“Bartleby! quick, I am waiting.” I heard a slow scrape of his chair legs on the uncarpeted floor, and soon he appeared standing at the entrance of his hermitage.

“What is wanted?” said he *mildly*.

“The copies, the copies,” said I *hurriedly*. “We are going to examine them. There” – and I held towards him the fourth quadruplicate.

“I would prefer not to,” he said, and *gently* disappeared behind the screen. For a few moments I was turned into a pillar of salt, standing at the head of my seated column of clerks. Recovering myself, I advanced towards the screen, and *demanding the reason* for such *extraordinary* conduct. “*Why* [in italics in the text] do you refuse?”

“I would prefer not to.”

With any other man I should have flown outright into a dreadful passion, scorned all further words, and thrust him ignominiously from my presence. But there was something about

susceptible to respond here? As the other addresses (and affects) *me*, it would be the ‘self’ or even the I in the accusative(<>gerundive) case rather than the nominative (<>optative) one liable to perform the answer in its very obedience to the pre-*scription* (let’s recall in passing the signifying form: from *praescribere* ‘direct in writing’, from *prae* ‘before’ + *scribere* ‘write’) or even pre-*dition* (from *praedicere* ‘make known beforehand’, from *prae* ‘beforehand’ and *dicere* ‘say’). The opening up to a future which is not *my* future but to which I am, since time immemorial, *destined* (“predestinated from eternity”, as the lawyer, quite sarcastically, puts it: “Bartleby was billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an all-wise Providence, which it was not for a mere mortal like me to fathom [...] At last I see it, I feel it; I penetrate to the predestinated purpose of my life[...] Other may have loftier parts to enact; but my mission in this world, Bartleby, is to furnish you with office-room for such period as you may see fit to remain.” p.42) would be effected only through what Lévinas terms as “declination of the cogito”, entailing the break-up of the economy of being and of being as economy (as the return of consciousness to itself). This is precisely because I (in the accusative/gerundive case, under accusation!) answer to the other immediately, that is, without the mediation of the *logos*, without the I in the nominative, in its “I think” being *present* to this precise moment (to which the subject participate but without though being able to possess it). To say this with Lévinas, the ego is always already “*anachronously delayed* behind its present moment, and unable to recuperate this delay [...] unable to conceive what is ‘touching it’ [and recall here the lawyer’s comment: “This is very strange, thought I”], the ascendancy of the other is exercised upon the same to the point of interrupting it, leaving it speechless” or, as he elsewhere puts it: “consciousness is always late for the rendez-vous with the neighbour”. This irrecoverable interval (truly “a – valuable – loss of time”) within my space and my time ultimately signifies a passage in time (and space), to the time (and space) of the other. In its obedience to the prescription it is as if the self left, for a (nonrecollective) moment, itself (its *oikos*), passing to the other side, so to speak. As if the self left itself for-the-other, as Lévinas would put it. The quotes from Lévinas are respectively from *Otherwise than being*, p.101 and *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. by A. Lingis, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht/Boston/London, 1993, p.119.

⁹² Says Derrida: “I want to be master at home (*ipse, potis, potens*, head of house, we have seen all that)[...] Anyone who encroaches on my ‘at home’, on my ipseity, on my power of hospitality, on my sovereignty as host, I start to regard as an undesirable foreigner, and virtually as an enemy. *This other becomes a hostile subject, and I risk becoming their hostage*”. Derrida, J., *Of Hospitality*, transl. by R. Bowlby, Stanford Univ. Press, Stanford, California, 2000, pp.53-54, my emphasis.

Bartleby that *not only strangely disarmed me, but in a wonderful manner touched and disconcerted me.* (p.26, emphasis added)

Further down, after having tried to reason with Bartleby and suffering much from perplexity, the narrator finally concludes:

It is not seldom the case that when a man is browbeaten in some unprecedented and violently unreasonable way, he begins to stagger in his own plainest faith. He begins, as it were, vaguely to surmise that, wonderful as it may be, *all the justice and all the reason is on the other side.* Accordingly, if any disinterested persons are present, he turns to them for some reinforcement for his own faltering mind.

“Turkey,” said I, “What do you think of this? Am I not right?”

“With submission, sir,” said Turkey, with his blandest tone, “I think you are.”

“Nippers,” said I, “what do *you* think of it?”

“I think I should kick him out of the office.”

[...] “Ginger Nut,”⁹³ said I, willing to enlist the smallest suffrage in my behalf, “what do *you* think of it?” “I think, sir, he is a little *lunny*,” replied Ginger Nut, with a grin [...] With a little trouble we made out to examine the papers without Bartleby, though at every page or two, Turkey deferentially dropped his opinion that this proceeding was quite out of the common; while Nippers, twitching in his chair with a dyspeptic nervousness, ground out between his teeth occasional hissing maledictions against the stubborn oaf behind the screen. And for his (Nipper’s) part, this was the first and last time he would do another man’s business without pay. (p.27, the first emphasis is mine)

The same situation takes place once again, though this time it is in the afternoon:

⁹³ “Ginger Nut, the third on my list, was a lad some twelve years old. His father was a carman, ambitious of seeing his son on the bench instead of a cart, before he died. So he sent him to my office as a student at law, errand boy, and cleaner and sweeper, at the rate of one dollar a week. He had a little desk to himself, but he did not use it much. Upon inspection, the drawer exhibited a great array of the shells of various sort of nuts. Indeed, to this quick-witted youth the whole noble science of the law was contained in a nut-shell” (p.23). Note in passing that the all three nick-names are ‘food-related’: beside *Turkey* and *Ginger Nut*, where the allusion is more explicit, the *Nippers*, as Bagicalupo suggests (see Bagicalupo, “Introduction to Bartleby, the Scrivener”, p.176) indicate “the grasping claw of a crab or lobster”. In this concern, Lévinas declares: “the world as a set of implements forming a system and suspended on the care of an existence anxious for its being interpreted as an onto-logy, attests labor, habitation, the home, the economy; but, in addition, it bears witness to a particular organization of labor in which ‘foods’ take on the signification of fuel in the economic machinery. It is interesting to observe that Heidegger does not take the relation of enjoyment into consideration. The implement has entirely masked the usage and the issuance at the term – satisfaction. Dasein in Heidegger is never hungry. Food can be interpreted as an implement only in a world of exploitation.” Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.134. On this passage, Simon Critchley, one of today’s finest critic of Lévinas’s philosophy, has this to say: “The ethical subject is an embodied being of flesh and blood, a being capable of hunger, who eats and enjoys eating. As Levinas writes, ‘only a being that eats can be for the other’ (OB 74); that is, only such a being can know what it means to give its bread to the other from the out of its own mouth. In what must be the shortest refutation of Heidegger, Levinas complains that *Dasein* is never hungry (TI 134), and the same might be said of all the various heirs to the *res cogitans*”; Critchley, S., “Post-deconstructive subjectivity?”, in *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity*, Verso, London - New York, 1999, pp.63-64.

“Bartleby a second time says, he won’t examine his papers. What do you think of it, Turkey?” It was afternoon, be it remembered [...] “Think of it?” roared Turkey; “I think I’ll just step behind his screen, and black his eyes for him!” So saying, Turkey rose to his feet and threw his arms into a pugilistic position [...] “Sit down, Turkey,” said I, and hear what Nippers has to say. “What do you think of it, Nippers?” “Excuse me, that is for you to decide, sir. I think his conduct quite unusual, and indeed unjust, as regards Turkey and myself [...]”(p.29)

Remember what the narrator said at the beginning: “I am one of those unambitious lawyers who never addresses a jury, or in any way draws down public applause”. Well, this is certainly not the case here. Following the latest events, the lawyer improvises a trial against Bartleby. It should be said, however, that the jury, comprised by Turkey, Nippers and Ginger Nut, is far from being the most neutral or disinterested one around, as the narrator would instead like us to believe. Yet, what does come here as a surprise is the fact that both Turkey and Nippers, independently of whether their eccentricities are on or off, are completely aligned with the lawyer against Bartleby. Take Turkey for instance: in the first scene (we are in the morning, his weird behaviour is off), when asked his opinion, he blandly replies: “With submission, sir...I think you are”, and in second one (it is afternoon): “Think of it?...I think I’ll just step behind his screen, and black his eyes for him”. His tone has indeed changed, but the message hasn’t: Bartleby is the one in the wrong. The one to be blamed. This is significant. I mean, it is significant that Turkey and Nippers’s aggressivity is no longer directed against the lawyer, as used to be the case during their on phases. As a matter of fact, their negativities are now being positively re-directed against the scrivener, who has ultimately become everybody’s scapegoat (and enemy). In sum, while the lawyer is being discounted of any responsibilities, Bartleby is the one to be held responsible. It couldn’t have been any other way. And it couldn’t have been any other way simply because the copyists’s (moral) perspective remains the (moral) perspective of an (eco)system whose *ethos* rests subordinated to the law of reason and to reason as the law, whereas reason is always already a *raison d’être*, an economic one, so to speak: “Turkey [...]; Nippers [...]; Ginger Nut [...] What do you *think* of this? Am I not *right*?”. To say this too quickly for the present, as long as one *thinks*, as long as one rests confined within the logical, the other will be always wrong and the same always right. For the lawyer, the hospitality offered to the stranger is certainly not unconditional: it is not beyond debt. It does, first and foremost, entail a return in terms of labor. This is the law of the house: not to respect it (and Bartleby’s preference is

being taken in this sense), that is, to break with it (to break with one's economy and ultimately with the law of hospitality), makes the guest mathematically in the wrong. It renders him an unwanted guest (and an enemy), so entitling the host to throw him out at any time. To throw him out as a mere trespasser. As to Turkey, Nippers and Ginger Nut, at the end of scene one, for example, we are told that Nippers will never do somebody else's work without pay, without remuneration, without return. His colleagues will certainly agree with him on this, as they agreed, in the first place, to account Bartleby for their additional work. One way or another one has to pay, and this is to be sure the scrivener. In the end, it is a question of proportion, reciprocity, equivalences: in short, one is always to make his accounts come right...

Finally, as we were saying a moment ago, as long as one *thinks*, as long as one is being reasonable, the other will be always wrong and the same always right: the heteronomy of a law which finds me responsible is always to be reversed into the autonomy of one, by which the other is to be recognized, universally recognized, as the accountable one. Yet, let's recall in passing once again, that the indictment perpetrated by the other and the *responsibility* (absolute hospitality: hospitality beyond debt, entailing the host precisely to become the other's *hostage* in responsibility) it summons to do not belong to the order of the logological, namely the order of economy, calculable right and accountability, the order of the I in its identity of same. Rather, they precede and exceed this very order (from whence the "unprecedenced" and "violently unreasonable way" by which the other approaches the ego), ultimately calling it into question.

Reassured in his faith, the lawyer economically concludes:

Poor fellow! Thought I, he means no mischief; it is plain he intends no insolence; his aspect sufficiently evinces that his eccentricities are involuntary. He is useful to me. I can get along with him. If I turn him away, the chances are he will fall in with some less indulgent employer, and then he will be rudely treated, and perhaps driven forth miserably to starve. *Yes. Here I can* [this is indeed the language of the I in its 'I think': it is the language of power. The language of ontology or economy proper. Hence, not the language of – unconditional – hospitality. The responsibility the other calls me for is not, let's repeat it once more, an act – of power – but pure passivity. It precedes all intention. "Yes. Here I can" can in sum be read as the ultimate perversion of the biblical "Yes. Here I am", "Yes. See me here.", as the extreme exposition of the I *hostage* to – its – responsibility for the mortal other] cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval. To befriend Bartleby; to humor him in his strange willfulness, will cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience. (p.28, my emphasis)

Yet,

This mood was not invariable with me. The passiveness of Bartleby sometimes irritated me, I felt strangely goaded on to encounter him in new opposition, to elicit some angry spark from him answerable to my own. But indeed I might as well have essayed to strike fire with my knuckles against a bit of Windsor soap. (p.29)

And, further down:

I felt additional incentives tempting my fate. I burned to be rebelled against again. I remembered that Bartleby never left the office. “Bartleby,” said I, “Ginger Nut is away; just step round to the Post Office, won’t you? (it was but a three minutes walk,) and see if there is any thing for me.”

“I would prefer not to.”

“You *will* not?”

“I *prefer* not.” (p.30, Melville’s emphasis)

“I (would) prefer not to”. To my ear especially, especially to the ear of someone like me, who, though living, for many years now, in an English-speaking country, still remain (and always will remain) an outsider to the language of the host, the master, as Derrida would put it, the formula does sound awkward and, more particularly, it sounds like the unhappy translation of a foreign language (namely, American-English).⁹⁴ It is as if Bartleby weren’t speaking proper English. Yet, *can* he speak it and, more originally, can he understand, comprehend it? Can the guest, the *xenos*, the other speak the language of the host, the master? He certainly can. The formula, despite sounding wrong, is grammatically and syntactically correct. Bartleby’s performative is in English; it is English the language he speaks. Yet again, it is *as if* the scrivener were speaking or better answering (as it is always, as far as Bartleby is concerned, a matter of answering or, non-answering) in *another* language.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ See Deleuze, “Bartleby ou la Formule”, p.93.

⁹⁵ “I remembered that he never spoke but to answer[...]”, remarks at a certain point the narrator; p.33. Though opening up a different field of analysis, Derrida says: “In Melville’s ‘Bartleby the Scrivener,’ the narrator, a lawyer, cites Job (‘with kings and counselors’). Beyond what is tempting and obvious comparison, the figure of Bartleby could be compared to Job – not to him that hoped to join the kings and counselors one day after his death, but to him who dreamed of not being born. Here, instead of the test God makes Job submit to, one could think of that of Abraham. Just as Abraham doesn’t speak a human language, just as he speaks in tongues or in a language that is foreign to every other human language, and in order to do that responds without responding [to his only son Isaac: ‘God himself will provide the lamb for the holocaust, my son.’; see Genesis 22: 12], speaks without saying anything true or false, says nothing determinate that would be equivalent to a statement, a promise or a lie, in the same way Bartleby’s ‘I would prefer not to’ takes on the responsibility of a response without response. It evokes the future without either predicting or promising [...] the tense of this singularly insignificant statement reminds one of a nonlanguage or a secret language. Is it not as if Bartleby were also speaking ‘in tongues’? [...] If Abraham has already consented to *make a gift of death*, and to give to God the death that he is going to put his son to, if he knows that he will do it unless God stops him, can we not say that his disposition is such that he

Quite paradoxically in fact, though speaking the same language, the language of the same, the lawyer is clearly unable fully to understand Bartleby's saying. He *cannot* comprehend it. As we shall see however, the problem we are facing doesn't as much concern, in the first place, the language one speaks, as the very law governing it, if we can put it that way, whereas the law is always already the law of reason, the law of an I in its 'I think'. By saying what he is saying, Bartleby critically breaks with the language of the law(yer). He ultimately breaks with the logological. How? It has been pointed out that the formula is neither an affirmation nor a negation: Bartleby's answer is neither an acceptance nor a refusal; it is neither a 'yes' nor a 'no'.⁹⁶ As Deleuze suggests, the formula but opens a *zone d'indistinction, d'ambiguïté* between the position and the denial, the 'yes' and the 'no', that is, between the only two (dead-locking) answers in line with the code, the system, the law. The only two answers that the lawyer understands. The only two answers correlative with his own logic, that Bartleby so cleverly defies, while calling it into question. As a matter of fact, were he to say 'yes', were he to submit to the will(-power) of his host, he would certainly be defeated. He wouldn't survive. Were he to say 'no', on the other hand, were he to say "No, I won't (do this or that)", were he in sum to rebel against, as Turkey and Nippers during their 'on' phases, he would systematically be re-enclosed within the logic he negates. And again, he would be defeated. The lawyer would there find exactly what he is looking for, namely, "angry spark from him *answerable*" to his own. He would find an active resistance, the opposition of another ego, allowing him legitimately to start a 'war of words', to enter into a *polemos*; always with the risk that it may turn into a physical confrontation, into a war in the proper sense. Bartleby's resistance is indeed a passive and a peaceful one, it has an ethical structure: he contests the law(yer), but, and this is one of the points here, without necessarily going against him and the law and, therefore, without having further to answer for himself, without having to be responsible for what he is saying. In a way, he can be said to break with the law *without* breaking it, and, more particularly or more originally, without *willingly* breaking with it: "Will you or will you not?" "I prefer not to", wherein there is no trace left of the verb 'to will', as

would, precisely, *prefer not to*, without being able to say to the world what is involved?[...]He will not decide *not to*, he has decided *to*, but he would prefer not to. He can say nothing more and will do nothing more if God, if the Other, continues to lead him towards death, to the death that is offered as a gift. And Bartleby's 'I would prefer not to' is also a sacrificial passion that will lead him to death, a death given by the law, by a society that doesn't even know why it acts the way it does." Derrida, *The Gift of Death*; trans. by David Wills, The Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1995, pp.74-75, Derrida's emphasis.

Giorgio Agamben cutely observes.⁹⁷ The formula, and this to me is certainly one of the most interesting thesis proposed by the philosopher, can be taken as the expression of a power preceding and exceeding all will, intentionality: “Bartleby can only without willing (*il peut seulement sans vouloir*), he can but (*il ne peut que*) de *potentia absoluta*...That is the formula of power (*puissance*)”.⁹⁸ As the narrator himself remarks, “his eccentricities are involuntary” (p.28). It is as if Bartleby were subjected to the saying rather than being the subject of it. As though he were spoken by it, instead of speaking it. The subject would in sum find himself in a condition of passivity with respect to its word:

“Every copyist is bound to help examine his copy. Is it not so? Will you not speak? Answer!”

“I would prefer not to,” he replied in a flute-like tone. It seemed to me that while I had been addressing him, he carefully resolved every statement that I made; fully comprehended the meaning; could not gainsay the irresistible conclusion; *but, at the same time, some paramount consideration prevailed with him to reply as he did.*

“You are decided, then, not to comply with my request, a request made according to common usage and common sense? [...]” (pp.26-27, emphasis added)

As we were saying a moment ago, the lawyer does fail to fully understand Bartleby’s saying. His answer takes him by surprise, leaving him wonder. The scrivener is in short not being reasonable and at any rate not being clear: he is neither saying ‘yes’ nor is he saying ‘no’. The formula, to borrow Deleuze’s excellent expression, can ultimately be construed as “a negativisme beyond all negation”. Yet, as we shall show presently, there is another important aspect worth touching on. When I first came across the formula, that which, more than anything else, caught my ‘listening eye’, as Lévinas would say, was in fact its inconclusiveness, its remaining suspended in its orientation, open-*to* beyond closure, so to speak: “I would prefer not to”. Its end, one would agree, is rather abrupt, as if truncated, always leaving one wonder whether there is more to follow. Always leaving one in abeyance, waiting for something that it is not going to come. The phrase is awfully indeterminate. Its border, to paraphrase Derrida, belongs to the night. However fascinating this may sound to some, others though may find the whole argument a little naïve, especially on the grounds that the ‘to’ which ends the formula has an anaphoric character. That is to say, it would refer

⁹⁶ See for example Jaworsky, Philippe, *Melville: Le Désert & L’Empire*, Off-Shore, Presses de l’Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris, 1986, p.19 and Deleuze, “Bartleby ou la Formule”, p.92 et passim.

⁹⁷ Agamben, G., *Bartleby ou la création*, transl. from Italian by Carol Walter, Circé, Saulxures, 1995, p.40 et passim.

back to a word or an expression previously used within the con-text of a discourse, starting from which the saying would be identified, thematized and thus given its conclusiveness: “Bartleby [...] just step round the Post Office, won’t you? [...]”/ I would prefer not to (step round...). So far, so good. Unfortunately, that is not always the case and here is exactly when things start to get a little bit more complicated (and interesting). Take for instance the following segment: “*Why* [in italics in the text] do you refuse?”/ “I would prefer not to”. This time not only the ‘to’ fails referring back to an anaphorized term but Bartleby’s answer is completely out of context: it simply doesn’t return to it. It breaks with the con-text and the finite circuit of its economy. It interrupts the hermeneutical circle, so resulting the more incomprehensible, foreign to representation, possession, property... The formula, truly an enigma (from *ainigma*, a dark saying or riddle), identifies with nothing. It identifies with nothing if not, as we believe, the voice that utters. It is as if the phrase absolutized (from *absolvere* ‘set free, acquit’) itself, referring back exclusively to itself (and thus to the signifier, to the giver of signs, to the sayer) precisely by means of the ‘to’ that ends it and which would ultimately have an absolutely anaphoric character, as Agamben argues: “absolute anaphore, that turns back on itself, without either referring back to a real object or to an anaphorized term (*I would prefer not to prefer not to...*)”.⁹⁸ There would be, thus, an iteration (*iter* ‘again’, from Sanskrit *itara* ‘other’) of the phrase and, more exactly, there would be the pre-reflective, non-intentional iteration of it: whatever the question, whatever the situation, one can be sure that a ‘same’ answer will be given in return. Bartleby will have always already answered the way he always already does, he will have always already repeated what he always already repeats: “I would prefer not to”, that is, nothing in particular (neither ‘yes’ nor ‘no’ but also and, more originally, neither ‘this’ nor ‘that’). As though, and I put this in simple terms, it were merely a matter of exhausting himself in saying the saying without saying, as we said just now, anything in particular, in exposing himself to the addressee without conveying any particular message or information (“I am not particular”, he will later assert, p.46), for if the formula were to refer to something, if it were, by referring to something other than itself, to enter into the context of a discourse, it would come to lose, *ipso facto*, its very signifyingness, which would ultimately reside, and I am now going back in circle, in the very fact or event that

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.41, my transl.

⁹⁹ Agamben, “Bartleby ou la formule”, p.43.

words are always said by someone *to* another. Commenting on Lévinas's philosophy of language, if we can put it that way, Adriaan Peperzak casts further light on this:

Levinas indicates a more radical oblivion when he points at a very simple fact, which surprisingly never has been taken into serious account by philosophy: *the fact that a discourse or epos (or Sage) always is said by someone to one or more others (or to oneself as listener or reader) [...]* In talking or writing I always address my words – and myself! – to someone: I speak to another person who I suppose hears me [...]. Speaking or writing, thus, *includes necessarily a relation between someone and some Other* [the emphasis is mine here]. This relation is the fact or event forgotten by Western philosophy [...]. The Western fascination with theory and thematization has neglected or repressed the truth of the Other's emergence from the context of noematic beings. The theoretical intention is essentially inapt to take this most trivial experience of everyday life seriously; it cannot do justice to the fact that words are *addressed to someone*. The problem with philosophy is that, as soon as we want to concentrate on this experience, we make it into a theme and in so doing betray its truth: by becoming a theme, an address hides or loses the very moment of Saying and, therefore, that by which its "signification" is communicative or signifying. *By reducing it to a theme we cut the Saying off from its orientation toward an actual or possible hearer and thus kill it as Saying. The "to" has changed into the "in front of" or "before" of a noema that is present before consciousness* [my emphasis here].¹⁰⁰

The movement of the 'addressee', the fact that my words and myself are addressed *to* someone, can in this sense be said to constitute the very essence of language: to speak (without saying anything in particular, without this saying becoming an element of a context but undoing in fact its threads and thus overcoming comprehension) is, first and foremost, to appeal to the listener to pay attention to the speaker, whose presence would be now revealed in all its irreducibility (in all its "defenseless nudity", as Lévinas puts it) and it is, more particularly, to establish a contact and a proximity "which are neither forms of knowledge nor possible themes of a theory"¹⁰¹: "I am here, I am here speaking *to* you, yet you shouldn't bother yourself with trying to understand what I am saying, to be honest with you, these words of mine don't mean anything in particular, don't distract yourself then, I am here, I am here speaking *to* you to say nothing in particular, so interrupting the coherence of your narrative, breaking with the threads of the context, breaking with its economy, breaking into your self-contained world, approaching you by surprise, leaving you wonder, expropriating you of the very power of naming, the very power of claiming the identical, of

¹⁰⁰ Peperzak, *Beyond*, pp.61-63. See also following pages.

¹⁰¹ "The relation between speaker and listener is not a theoretical orthetic intention; it precedes the scission of theory and practice but includes an ethical moment"; Peperzak, p.67.

exerting your mastery over me, of comprehending me, ultimately provoking you into exposition, into a response that does not rest upon a choice of yours, that comes before deliberation, before your capacity to will, provoking you into a relation irreducible to the subject-object relation, irreducible to understanding, yet a relationship (relationship instituted in and through language) *where the one weighs or concerns or is meaningful to the other, where they are bound by a plot which knowing can neither exhaust nor unravel.*¹⁰²

¹⁰² The material in italics is a quotation from Lévinas's "Language and Proximity", in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p.116 (it appears as a footnote). As to Bartleby's response without response, Derrida ultimately interprets it as form of irony, a superb one: "Speaking in order not to say anything or to say something other than what one thinks, speaking in such a way as to intrigue, disconcert, question, or have someone or something else speak (the law, the lawyer), means speaking ironically. Irony, in particular Socratic irony, consists in not saying anything, declaring that one doesn't have any knowledge of something, but doing that in order to interrogate, to have someone or something (the lawyer, the law) speak or think. Eirōneia dissimulates, it is the act of questioning [...]"; *The Gift of Death*, p.76.

Chapter 3

To the Other:

And the Lord said unto Cain, 'Where is Abel thy brother?' And he said, 'I Know not. Am I my brother's keeper?'

Genesis, 4: 1

Messianism does not mean, to be sure, that someone will come who will put a stop to history. It is my power to support the suffering of the others. It is the moment when I recognise this power and my universal responsibility.

Lévinas

The hostage is the one who is found responsible for what he has not done.

Lévinas

(f) The hostage:

Now, one Sunday morning I happened to go to Trinity Church, to hear a celebrated preacher, and finding myself rather early on the ground, I thought I would walk round to my chambers for a while. Luckily I had my key with me; but upon applying it to the lock, I found it resisted by something inserted from the inside. Quite surprised, I called out; when to my consternation a key was turned from within; and thrusting his lean visage at me, and holding the door ajar, the apparition of Bartleby appeared, in his shirt sleeves, and otherwise in a strangely tattered dishabille, saying quietly he was sorry, but he was deeply engaged just then, and - preferred not admitting me at present. In a brief word or two, he moreover added, that perhaps I had better walk round the block two or three times, and by that time he would probably have concluded his affairs.

Now, the utterly unsurmised appearance of Bartleby, tenanted my law-chambers of a Sunday morning, with his cadaverously gentlemanly *nonchalance*, yet withal firm and self-possessed, had such a strange effect upon me, that incontinently I slunk away from my own door, and did as desired. But not without sundry twinges of impotent rebellion against the mild effrontery of this unaccountable scrivener. Indeed, it was his wonderful mildness chiefly, which not only disarmed me, but unmanned me, as it were. For I consider that one, for the time, is a sort of unmanned when he tranquilly permits his hired clerk to dictate to him, and order him away from his own premises. (pp.31-32, Melville's emphasis)

Sometimes, not to say most of the time, I can't help empathizing with the lawyer. Yes, I won't hide it (and then, why hide it? As if it were something of a sin to admit that I, yes), I do have sympathy for him (as a matter of fact, I firmly believe that it wasn't, in the end, all his fault...and yet, does not Lévinas says that one is responsible even for the faults the Other has for me, does he not talk of a responsibility without reciprocity?¹). At any rate, who, in all honesty, wouldn't? I mean, this guy Bartleby, of whom we know absolutely nothing (again, who in mercy's name is he? Where does he come from? What is he doing here? What does he want?...) and who, just like a broken record, goes on preferring not to in reply to his host's reasonable demands, has certainly gone, in my (selfish) opinion, a step too far, now behaving as if he were the master of the house. The Other, the *xenos*, the guest is the one holding the keys, the one now standing on this very side of the threshold. The one with the power to give or not to give hospitality: *preferred not admitting me at present* [...] What an insolence! And, what a strange (and dangerous!) economy this one, where the guest, as Derrida would say, has suddenly become the host's host, has suddenly become the master of the host², dictating and ordering *him away from his own premises*.³ In effect, what does come here as a surprise is the lawyer's very reaction or, I should say, quasi-lack of reaction against the scrivener's *mild effrontery*, as he puts it. As a matter of fact, despite some *sundry twinges of impotent rebellion*, he *tranquilly* complies with his guest's demand: *and did as desired*. He passively responds to him, without even inquiring as to the reasons of such an extraordinary request;

¹ "It [responsibility] is originally without reciprocity, which would risk compromising its gratuitousness or grace or unconditional charity." Lévinas, *Entre Nous*, pp.228-229. As he also maintains in *Otherwise than Being*, "To be oneself, the state of being a hostage, is always to have one degree of responsibility more, the responsibility for the responsibility of the other.;" p.117. In this concern, Eskin says: "Through the other's interpellation I become response-able; the other forces me to assume responsibility for 'the other's misery and failure and even the responsibility which the other may have for me' (AQE 185). My response-ability and, consequently, my factual responsibility to and for the other are always greater than the other's responsibility for me: 'being oneself [...] always means to be more response-able [than the other(s)], to be responsible for the responsibility of the other' (185-6). Lévinas calls this insurmountable surplus of responsibility 'substitution'. Ethically, I substitute myself for, that is, I am always more response-able than the other(s), while remaining infinitely separated from the other(s)." Eskin, Michael, *Ethics and Dialogue in the Works of Levinas, Bakhtin, Mandel'shtam and Celan*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, pp.28-29.

² Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, p.125.

³ "If A commands B, B is no longer autonomous, no longer has subjectivity; but when, in thinking, you do not remain on the level of form, when you think in terms of content, a situation called heteronomy has a completely different signification [...] and the word "to order" is very good in French: when you become a priest, you are ordained, you take orders; but in reality, you receive powers", says Lévinas. Lévinas, *Entre Nous*, p.111. Now, as we shall show presently, it could be said that the lawyer is being empowered with the power of giving hospitality, that is, of offering all of his home and himself to the Other. It should then be

as if his responding came prior to all acts of thought, to all initiatives of his own. Let's shed some light on this. In order to do so, I would like to recall the following passage, which well pinpoints the narrator's feelings in the very aftermath of the event: *Indeed, it was his wonderful mildness chiefly, which not only disarmed me, but unmanned me, as it were.* As always the case with Melville, the lexical choice is more than accurate, so greatly facilitating my work. Take for instance the use of the past participle 'unmanned'. To the voice 'unman (unmanned, unmanning)', the New Oxford Dictionary reads: "deprive of qualities traditionally associated with men, such as self-control, courage...". This is very interesting. Now, the very fact or event of being unmanned, of finding ourselves deprived of all powers over the alterity that faces us (including the power *par excellence*, the very power to kill the Other⁴), of no longer being able to be able, as if we were undergoing a sort of paralysis⁵, can perhaps be construed as a failure in what Lévinas calls the 'virility of being', that is, the virility of a being capable of maintaining itself throughout all that happens to it, of tranquilly persisting in being itself and for itself with no regard for the Other upon whom it exerts its mastery, its dominion, the virility of a being eternally returning to itself and to itself solely as to a home. It can be understood as an interruption or disruption in the economy of being and being as economy and, consequently, as the opening up to a new dimension of the self: the dimension of the feminine; with which, to say this too briefly for the moment, Lévinas associates the semantemes of love (kindness, gentleness, hospitality...), suffering (passivity, vulnerability...) and death.⁶ The feminine (which the philosopher uses mainly as a trope⁷)

clear by now, that the power we are talking about here, does not rest on the *conatus*, does not refer to freedom.

⁴ "Murder exercises a power over what escapes power. It is still a power, for the face expresses itself in the sensible, but already impotency, because the face rends the sensible. The alterity that is expressed in the face provides the unique 'matter' possible for total negation. I can wish to kill only an existent absolutely independent, which exceeds my powers infinitely [...] The Other is the sole being that I can wish to kill.", says Lévinas; *Totality and Infinity*, p.198. Let's bear in mind that the line between hospitality and hostility is a very thin one.

⁵ "[The Other] does not oppose them [my powers] but paralyses the very power of power [...] The infinite paralyses power by its infinite resistance to murder, which firm and insurmountable, gleams in the face of the Other, in the total nudity of his defenceless eyes, in the nudity of the absolute openness of the Transcendent. There is here a relation not with a very great resistance, but with something absolutely *other*: the resistance of what has no resistance – the ethical resistance." Lévinas, *ibid.*, pp.198-199.

⁶ I am freely borrowing here from Tina Chanter's well-focussed and beautifully written *Time, Death and the Feminine: Levinas with Heidegger*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2000, pp.37-43. In this concern, Lévinas says: "My mastery, my virility, my heroism as a subject can be neither virility nor heroism in relation to death. There is in the suffering at the heart of which we have grasped this nearness of death [...] this reversal of the subject's activity into passivity [...] Death becomes the limit of the subject's virility [...] It is not just that there exist ventures impossible for the subject, that its powers are in some way finite; death does not announce a reality against which nothing can be done, against which our power is

would represent exactly what is necessary in order to be capable of an ethical gesture towards the Other, to be capable of performing the ethical (in this case, as we had said, we shall be talking of an act of hospitality). It would represent what is needed in order to overcome ontology or economy, in order to access time in its diachrony, in its difference, in its infinity (a time, let's repeat it once more, which is not the representational/historical time of the I). The conversion from a being that is for itself to a being that is for the other, that is, hostage to (its) (immemorial) response-ability for him/her [response-ability entailing (my) sacrifice for his/her life], the passage from ontology to ethics, from an utilitarian way of being to a completely disinterested one where the whole of myself is to be *handed* over to the stranger, would thus be accomplished only thanks to the feminine, thanks to a stoppage or even loss of the subject's 'masculine essence' (freedom as self-possession, mastery, dominance, violence...), thanks, in a word, to its 'unmanning'.

Furthermore, I was full of uneasiness as to what Bartleby could possibly be doing in my office in his shirt sleeves, and in an otherwise dismantled condition of a Sunday morning. Was any thing amiss going on? Nay, that was out of question. It was not to be thought of for a moment that Bartleby was an immoral person. But what could he be doing there? – copying? Nay, again, whatever might be his eccentricities, Bartleby was an eminently decorous person. He would be the last man to sit down to his desk in any state approaching to nudity. Besides, it was Sunday, and there was something

insufficient – realities exceeding our strength already arise in the world of light. What is important about the approach of death is that at a certain moment we are no longer *able to be able* (*nous ne 'pouvons plus pouvoir'*). It is exactly thus that the subject loses its very mastery as a subject." Lévinas, *Time and the Other*, in *The Levinas Reader*, pp.41-42.

⁷ However, as Tina Chanter argues, "although it is clear...that Levinas does not intend his use of the term 'feminine' to designate in any straightforward way empirical women, and thus can hardly be taken to be subordinating one sex to another in any simple way, it remains the case that Levinas sometimes drops his guard, and resorts to language that invokes the actual empirical women that at other places in his texts he assures us he does not have in mind." Chanter, T., *Time, Death and the Feminine*, p.252. As to the 'feminine' in Lévinas see also Luce Irigaray's thought-provoking paper "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas: On the Divinity of Love" and Catherine Chalié, "Ethics and the Feminine", in *Re-reading Levinas*, edited by R. Bernasconi and S. Critchley, Indiana Univ. Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1991, respectively pp.109-118 and 119-129. In relation to this, it would be worth pointing out that in *Otherwise than Being*, Lévinas's *magnum opus*, the trope of maternity is used to exemplify the (un)condition of one's being hostage to (its) responsibility for the (responsibility of the) other, or substitution. "Levinas describes the maternal body as a 'pre-original not resting on oneself' [OB, p.75], as a body of goodness that is devoted to the Other before being devoted to itself [...] As a subjectivity without substitute, the maternal body has to answer for the Other and is *irreplaceable in this task*. The maternal body suffers for the Other, it is 'the body as passivity and renunciation, a pure undergoing.' [OB, p.79]. It is the very contrary of the *conatus*. It is 'signification for the Other and not for itself' [OB, 80]. In spite of me, for the other [...] The maternal body is ruled by the Good beyond being; it has not chosen the Good but the Good has elected it. It is a passive body, *a body that is hostage since it is evicted from its own being*", says Chalié. Chalié, C., "Ethics and the Feminine", pp.126-127, my emphasis. The question of the feminine will be retaken and discussed at length later on, mainly in chapter six.

about Bartleby that forbade the supposition that he would by any secular occupation violate the properties of the day. (p.32)

This is interesting: it would seem in fact that what is at issue here doesn't as much regard the presence of Bartleby within the office, as his presence there *in a dismantled condition of a Sunday morning* (let's remember, in passing, that in New England, up to recent times, the abstention from work on Sundays was observed). The question is then not: has the scrivener broken the law by occupying the law-chambers without authorization, but rather and more particularly, has he transgressed the laws (in the plural, as Derrida wants it) of the chambers, the laws of hospitality by being there (possibly working) in a state approaching to nudity of a Sunday? As we were saying earlier on, the right of residence granted to the foreigner is not unconditional: it is not beyond debt and economy. And it is not, as is the case here, above a certain morality or ethos. First, the hospitality offered entails a return in terms of labor (and, not for nothing, we speak today of economic immigrants): one is required to work for the establishment/maintenance of the house (in the broad sense, meaning the city, the county, the State) in which he/she is welcomed. It goes that one should also be able to support himself/herself: that is, to be responsible for his/her own survival, as he/she cannot just be placed in the care of the host(s) (it would be asking for too much!). Finally, one ought to respect the norms, the policies, the traditions of the hosting place. At the bottom of this kind of hospitality always already lies then the implicit subscription of a contract or agreement between the host and the guest, involving a reciprocity of duties and rights. This hospitality 'by right' (the 'reasons' of which are always however, as we have said just now, in the first place economical, that is, egoistical), should also be distinguished from what Derrida, following Kant, terms as 'absolute' or 'unlimited' hospitality, whose law (in the singular this time, in its 'universal singularity') is above the laws:

there would be an antinomy, an insoluble antinomy, a non-dialectizable antinomy between, on the one hand, *The* law of unlimited hospitality (to give the new arrival all of one's home and oneself, to give him or her one's own, our own without asking a name, or compensation, or the fulfilment of even the smallest condition), and on the other hand, the laws (in the plural), those rights and duties that are always conditioned and conditional, as they are defined by the Greco-Roman tradition and

even the Judeo-Christian one, by all of law and all philosophy of law up to Kant and Hegel in particular, across the family, civil society and the State.⁸

Being 'above the laws', the law of unconditional hospitality should then be regarded as a 'lawless law': it is above and *outside* the law (of the house, outside economy). It is therefore illegal. Now, if we are to follow Derrida here, one may legitimately wonder whether the lawyer, having offered, from the very start, (economic) hospitality to a *without paper* as Bartleby is, has not already breached the law, has not already violated the very first law of the laws of conditional hospitality, which demands the foreigner to identify himself/herself, to be identifiable by his/her family name, by place and date of birth, by nationality...so that he/she can be posited as a legal subject, as a subject responsible before his/her host and before the law. As 'a subject in law', as Derrida puts it. Precisely by having accorded economic hospitality to a non-identified and non-identifiable subject, it may be said that not only has the narrator committed a 'criminal act' (today, it may also be treated as an 'act of terrorism'⁹), but he has also become legally accountable for all illegalities that his clandestine guest might have carried and/or may be carrying out. Ultimately, the very possibility of being prosecuted for Bartleby's ('moral') wrong-doings, always with the risk, moreover, of a scandal that would inevitably come to damage his reputation, seems here to be the lawyer's main preoccupation.¹⁰

⁸ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, p.77, Derrida's emphasis. In passing, it should be said that not only is Derrida indebted here to Kant but also and especially, as I believe, to Lévinas's conception of (absolute) hospitality. As Simon Critchley affirms: "Derrida rightly argues that Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* can be read as 'an immense treatise on hospitality', where ethics is defined as a welcome to the other, as an unconditional hospitality." Critchley, S., *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity*, Verso, London & New York, 1999, p.274. Critchley refers here to Derrida's *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, Stanford Univ. Press, Stanford, California, 1999; where the French philosopher deals at length with one of Levinas's key-words, that is, that of "welcome", raising moreover the question of the political.

⁹ In his *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (transl. by Mark Dooley and M. Hughes, Thinking in Action, Routledge, London and New York, 2001), Derrida, with an eye to the situation of asylum seekers and refugees in France, states that: "Under examination in the parliamentary assemblies, in the National Assembly and in the Senate, is a proposal to treat as acts of terrorism, or as 'participation in a criminal conspiracy', all hospitality accorded to 'foreigners' whose 'papers are not in order', or those simply 'without papers'. This project, in effect, makes even more draconian article 21 of the famous edict of 2 November 1945, which had already cited as a 'criminal act' all help given to foreigners whose papers were not in order. Hence, what was a criminal act is now in danger of becoming an 'act of terrorism'. Moreover, it appears that this plan is in direct contravention of the Schengen accords (ratified by France) – which permit a conviction of someone for giving help to a foreigner 'without papers' only if it can be proved that this person derived financial profit from such assistance."; p.16.

¹⁰ Later on, just after having moved out of his premises in the desperate attempt to get rid of Bartleby once and for all, the lawyer receives, to his surprise, the visit of the new occupier of it. "Being the last person known to have any thing to do" with the strange scrivener (who still prefers not – to do anything, least of all to relocate elsewhere...), he is asked to take full responsibility for him: "In vain I persisted that Bartleby

Nevertheless, my mind was not pacified, and full of restless curiosity, at last I returned to the door. Without hindrance I inserted my key, opened it, and entered. Bartleby was not to be seen. I looked around anxiously, peeped behind his screen, but it was very plain that he was gone.

Upon more closely examining the place, I surmised that for an indefinite period Bartleby must have ate, dressed, and slept in my office, and that too without plate, mirror or bed [...] under his desk, I found a blanket; under the empty grate, a blacking box and brush; on a chair, a tin basin, with soap and a ragged towel; in a newspaper a few crumbs of ginger-nuts and a morsel of cheese. Yes, thought I, it is evident enough that Bartleby has been making his home here, keeping bachelor's hall all by himself. Immediately then the thought came sweeping across me, What miserable friendlessness and loneliness are here revealed! His poverty is great; but his solitude, how horrible! [...] For the first time in my life a feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy seized me. Before, I had never experienced aught but a not-unpleasing sadness. *The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam.* I remembered the bright silks and sparkling faces I had seen that day, in gala trim, swan-like sailing down the Mississippi of Broadway; and I contrasted them with the pallid copyist, and thought to myself, Ah happiness courts the light, so we deem the world is gay; but misery hides aloof, so we deem that misery there is none. (pp.32-33, my emphasis)

Yet, despite some good talking, despite 'talking the good', the narrator is quick to distance himself from what he describes as "sad fancyings – chimeras, doubtless, of a sick and silly brain". He then continues:

Presentiments of strange discoveries hovered round me. The scrivener's pale form appeared to me laid out, among uncaring strangers, in its shivering winding sheet [...] Revolving all these things, and coupling them with the recently discovered fact that he made my office his constant abiding place and home, and not forgetful of his morbid moodiness; revolving all these things, a prudential feeling began to steal over me. My first emotions had been those of pure melancholy and sincerest pity; but just in proportion as the forlornness of Bartleby grew and grew to my imagination, did that same melancholy merge into fear, that pity into repulsion. So true it is, and so terrible too, that up to a certain point the thought or sight of misery enlists our best affections; but, in certain special cases, beyond that point it does not. They err who would assert that invariably this is owing to the inherent selfishness of the human heart. It rather proceeds from a certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill. To a sensitive being, pity is not seldom pain. And when at last it is perceived that such pity cannot lead to effectual succor,

was nothing to me – no more than to any one else. In vain...Fearful then of being exposed in the papers (as one person present obscurely threatened) I considered the matter, and at length said, that if the lawyer would give me a confidential interview with the scrivener, in his (the lawyer's) own room, I would that afternoon strive my best to rid them of the nuisance they complained of."; pp.45-46.

common sense bids the soul to be rid of it. What I saw that morning persuaded me that the scrivener was the victim of innate and incurable disorder. (pp.33-34)

Let's linger over the very first image, the ghostly and indeed creepy one. It is *as if* the narrator were witnessing the burial of Bartleby, the burial of the other, the *xenos*, the foreigner. It is *as if* he were witnessing the interring of his wasted body in some *foreign place*, in some land of nobody, in some lawless land, amongst *uncaring strangers*, most likely gravediggers. And, it is *as if* he were witnessing all this from a distance... (the distance, if we can say so, between the still-*here* of life and the no-longer-*there* of death). The image, opening a time fissure and functioning just like a prolepsis (to be more exact, the prolepsis of an analepsis, as the time of the narrative is the past tense, as what will happen will have already happened... the reader is thus warned...) can be said to bespeak the secret and nomadic death of the other¹¹, as well as informing the inescapable responsibility ("the responsibility of the survivor", as Lévinas calls it) one will have to bear for this very death. The specter of Bartleby arrives in fact (always, to be sure, with the promise of coming back...) from that which has not yet arrived, from that which has not yet *taken place*. It appears *to* the lawyer from the deferred time of death and 'speaks' to him, commanding: "Thou shall not kill".¹² But also, it *reappears* to him in the here and now of his discourse, this time "truly returning, truly ghostly".¹³

¹¹ Bartleby, as we know, will die in the so-called 'Tombs', New York's old prisons and Court of Justice: "The Egyptian character of the masonry weighed upon me with its gloom...Strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side, his head touching the cold stones, I saw the wasted Bartleby. But nothing stirred."; p.50. To move a little quickly here, it might be noted that there is no mention of a funeral: with the death of the scrivener, the narrative ends and we are immediately brought back to the *here and now* of the narrator's discourse. Bartleby's *entomb(s)ment* is not recounted: it only *takes place* outside the *space* of the story or, if one likes, it takes place to a nominal plane uniquely. It remains, however, that even in death or, better, especially in death the other *rests* without "a fixed address" (the pyramid-like character of the "Tombs" also makes one think of a vault or crypt where the body of the dead secretly lies): "what this death is, is the becoming-foreign of the foreigner, the absolute of his becoming-foreign...the dead one remains all the more foreign in a foreign land in that there is no *manifest* grave, no visible and phenomenal tomb, only a secret burial..."; says Derrida referring to the secret death of Oedipus and to the impossible mourning of Antigone. Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, p.113; it goes without saying that this little book by Derrida (comprising two lectures which derive from a series of seminars held by the philosopher in Paris, January 1996) has proved itself to be an invaluable source of inspiration.

¹² Talking of specters, I should recall here that the (concrete) presence of the mortal other is always, to a *certain* extent, ghost-like: the other, we argued at the beginning of our paper, resists comprehension, possession, *sa-voir*; remaining, in *this* sense, invisible. The appearing of the other is the appearing of an apparition (or, as Lévinas puts it in order to avoid a too phenomenological or ontological language, the revealing of a re-velation...the other reveals itself and it does so in expression...) and, just like real phantoms, it always sees us first. It always *regards* us (before we know it does), thus starting to haunt (as an obsession or a fear or even a disturbing memory) our conscience. In this concern, I should also point out the narrator's recent habit of referring to Bartleby as to a ghost, like in the passage mentioned above: "and thrusting his lean visage at me, and holding the door ajar, *the apparition of Bartleby appeared* [...]", or like

In other words, to the extent that the mortal other has chosen me to be responsible for his life, to the extent that he has *placed* himself under my roof, within my house, *as if* it were a *womb*, to the extent that he has “entrusted to me”, as Lévinas puts it, I have to answer for him: I am *hostage* to (my) responsibility and nobody can *replace* me in this task. Failing to offer the guest an unconditional welcome, his death will necessarily find me culpable. Ghosts, be they coming from the past or the future, always “haunt places that exist without them; they return to where they have been excluded from [...]”.¹⁴

At any rate, if there is anything here one can be (concretely) sure of, this is the fact that a ghost (and I mean, more or less correctly, a dead man) Bartleby will soon be, unless he decides to give up his hypo-caloric diet:

I observed that he never went for dinner; indeed that he never went any where... He was a perpetual sentry in the corner. At about eleven o'clock though, in the morning, I noticed that Ginger Nut would advance toward the opening in Bartleby's screen... The boy would then leave the office jingling a few pence, and reappear with a handful of ginger-nuts which he delivered in the hermitage, receiving two of the cakes for his trouble.

He lives, then, on ginger-nuts, thought I; never eats a dinner, properly speaking; he must be a vegetarian then; but no; he never eats even vegetables, he eats nothing but ginger-nuts [...] (p.28¹⁵)

the following one, just a few lines up: “‘Bartleby!’ No answer. ‘Bartleby,’ in a louder tone. No answer. ‘Bartleby,’ I roared. Like a very ghost, agreeably to the laws of magical invocation, at the third summons, he appeared at the entrance of his hermitage.” (p.30); or the next one: “What shall I do? What ought I to do? What does conscience say I *should* do with this man, or rather ghost?” (p.43), where the term ghost clearly connotes obsessiveness, fixedness.

¹³ The expression is Derrida's; *The Work of Mourning*, edit. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, The Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2001, p.64. Note that the French word ‘revenant’, Derrida's favourite term for ghost or specter, literally indicates that which comes back.

¹⁴ The quotation is from Anne Dufourmantelle's “Invitation”, in Derrida's *Of Hospitality*, p. 152.

¹⁵ Far from taking Bartleby's irresponsible eating-behaviour seriously, the narrator sarcastically goes on: “My mind then ran on in reveries concerning the probable side effects upon the human constitution of living entirely on ginger-nuts. Ginger-nuts are so called because they contain ginger... Now what was ginger? A hot, spicy thing. Was Bartleby hot and spicy? Not at all. Ginger, then had no effect upon Bartleby. Probably he preferred it should have none.”; p.28. In relation to the theme of food, to its consumption or better non-consumption as is the case here, at the end of the story, we are also introduced to Mr. Cutlets, aka ‘the grub-man’ (the Tombs's ‘chef’): “As I entered the corridor again, a broad meat-like man, in an apron, accosted me, and jerking his thumb over his shoulder said – ‘Is that your friend [referring to Bartleby]?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Does he want to starve? If he does, let him live on the prison fare, that's all.’ ‘Who are you?’ asked I, not knowing what to make of such an unofficially speaking person in such a place. ‘I am the grub-man. Such gentlemen as have friends here, hire me to provide them with something good to eat.’ ‘Is it so?’ said I, turning to the turnkey [according to Paola Cabibbo the figure of Turkey anticipates that of the ‘turnkey’, as the jailer of the narrator's prison-like office along with Nippers – a name that also contains the meaning of pincers, pliers, as instruments of the ‘turnkey’; see Cabibbo, P., “Bartleby: il sistema semantico della doppia negazione”, *Melvilliana*, p.56]. He said it was. ‘Well then,’ said I, slipping some silver into the grub-man's hands (for so they called him). ‘I want you to give particular attention to my

And,

I remembered that he never spoke but to answer; that though at intervals he had considerable time to himself, yet I had never seen him reading – no, not even a newspaper; that for long periods he would stand looking out, at his pale window behind the screen, upon the dead brick wall; I was quite sure he never visited any refectory or eating house; while his pale face clearly indicated that he never drank beer like Turkey, or tea or coffee even, like other men; that he never went any where in particular that I could learn; never went out for a walk, unless indeed that was the case at present; that he had declined telling who he was, or whence he came, or whether he had any relatives in the world; that though so thin and pale, he never complained of ill health. (pp.33-34)

Even an idiot would have realized by now that the scrivener, though never complaining of poor health, was dying. Indeed, the lawyer is not an idiot (at least not in the common sense of the word¹⁶), but he is not the Good Samaritan either. As he persuasively puts it a few lines down, in a passage that we have already quoted: “So true it is, and so terrible too, that up to a certain point the thought or sight of misery enlists our best affections; but, in certain special cases, beyond that point it does not. They err who would assert that invariably this is owing to the inherent selfishness of the human heart. It rather proceeds from a certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill.” Of course not: there is always hope, there is always time. As Lévinas continually maintains, I am never done with the other.¹⁷ The lawyer continues his self-defense affirming that: “To a sensitive being, pity is not seldom pain. And when at last it is perceived that such pity cannot lead to effectual succor, common sense bids the soul to be rid of it.” If there is anything true in what he says, this is it: *pity is not without pain*. More particularly here, we say that (my) responsibility for the other is precisely vulnerability, passivity, patience, pain or suffering. Let’s be frank: there is nothing to enjoy, there is nothing enjoyable in this *experience*, for otherwise, as enjoyer, to paraphrase Peperzak on Lévinas, I would myself still be the very focus of it and (my) hospitality for the guest would fail in being absolute or unconditional, remaining compromised, as it ultimately

friend there; let him have the best dinner you can get. And you must be as polite to him as possible...”; see pp.48-50.

¹⁶ See chap. I, p.7 of this work.

¹⁷ “[Responsibility] does not cease with the neighbour’s utmost extremity – despite the merciless and realistic expression of the doctor, ‘condemning a patient – even if the responsibility comes to nothing more at that time – as we powerlessly face the death of the other – than saying ‘Here I am,’ or – in the shame of surviving – than pondering the memory of one’s wrongdoings.” Lévinas, *Entre Nous*, p.169.

would, within the viciously circular logic of economy or *egonomy*.¹⁸ That to which the stranger summons me must go completely without reciprocity or at least I shouldn't be waiting for any, were I to die for him/her. There ought not be any remuneration or compensation for myself. There ought not be any return, not even, for that matter, the smallest of returns, that is to say, a simple word of gratitude.¹⁹ And it must also be unlimited, as if I had suddenly found myself indebted to him/her of everything I own (the food I eat, the water I drink, the clothes I wear, the house I live in, my time, my life...), without me recalling of ever having entered into any contract or agreement of any sort.²⁰ The mortal other asks me in sum to go against all the rules, to break all the laws, including the *ante-litteram* law, namely, the very law of survival, that one that keeps flashing in full-size characters in the lawyer's mind, warning him to keep his distance from Bartleby if he wants to stay alive: "Yes, why should you bother for him...he has no chance...there is nothing you can possibly do to save him...you have done your bit...enough is enough...and in fairness you have been even too patient with him...I mean...someone else would not have hesitated in getting rid of him at a sooner stage...without thinking twice about it...keep your distance then...now that you still can...don't get involved more than you already are...think about yourself...this is a weight too heavy for anybody to support...and it is not worth the risk...and the risk...believe me...is far greater than the catch this time...far greater...and he is going to die anyway...all your efforts all your sufferings will be useless and in the end pretty much absurd...think about it...you risk losing everything and for what?...for nothing...for nothing..."²¹ But

¹⁸ "My suffering must even be – at least partially – meaningless. For were I able to grasp its meaning, I would be able to integrate it into my consciousness in the form of some piece of knowledge", says Peperzak; *To the Other*, Purdue Univ. Press, West Lafayette, Indiana, 1993, p.221. In a footnote to the "Substitution" chapter in *Otherwise than Being* (this chapter being the very germ of the book), Lévinas states: "The vortex – suffering of the other, my pity for his suffering, his pain over my pity, my pain over his pain, etc. – stops at me. The I is what involves one movement more in this iteration. My suffering is the cynosure of all the sufferings – and of all the faults, even of the fault of my persecutors, which amounts to suffering the ultimate persecution, suffering absolutely." p.196, 21n.

¹⁹ The gift of unconditional hospitality demands that the Other be totally ungrateful. The theme of gratitude/ungratitude will be retaken and further developed in the next two chapters.

²⁰ The debt towards the other, as Lévinas argues, goes back to a past that never was my present. It goes back to an immemorial past.

²¹ Ultimately, everything ought to be, in Anne Dufourmantelle's words, "justifiable at least by an ethical system. As though, for a society doomed to the quantification of what is useful and efficient, the supreme danger lay in the useless, the purposeless, the absolutely gratuitous [...]"; "Invitation", p.64. Lévinas continues the above-mentioned footnote affirming: "This element of a 'pure born,' for nothing, in suffering, is the passivity of suffering which prevents its reverting into suffered assumed, in which the for-the-other of sensibility, that is, its very sense, would be annulled. This moment of the 'for nothing' in suffering is the surplus of non-sense over sense by which the sense of suffering is possible."; *ibid*.

again, have we not always maintained that responsibility for the other precedes and exceeds deliberation, that is, self-consciousness, activity, freedom and will? Have we not qualified the being-for-the-other as a “despite oneself”? So, does the lawyer really have a choice? Can he just say ‘no’ (or even ‘yes’ for that matter) to Bartleby? Can he just resolve to dump him out of the way, with total disregard for his command?²² As a conclusion to his soliloquy, the narrator declares:

What I saw that morning persuaded me that the scrivener was the victim of innate and incurable disorder. I might give alms to his body; but his body did not pain him; it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach. (p.34)

Maybe he is right, maybe it is not his body but rather his soul that is in pain. But again, could not just a simple word, a simple and spontaneous word of affection be able to cure all that deep down pain? Do not hospitality and friendship begin in language properly?

(g) Affection:

affect²:...from French *affecter* or Latin *affectare* ‘aim at’, frequentative of *afficere* ‘work on, influence’...the original sense was ‘like, love’, hence ‘(like to) use, assume, etc.’.

The Oxford Dictionary

I am sick with love.

The Song of Songs, 6:8

I did not accomplish the purpose of going to Trinity Church that morning. Somehow, the things I had seen disqualified me for the time from church-going. I walked homeward, thinking what I would do with Bartleby. Finally I resolved upon this; – I would put certain calm questions to him the next morning, touching his history, &c., and if he declined to answer them openly and unreservedly (and I supposed he would prefer not), then to give him a twenty dollar bill over and above whatever I might owe him, and tell him his services were no longer required; but that if in any other way I could assist him, I would be happy to do so, especially if

²² As the other is the one we ought not kill, Simon Critchley critically questions: “[...] does the formal ethical imperative of Levinas’ s work (‘tu ne tueras point’) lead to a determinable political or legal content? Can one deduce politics from ethics?”; see Critchley, “The Other’s Decision in Me”, in *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity*, p.274 *et passim*.

he desired to return to his native place, whatever that might be, I would willingly help to defray the expenses. Moreover, if, reaching home, he found himself at any time in want of aid, a letter from him would be sure of a reply. (p.34)

In theory, this is a good plan. But, will it work out that smoothly? Let's see what happens the very next morning:

"Bartleby," said I, gently calling to him behind his screen. No reply. "Bartleby," said I, in a still gentler tone, "come here; I am not going to ask you to do any thing you would prefer not to do – I simply wish to speak to you."

Upon this he noiselessly slid into view.

"Will you tell me, Barleby, where you were born?"

"I would prefer not to"

"But what reasonable objection can you have to speak to me? I feel friendly towards you."

He did not look at me while I spoke, but kept his glance fixed upon my bust of Cicero, which as I then sat, was directly behind me, some six inches above my head.

"What is your answer, Bartleby?" said I, after waiting a considerable time for a reply, during which his countenance remained immovable, only there was the faintest conceivable tremor of the white attenuated mouth.

"At present I prefer to give no answers," he said, and retired into his hermitage. (p.35)

So far, so good. Everything is going as planned: as sibylline as usual Bartleby replies that he *prefers not to*, even though, it should be said, he turns out to be a little bit more explicit (or more explicitly arrogant) in the end, answering that he *prefers* not to give any answers... (let me say, in passing, that this man is really impossible and he would definitely get on my nerves...he certainly has the "ability" of pushing one to its limit. Bartleby seems in fact to be constantly pro-voking the lawyer, but in a very special way as provocation here is not only nonintentional – Bartleby's eccentricities are involuntary as the narrator often claims –, but non-polemical too, in the etymological sense of this word. As he answers *and* non-answers the way he does, and we have previously discussed this in relation to the formula, he leaves his interlocutor in the dark, fumbling for a thread like a complete fool: unable to really grasp the meaning of what is said and thus unable to debate or dispute it. Of course, the lawyer may well feel joked about, he may feel hurt in his self-esteem as nobody wants to be taken for an idiot and he may, as a result of this, that is, out of resentment precisely, end up losing his cool: he may get angry, maybe very angry and he may be tempted to raise his hand over him, he may be tempted to fight him and ultimately to kill him, thus giving up

comprehension absolutely, to paraphrase Lévinas.²³ As the French philosopher constantly maintains, the other is “the sole being I can wish to kill”, properly because it escapes my powers infinitely²⁴. It would seem to me then that it is as I lose control of myself that the other can truly reveal itself to me in the primordial expression that forbids to commit murder and obliges to respond²⁵. I take, however, that this element of nonintentional and non-polemical *provocation* to which I am subjected is essential for ethics to affirm itself. Ultimately, it could be said that the lawyer’s patience is not just being repeatedly put to the test, but put to an *incredible* one every single time...). The unexpected however comes precisely from this latter who, despite confessing, on this occasion in particular, a certain “calm disdain” in Bartleby’s manners and blaming him, on a more general level, of having shown no gratitude whatsoever in his regard, especially “considering the undeniable good usage and indulgence he had received” (p.35), seems to be struggling with himself to carry out the dismissal plan:

I strangely felt something superstitious knocking at my heart, and forbidding me to carry out my purpose, and denouncing me for a villain if I dared to breathe one bitter word against this forlornest of mankind. At last, familiarly drawing my chair behind his screen, I sat down and said: “Bartleby, never mind then about revealing

²³ “To kill is not to dominate but to annihilate; it is to renounce comprehension absolutely”; *Totality and Infinity*, p.198.

²⁴ Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.198. A few pages down, the lawyer affirms: “But again obeying that wondrous ascendancy which the inscrutable scrivener had over me, and from which ascendancy, for all my chafing, I could not completely escape, I slowly went downstairs and out into the street, and while walking around the block, considered what I should next do in this unheard of perplexity. Turn the man out by an actual thrusting I could not; to drive him away by calling him hard names would not do; calling in the police was an unpleasant idea; and yet, permit him to enjoy his cadaverous triumph over me, – this too I could not think of. What was to be done? [...back upstairs, after having tried once again to talk with the unreasonable Bartleby, the narrator has this to recount:] I was now in such a state of nervous resentment that I thought it but prudent to check myself at present from further demonstrations. Bartleby and I were alone. I remembered the tragedy of the unfortunate Adams and the still more unfortunate Colt in the solitary office of the latter; and how poor Colt, being dreadfully incensed by Adams, and imprudently permitting himself to get wildly excited, was at unawares hurried into his fatal act – an act which certainly no man could possibly deplore more than the actor himself [...] But when this old Adam of resentment rose in me and tempted me concerning Bartleby, I grappled him and threw him. How? Why, simply by recalling the divine injunction: ‘A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another.’ Yes, this it was that saved me.” He then sarcastically continues: “Aside from higher considerations, charity often operates as a vastly wise and prudent principle – a great safeguard to its possessor. Men have committed murder for jealousy’s sake, and anger’s sake, and hatred’s sake, and selfishness’ sake, and spiritual pride’s sake; but no man that ever I heard of, ever committed a diabolical murder for sweet charity’s sake. Mere self-interest, then, if no better motive can be enlisted, should, especially with high-tempered men, prompt all beings to charity and philanthropy.”; pp.40-42.

²⁵ Murder would be thus “still a power [...] but already impotency”, Lévinas, *ibid.* Of course, and it goes without saying, this does not necessarily mean that I *can’t* kill the other: the infinite resistance he/she *opposes* me is not real but ethical.

your history; but let me entreat you, as a friend, to comply as far as may be with the usages of this office [...] say now that in a day or two you will begin to be a little reasonable: say so, Bartleby.”

“At present I would prefer not to be a little reasonable,” was his mildly cadaverous reply. (35-36)

No doubt, the lawyer is really making an effort here. Within reason, of course...but still an effort. His troubles though are far from being over. This is, one might say, just the beginning of what lies ahead:

Just then the folding-doors opened, and Nippers approached. He seemed suffering from an unusually bad night's rest, induced by severer indigestion than common. He overheard those final words of Bartleby.

“*Prefer not*, eh?” gritted Nippers – “I'd *prefer* him, if I were you, sir,” addressing me – “I'd *prefer* him; I'd give him preferences, the stubborn mule! What is it, sir, pray, that he *prefers* not to do now?”

Bartleby moved not a limb. “Mr Nippers,” said I, “I'd prefer that you would withdraw for the present.” Somehow, of late I had got into the way of involuntarily using this word “prefer” upon all sorts of not exactly suitable occasions. And I trembled to think that my contact with the scrivener had already and seriously affected me in a mental way...As Nippers, looking very sour and sulky, was departing, Turkey blandly and deferentially approached.

“With submission, sir,” said he, yesterday I was thinking about Bartleby here, and I think that if he would but prefer to take a quart of good ale every day, it would do much towards mending him, and enabling him to assist in examining his papers.”

“So you have got that word too,” said I, slightly excited.

“With submission, sir,” asked Turkey, respectfully crowding himself into the contracted space behind the screen, and by so doing, making me jostle the scrivener. “What word, sir?”

“I would prefer to be left alone here,” said Bartleby, as if offended by being mobbed in his privacy.

“*That's* the word, Turkey,” said I, - “*that's* it.”

“Oh, *prefer*? Oh yes- queer word. I never use it myself. But, sir, as I was saying, if he would but prefer – ”

“Turkey,” interrupted I, “you will please withdraw.”

“Oh certainly, sir, if you prefer that I should.” (p.36, Melville's emphasis here)

This is indeed very funny. For us at least it is, as the lawyer seems to have a completely different opinion on the matter. Of course, we understand. I would certainly be as worried as he is, were I in his place. But, let's try to cast light on this exceptional phenomenon. As the narrator claims, he has recently got into the habit of using Bartleby's favourite word. The emphasis, however, lays on the very nonintentionality of this exposition/exposure. In the

same way as Bartleby's eccentricities are non-voluntary, the lawyer's use of the word precedes all initiatives on his part, all acts of thought. Logos as speech is not in sum, to reverse Lévinas's formula, entirely one with logos as rationality²⁶: the 'I' in its 'I think', that is to say, the 'I' conceived as actuality and thus as equality with itself, always comes too late to realize or even to know that it has ex-posed itself, that is, that he has offered itself to the other. Diachrony or even anachrony is here the other name for transcendence: "the happening of a relation that 'precedes' and conditions all sorts of intentions by offering the *whole* of my identifying and verbalizing acts, that is, the whole of my world, to someone who is not a part or moment or event within that whole"²⁷. But I am already going too far, at least for the moment. There are in fact two other important factors worth touching on, before I can draw any conclusions on the whole issue. The first one regarding Turkey and Nippers, as they both seem to have been seriously affected by the word, independently of whether their eccentricities are on or off²⁸. It should be pointed out however that Nippers, who is *on*, seems to be abusing the verb instead of simply using it, making his speech sound unreal, absurd and ultimately faulty. The lawyer himself remarks the inappropriate use he makes of the word: [...] *using this word 'prefer' upon all sorts of not exactly suitable occasions*. And this is the second aspect one should consider: that is, the very inappropriateness of the verb within the context. If we understand language as a meaningful concatenations of words, then the verb 'prefer', standing out as it does as an absolute singularity within this chain, can be said to provoke its semantic breakdown and, consequentially, the short circuit of the hermeneutical circle. Take Nipper's example: Could the narrator understand him on the above-mentioned occasion? Could he make sense of his mumbo-jumbo talking? I seriously doubt it. I hardly think he knew what the scrivener was about. If he had got anything out of it, this is but the

²⁶ See Lévinas, "Language and Proximity", in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p.109.

²⁷ Peperzak, *Beyond*, p.66. Elsewhere, this latter states: "It now becomes understandable why the subject's time can only exist in diachrony and not in ontological synchrony: only in an irretrievable time is it possible to truly lose something or to give [...]"; *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, Purdue Univ. Press, West Lafayette, Indiana, 1993, p.222. In this regard, also see Lévinas's *Otherwise than Being*, p.51 *et passim*.

²⁸ As a result of this, the functioning of the lawyer's economical or even egonomical system could be at stake: the scriveners are now eccentric beyond their own individual eccentricities and eccentric, as we just said, beyond horological *distinguo*. Of course, it remains to be seen whether their work performance is going to be affected by this (although there are no suggestions of this happening within the text). Curiously enough however, it is worth pointing out that Turkey and Nippers's presence, from this moment on, appears to be rather minimal. The lawyer will in fact no longer refer to them for support as he used to do; as if the 'prefer' affair had in some way concurred in the undoing of the egonomical bond established between this latter and, alternatively, the two scriveners.

word 'prefer' and that, to me, was all one could get. This fact, that is to say, the breakdown of the hermeneutical circle within the eco/ego-system does certainly go some way to explaining the progressive weakening of the egonomical relationship between the lawyer and the two copyists, to whom, as we were just saying, the former would refer for support. However, it would be also worth, at this point, recalling that one's discourse, despite failing in being communicative or significative through the information or message it carries, does still have a sense: namely, a sense (both signification and direction) preceding and exceeding (common) sense. It would still signify through its accomplishing the speaker's proximity to its interlocutor, who is invited and provoked to a response, to the giving of a sign. That is to say, to approach in its turn, breaking through all kind of barriers and shields and walls standing along the way. The ethical moment of addressing would be in sum preserved thanks precisely to the abuse one involuntarily makes of Bartleby's word within its speech. And I can't help my mind running wild here, imagining what would happen further to an extra reduction in Turkey's and Nipper's vocabulary: I can see them pronouncing Bartleby's formula in reply to the lawyer's demands...I can see all this happening: I can see the host turning into everybody's hostage, "a subjectivity supporting all the others", as Lévinas puts it²⁹; but I can also see everybody's turning into everybody else's hostage, without these substitutions paving the way for a re-entering into the viciously circular logic of an economy, as the involuntary play of provocations and answers would not be immediately reciprocal. But this is in passing. Let me now go back to the lawyer for one final saying on the whole matter. To put this in simple terms, I firmly believe that the very fact or event that he has got the word (a reception which does not entail possession or mastery or comprehension³⁰) comes to attest to his subjection to the other, to his being possessed or affected by him, to his being hostage to him, whether he wants it or not. Saying the word is already to respond for Bartleby: it is to enter into relation or even conversation with him, as Lévinas would word it.³¹ It is to say 'yes' ('yes, here I am'), it is to admit one's (own) responsibility for him

²⁹ Lévinas, *God, Death and Time*, p.140.

³⁰ "It is therefore to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But this also means: to be taught [...] Teaching [however] is not reducible to maieutics; it comes from the exterior and brings me more that I contain"; Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.51.

³¹ Lévinas is never at ease with the term "relation", to which he prefers "religion" and by which "he understands 'the bond that is established between the same and the other without constituting a totality' (*Totality and Infinity*, p.80). Religion is opposed to politics, which 'tends toward reciprocal recognition, that is, toward equality; it ensures happiness. And the political law concludes and sanctions the struggle for recognition. Religion is Desire and not struggle for recognition. It is [...] glorious humility, responsibility,

and one's (own) uniquely (this is of course, and this goes without saying, an admission which is prior to the dialectical opposition between affirmation and negation and, thus, also prior to the antagonism between true and untrue³²). And it is already to say 'yes' to another 'yes': saying the word is ultimately to give one's word to the other in responsibility. It is to make a promise, without having had the chance to agree with this commitment. In this sense, we may venture to say that the exposition of the word (and at the same time of oneself) not only does already refer to a past which never was and never will be the I's present (the pre-original or *an-archival* past of its affection for the other) but also points, starting precisely from its (the word) recurrence in time, towards a future which sees the suspension or even interruption of the eternal and irreversible return of the identical to itself and to itself solely as to a home. It points to a future where the I is unable to regain possession of itself, to rejoin its equality with itself, to make its accounts come right. This is a future in sum that sees it restless in its *non-in-difference* for the other, critically in question and before a question. The question being precisely: "Why do I expose myself in such a way?," "Why do I happen to say/give my word to the other?," "Why do I respond for him?," This is of course a question which gives rise or, better, which recalls *another* question: namely, the question of the other and the other as question, to which one, despite all its assuming on the matter and despite all actions then taken in this regard, simply *cannot* answer. This question can't in fact neither be answered through a theoretical response in the shape of information nor through

and sacrifice, which are the conditions of equality itself" (ibid., p.64)", says Tina Chanter, *Time, Death and the Feminine*, p.142. Unlike Buber but not unlike Blanchot for example, Lévinas construes the interhuman relation as an event of radical asymmetry: "The interhuman, properly speaking, lies in a non-indifference of one to another, in a responsibility of one for another, but before the reciprocity of this responsibility, which will be inscribed in impersonal laws, comes to be superimposed on the pure altruism of this responsibility inscribed in the ethical position of the *I qua I* [...] The interhuman is also in the recourse that people have to one another for help, before the astonishing alterity of the other has been banalized or dimmed down to a simple exchange of courtesies that has become established as an 'interpersonal commerce' of customs [...] These are expressions of a properly ethical meaning, distinct from those acquired by *self* and *other* in what is called the state of Nature or civil society. It is in the interhuman perspective of *my* responsibility for the other, without concern for reciprocity, in my call for his or her disinterested help, in the asymmetry of the relation of *one* to the *other*, that I have tried to analyze the phenomenon of useless suffering [...]" ; Lévinas, "Useless Suffering", in *Entre Nous*, pp.100-101.

³²For Lévinas, saying "realizes sincerity [...]" Sincerity undoes the alienation which saying undergoes in the said, where, under the cover of words, in verbal indifference, information is exchanged, pious wishes are put out, and responsibilities are fled. No said equals the sincerity of the saying, is adequate to the veracity that is prior to the true, the veracity of the approach, of proximity, beyond presence. Sincerity would then be saying without the said, apparently a 'speaking so as to say nothing,' a sign I make to another of this giving of signs, 'as simple as hello,' but ipso facto the pure transparency of an admission, the recognition of a debt [...] This exposure without anything held back [...] breaks the secret of Gyges, the subject that sees

a more practical one which may suit one's own schemes.³³ The pages that follow, up to Bartleby's removal into the 'Tombs', that is, up to the very end, clearly exemplify the lawyer's ontological *crisis*:

What was to be done? He would do nothing in the office: why should he stay there? In plain fact, he had now become a millstone to me, not only useless as a necklace, but afflictive to bear. *Yet* I was sorry for him. I speak less than truth when I say that, on his own account, he occasioned me uneasiness. If he would but have named a single relative or friend, I would instantly have written, and urged their taking the poor fellow away to some convenient retreat. *But* he seemed alone, absolutely alone in the universe. A bit of wreck in the mid Atlantic. At length, necessities connected with my business tyrannized over all other considerations. Decently as I could, I told Bartleby that in six days' time he must unconditionally leave the office [...] "And when you finally quit me, Bartleby," added I, "I shall see that you go not away entirely unprovided [...]" (pp.37-38, my emphasis)

Six days later...

"Not gone!" I murmured at last. *But* again obeying that wondrous ascendancy which the inscrutable scrivener had over me, and from which ascendancy, for all my chafing, I could not completely escape, I slowly went down stairs and out into the street, and while walking round the block, considered what I should next do in this unheard-of perplexity. Turn the man out by an actual thrusting I could not; to drive him away by calling him hard names would not do; calling in the police was an unpleasant idea; *and yet* permit him to enjoy his cadaverous triumph over me, - this I could not think of. What was to be done? Or, if nothing could be done, was there anything further that I could *assume* in the matter? [...] "Will you, or will you not, quit me?" I now demanded in a sudden passion, advancing close to him. "I would prefer *not* to quit you," he replied, gently emphasizing the *not*. (pp.40-41, the first two emphasis are mine)

Some days later and with Bartleby still preferring *not* to quit:

What shall I do? I now said to myself, buttoning up my coat to the last button. What shall I do? What ought I to do? What does conscience say I *should* do with this man, or rather ghost? Rid myself of him, I must; go, he shall. But how? You will not thrust him, the poor, pale, passive mortal, - you will not thrust such a

without being seen, without exposing himself, the secret of the inward subject."; *Otherwise than Being*, pp.143-145.

³³ Responsibility for the other, as we have maintained throughout, is antecedent to freedom, will-power, mastery, comprehension. I answer to the other before I know I do: in a way, it could be said that I am this non-assumable responsibility or even, as Lévinas puts it, this "original expiation".

helpless creature out of your door? You will not dishonor yourself by such cruelty? No, I will not, I cannot do that [...] What then will you do? For all your coaxing, he will not budge. Bribes he leaves under your own paper-weight on your table; in short, it is quite plain that he prefers to cling to you. Then something severe, something unusual must be done [...] Since he will not quit me, I must quit him... On the appointed day I engaged carts and men, proceeded to my chambers, and having but little furniture, every thing was removed in a few hours. Throughout, the scrivener remained standing behind the screen, which I directed to be removed the last thing. It was withdrawn; and being folded up like a huge folio, left him the motionless occupant of a naked room. I stood in the entry watching him a moment, while something from within upbraided me. I re-entered, with my hand in my pocket – and – and my heart in my mouth.

“Good-bye, Bartleby; I am going – good-bye, and God some way bless you; and take that,” slipping something in his hand. But it dropped upon the floor, and then, – strange to say – I tore myself from him whom I had so longed to be rid of. (pp.43-44)

The following passage (next to the lawyer’s decision to give Bartleby the six days’ notice) is also worth reporting, as it attests to the former’s obsessive possession by the latter. The text speaks for itself:

After breakfast, I walked down town, arguing the probabilities *pro* and *con*. One moment I thought it would prove a miserable failure, and Bartleby would be found all alive at my office as usual; the next moment it seemed certain that I should find his chair empty. And so I kept veering about. At the corner of Broadway and Canal-street, I saw quite an excited group of people standing in earnest conversation.

“I’ll take odds he doesn’t,” said a voice as I passed.

“Doesn’t go? – done!” said I, “put up your money.”

I was instinctively putting my hand in my pocket to produce my own, when I remembered that this was an election day. The words I had overheard bore no reference to Bartleby, but to the success or non-success of some candidate for the mayoralty. In my intent frame of mind, I had, as it were, imagined that all Broadway shared in my excitement, and were debating the same question with me. I passed on, very thankful that the uproar of the street screened my momentary absent-mindedness. (p.39)

Finally and to move a little quickly here, it might be noted that while for the most part of the story the lawyer is being identified with his office and with the signifieds of isolation, immanence, tranquillity and rest, the last quarter of it sees him being progressively dispossessed, decentered and ultimately uprooted from his original position, without ever being able to regain this initial status, that is, without ever being able to return home, to its self, *chez soi*. One has him always frantically and erratically walking around, rushing, jumping

from one place to the next, with no particular destination in mind; in the attempt, maybe, to escape the g-host that haunts his conscience.³⁴

(h) Adieu

All the rest is silence
on the other side of the wall
and the silence ripeness
and the ripeness all.

W.H. Auden

All the rest is silence. [...] In other words, what tragedy teaches is silence, and silence is nothing if it does not, at least for a time, put an end to thought. Of course, there is nothing to say about death.

G. Bataille³⁵

Having been informed of Bartleby's removal to the *Tombs* by the landlord of his former premises, the lawyer will pay the scrivener two visits:

And so I found him there, standing all alone in the quietest of the yards, his face towards a high wall, while all around, from the narrow slits of the jail windows, I thought I saw peering out upon him the eyes of murderers and thieves.

"Bartleby?"

"I know you," he said, without looking around, and – "and I want nothing to say to you."

"It was not I that brought you here, Bartleby," said I, keenly pained at his implied suspicion. "And to you, this should not be so vile a place. Nothing reproachful

³⁴ In this context, it should be mentioned that the narrator's 'positional shift' is also suggested to the level of the enunciated: comparing samples of the beginnings of the paragraphs of the first page (I am ...; I mean ...; I have known ...; But I waine...;While ...; I believe...; It is...) with the strongly dubitative ones present in the last page (There would seem...; Yet here I hardly know whether I should...; Upon what basis it rested, I could never ascertain...; When I think over this rumor, hardly can I express the emotions that seize me), Barbara Lanati can draw attention to the lawyer's dramatic loss of certainties in regard not only to Bartleby's story but also and more importantly to his own *savoir*. See Lanati, B., *Frammenti di un sogno: Hawthorne, Melville e il romanzo americano*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1987, p.218 (footnote 19).

³⁵ I owe this quotation from Bataille's (in *Œuvres complètes*; Paris, Gallimard, 1976, vol.VIII, pp.200-201) to Boris Delay. See his "Rigor Mortis: the thirteen stations of philosophy's passion (following Bataille's *Conferences on Un-Knowing*)", in *The Limits of Death*, p.52 (the translation is also Delay's).

attaches to you by being here. And see, it is not so sad a place as one might think. Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass.”

“I know where I am,” he replied, but would say nothing more, and so I left him. (p.48, emphasis mine)

A few days later, the narrator returns to the *Tombs*:

The yard was entirely quiet. It was not accessible to the common prisoners. The surrounding walls, of amazing thickness, kept off all sounds behind them. The Egyptian character of the masonry weighed upon me with its gloom. But a soft imprisoned turf grew under foot. The heart of the eternal pyramids, it seemed, wherein, by some strange magic, through the clefts, grass-seed, dropped by birds, had sprung.

Strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side, his head touching the cold stones, I saw the wasted Bartleby. But nothing stirred. I paused; then went close up to him; stooped over, and saw that his dim eyes were open; otherwise he seemed profoundly sleeping. Something prompted me to touch him. I felt his hand, when a tingling shiver ran up my arm and down my spine to my feet.

The round face of the grub-man peered upon me now. “His dinner is ready. Won’t he dine to-day, either? Or does he live without dining?”

“Lives without dining,” said I, and closed the eyes.

“Eh! – He’s asleep, aint he?”

“With kings and counsellors,” murmured I. (p.50)

I want to pick up on the grub-man’s question, which takes on an affirmative (and problematic) character through the lawyer’s repetition of it: “Lives without dining”. The assonance between ‘dining’ and ‘dying’ is undeniable. Now, what is Melville trying to suggest here? Is the death of the other somehow ‘in question’? And if so, what is the sense of this being-in-question with regard to the death of the other? And still, what do we intend for death, what is death (as the death of the other)? When understood from the point of view of language and from experience, death, as Lévinas interprets it, is the stopping in beings of all those “expressive movements that made them appear as living”.³⁶ It is the halting of a behaviour. It is the *no-response*. In *this* sense, and this goes without saying, Bartleby is certainly dead. The empirical facticity of this death is not denied. Death has taken place. It takes place. Yet, Bartleby’s death does remain in question: he lives without dying. The meaning of the other’s death does not seem, in sum, to exhaust itself in terms of a mere annihilation or negation, that is, in terms of a simple passage from being to no-longer-being. It exceeds this

very appearing: namely, the sense of death would not only exceed the ordinary knowledge we have of it (through the observation of the other's dying) but it would exceed knowledge period. And, it would exceed it precisely because there is always an excess in death: death presents us with an excess (an emotional one to be sure), which, to paraphrase Bataille, silences our capacity to think/speak (and yet, as we shall show presently, death, the trauma of the other's death, is also what provokes one to write, to expose oneself). Its meaning is beyond graspability, comprehension: it escapes or transcends the order of the intelligible, the order of our world, the order of being: "How can it be that he/she is dead?"; "Why is he/she dead?..." The death of the other is always already problematic or even enigmatic, as Lévinas would word it. It irremediably puts us in question: "Death, in the face of the other man, is the mode according to which the alterity that affects the Same causes its identity as the Same to burst open in the form of a question that arises in it". This is, as the philosopher continues, a question, "the question of death, [which] is unto itself its own response: it is my responsibility for the death of the other"³⁷: *I saw the wasted Bartleby. But nothing stirred. I paused; then went close up to him, stooped over, and saw that his dim eyes were open [...]*. This death does regard the lawyer: that is, it affects him beyond consolation in the trope of an infinite and thus inescapable responsibility, his responsibility as a survivor.³⁸ And note, in this context, the significant use of the article 'the' instead of 'his' in the sentence *and closed the eyes*, which not only connotes the im-possible simultaneity of a communion in and through death between the lawyer and Bartleby but further attests to the insinuating of a plurality within the ego's solipsistic existence: pain for the death of the other tears one away from its ego/ecological isolation, the sameness is broken into and broken up, beyond repair, by a non-containable otherness, structuring the being of the I no longer in economic terms, that is, as an equality or even coincidence with itself, as a presentedness to itself but in fact as a non-in-difference to the other, as a presentedness to what absolutely exceeds presence, as absolute noncoinciding, passivity ("a passivity beneath all passivity...where undergoing is always also an assuming"³⁹), patience and ultimately as time (in its diachrony).⁴⁰

³⁶ Lévinas, *God, Death, and Time*, p.9.

³⁷ Lévinas, *ibid.*, p.117.

³⁸ "The turning of the Same toward the Infinite, which is neither aiming or vision, is the *question*, a question that is also a response, but in no way a dialogue of the soul with itself. A question, a prayer – is this not prior to dialogue? The question contains the response as ethical responsibility, as an impossible escape". Lévinas, *ibid.*

³⁹ Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p.101.

Now, if, as we believe correct, the death of the other always presents us with an excess, an excess of meaning which resists com-prehension and puts us in question, that is, it poses the question of our response to the death of the other, comprising our infinite responsibility for this very death, then, does this not come down to affirming that the work of mourning is in the end impossible or infinite⁴¹? And if so, is it not precisely on the grounds that the work of mourning, understood as a process of spiritual/memorial incorporation of the dead one, is ultimately impossible that we can say that the other lives without dying, that he/she continues to express himself/herself to us, to inspire us and ultimately to question us, beyond our attempt to reduce him/her to mere signs or images, that is, beyond our egoistic attempt to put this other forever to death? I shall leave this question open for debate. In this regard, however, there is one more thing that needs to be said: talking of mourning, a maybe impossible one also, for the lawyer, just like Antigone, is left without a visible grave to mourn... I would like to think (and the more I think about it the more I now understand) the narrator's text, his writing "of a few passages in the life of Bartleby", as a text in mourning for his death. As a text of mourning and friendship: as an homage in the form of personal testimony ("What my own astonished eyes saw of Bartleby, that is all I know of him"). This text is for Bartleby and in memory of Bartleby: in memory of the extraordinary man he was. I would also like to think this act of love, of fidelity towards the other (and towards the word of the other or, even better, towards the other as word) to be ultimately free of narcissism, selfishness, self-gratification, self-pity and for the most part pathos: the

⁴⁰ "Time passes (*se passe*). This synthesis which occurs *patiently*, called with profundity passive synthesis, is ageing [and remember here the very incipit of "Bartleby, the scrivener": *I am a rather elderly man.*] . It breaks up under the weight of years, and is irreversibly removed from the present, that is, from representation. In self-consciousness there is no longer a *presence* of self to self, but senescence. It is as senescence beyond the recuperation of memory that time, lost time that does not return, is a diachrony, and concerns me. This diachrony of time is [...] a disjunction of identity where the same does not rejoin the same: there is non-synthesis, lassitude. The for-oneself of identity is no longer for itself. The identity of the same in the ego comes to it despite itself from the outside [...] The subject is for another; its own being turns into for another, its being dies away turning into signification [...] the subject is not in time, but is diachrony itself [...]" ; Lévinas, *ibid.*, p.52 and 57.

⁴¹ In this concern, Simon Critchley affirms: "Death is not the *noema* of a *noesis*. It is not the object or meaningful fulfilment of an intentional act. Death, or, rather, dying, is by definition ungraspable; it is that which exceeds intentionality and the noetico-noematic correlative structures of phenomenology. There can thus be no phenomenology of dying, because it is a state of affairs about which one could neither have an adequate intention nor find intuitive fulfilment. The ultimate meaning of human finitude is that we cannot find meaningful fulfilment for the finite. In this sense, dying is meaningless and, consequently, the work of mourning is infinite." Critchley, S., *Very Little...Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature*; Routledge, London and New York, 1997, p.73.

narrator's intent, as he makes clear at the very beginning, is not, in fact, to write a story "at which good-natured gentlemen might smile, and sentimental souls might weep"; his intent is not, he seems to be wanting to say, to write a more or less fictionalized account of events (or even a generic piece of writing, be it a biography or a eulogy), where the other (and its word) inevitably gets reduced to the same, where the other and the same ends up in forming a synthetic and permanent whole where all gaps and breaches are filled out, where all differences come to be re-integrated within the economy of the text and the text as economy. And it is not, by seeking to recount the unaccountable, the unspeakable, by trying to recall what will always exceed recollection, to ask for his (Bartleby, wherever he may be) or our, for that matter, forgiveness. It is not to express his regret for having let things go the way they went, for having thought or done this or that, for not having responded for his life. It is not, in sum, to express his guilt.⁴² The other has here the priority over the same. It is put before its self-interest, before its self-justifying reasons. This text, as we have said just now, is for Bartleby. It is in his memory and in his name that one writes (and it is his name that one mentions first – in the very title – and last – "Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!" –, as if to invoke the ghost of the dead, as if to invoke its coming back once again, once and for all). It is in the name of the truth: the truth, as painful as it may be, as scandalous (the scandal itself of sincerity, as Lévinas would put it) as it may sound or appear to some (but especially to all those good-natured and sentimental readers that we in the end are or pretend to be), about his relation with Bartleby. The truth about a diverse, difficult, problematic, and indeed very much suffered (not to say traumatic) friendship, as it were. The truth about himself: of the persona he was and, I would like to believe, the man, the ageing man he now is⁴³, in this time of mourning, of bearing witness and bearing period. In this time of giving, of rendering

⁴² "Nothing is more unbearable or laughable than all the expressions of guilt in mourning, all its inevitable spectacles", says Derrida in "The Deaths of Roland Barthes", in *The Work of Mourning*, p.42 (For my conclusion on mourning, I owe a lot to the thought-provoking introduction by the editors of the above-mentioned book, see pp.1-30). A point of clarification here: the fact that he does not express his regret and guilt for his wrong-doings, does not necessarily mean that he is not sorry. Of course he is. And he says it without saying it, so as to avoid this saying becoming an element of the said, entering into the economical context of his discourse and, thus, losing within it its very signifyingness. Silence is indeed a form of speech. Perhaps, the only form of speech.

⁴³ The sub-ject, Lévinas would say; from Latin subjectus, past participle of subicere, from sub 'under' + jacere 'throw', literally meaning 'that which is thrown under': "Subjectivity signifies by a passivity more passive than all passivity more passive than matter, by its vulnerability, its sensibility, by its nudity more nude than nudity, the sincere denuding of this very nudity that becomes a saying, the saying of responsibility, by the substitution in which responsibility is said to the very end, by the accusative of the

homage to the other who no longer responds. In this time of offering unconditional hospitality (here and now, within the body of the text and the text as one's body) to the other as g-host, who still holds and forever will hold one hostage. In this time of responding through him and for him with this very letter of *adieu* (or à-Dieu, as Lévinas taught us to pronounce this word, connoting, as is the case here, the giving of Bartleby to God). Yet, with a dead letter, one wonders? Does this letter speed to death?

Bartleby had been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington, from which he had been suddenly removed by a change in the administration. When I think over this rumor, hardly can I express the emotions which seize me. Dead letters! Does it not sound like dead men? Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them to the flames? For by the cart-load they are annually burned. Sometimes from out the folded paper the pale clerk takes a ring: - the finger it was meant for, perhaps, moulders in the grave; a bank-note sent in the swiftest charity: - he whom it would relieve, nor eats nor hungers any more; pardon for those who dies despairing; hope for those who dies unhoping; good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities. On errands of life, these letters speed to death. Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity! (pp.50-51)

So, does this letter speed to death? To be sure, and this goes without saying, Bartleby is not there to receive this gift. The other to whom and for whom one writes is no longer there to respond, if only to utter a mere 'thank you', as a sign of gratitude/forgiveness. From the very start, this letter is destined to remain undestined. To miss its addressee. It is destined, therefore, to escape the viciously circular logic of economy. The very fact or event that the other is no longer there to respond comes to insure against the risk of this gift being reciprocated, of this gift returning to its origin, to the same; ultimately attesting to the gratuitousness of a movement that proceeds unto the other absolutely, infinitely. Let's ask once again then, is this letter a dead one? Not necessarily: this missive reaches us in the form of a trans-mission, as if to reach the other to whom it is originally destined, it had to reach 'an-other' or even 'another other'. It had to reach us, the living, and, it had to reach us, so as

oneself without a nominative form, by exposedness to the traumatism of gratuitous accusation, by expiation for the other."; Lévinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p.147, footnote 8.

not, before it is too late (again remember the narrator's incipit: "I am a rather elderly man"), "to let death have the last word, or the first one".⁴⁴

⁴⁴ The citation is from Derrida's "Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas", p.2. Note, in reference to the last clause (this: "or the first one"), that for Derrida the proper name of the other is always in advance the name of a dead person. As he puts it, "name signs death"; Derrida's "A Demi-Mot", in *The Work of Mourning*, p.130. Finally and in relation to the very incipit of the narrator's text ("I am a rather elderly man"), it would be worth mentioning this passage from S. Critchley's "The Other's decision in me" (in *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity*, pp.257-258; the essay is – but not only – a commentary of Derrida's reading – in *Politics of friendship – of Blanchot's Pour l'amitié*): "The time of friendship is strongly linked with the experience of ageing, of senescence [...] Friendship is the time of recollection, testimony, testament, narration and memoir. Thus, the experience of friendship is deeply bound up with the experience of memory, both of friends recalling the past together, but – more importantly perhaps – of one friend recalling alone, in solitude, what Derrida calls in connection with Blanchot, 'amitié du solitaire pour le solitaire'. This is also why the experience of friendship – and this is something obvious in Blanchot, but also, as Derrida shows, in Cicero, Montaigne and others – is so intimately connected with the experience of loss, of mourning [...] As Derrida writes, in an unintended response to Blanchot's perplexity, 'l'amitié commence par se survivre (friendship begins by surviving)' [...] The dead live because they are recalled by friends, they survive after death because they are not forgotten. In this sense, *philia* is *necrophilia*. However, this experience of friendship as loss, as a work of mourning [...] is also essentially the here and now of writing, the present time of inscription, of iterability [...] One writes here and now out of friendship, in favour of friendship, for the future of friendship. And one does this in saying adieu, in trying to evoke the past, in seeking to recollect one's loss. One is most for the other in taking one's leave, in parting's sweet sorrow."

Chapter 4

The World Upside Down, or of Envy:

For to all those who have, more will be given,
and they will have an abundance; but from those
who are unproductive, even what they have will
be taken from them.

Matthew 25, 29¹

(From need...)

(a) Genesis:

In the year 1799, Captain Amasa Delano, of Duxbury, in Massachusetts, commanding a large sealer and general trader, lay at anchor, with a valuable cargo, in the harbor of St. Maria – a small, desert, uninhabited island toward the southern extremity of the long coast of Chili. There he had touched for water.
(p.52)

The opening paragraph is clearly divided in two phrases by the full stop. The first one or incipit can be also subdivided in two units or clauses. The incipit opens by positing the time of the diegesis or story: *in the year 1799*.² This is a (biographical) time which inheres to the figure of Amasa Delano. Additionally, the subject of the enunciated is contextualized in terms of space: *of Duxbury, in Massachusetts*. More particularly, this denotative detail can be said to root the subject referentially, that is, it links it to a spatio-cultural horizon which is scanned by the progression: Duxbury, Massachusetts, United States.³ Indeed, this an horizon that pertains to the dimension of the known, of the familiar: of what is in sum identical to itself. The exigence is, to be sure, that of defining

¹ I owe my epigraph here to Silvano Petrosino. The Italian philosopher also appends it at the beginning of his beautifully written and extremely inspiring book on the phenomenon of envy (considered from a philosophical rather than a social point of view). See S. Petrosino, *Visione e Desiderio*, Jaca Book, Milano, 1992.

² But also the time of history: it is known that 'Benito Cereno' is the 're-writing' of the voyage chronicle by Amasa (or Amassa) Delano (Duxbury, 1763 – Boston, 1823). "The Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres..." (1817) is the historical source of Melville's drama. This source will be widely quoted in the legal deposition at the end of the tale. Bianchi, Ruggero, *I Racconti della Veranda*, p.54.

³ Let's not forget that, in 1799, the United States were a new born nation (and new born was the identity of its citizens): George Washington was chosen to serve as its first president only ten years before.

a starting point or, even better, an origin: of the voyage, of the adventure, of the narrative, and, possibly, that of tracing, following a circular scheme, its return route. Consider also the crystal-like, sharp, incisive and very much controlled pace of this opening sequence; which remains almost unaltered till the end of the phrase. But let's carry on: *commanding a large sealer and general trader, lay at anchor, with a valuable cargo, in the harbor of St. Maria*. More data are now in our possession. Let's then question ourselves: what else can we say in relation to the figure of the American Captain Amasa Delano? He is certainly a man wonted to command, to give orders and, therefore, to be obeyed. He is, no doubt, a man of power. Another significant element of the first moment of the incipit is given by the syntagm: *lay at anchor*. This verbal form (the only 'active' one within the first phrase) is comprised by a head: *lay*, and its projection: *at anchor*; this latter contributing to reinforce the synthetical, centripetal nature of the syntagm itself, aimed as it is at centralizing, fixing, rooting the image built just now around Delano's ship, which indeed stands as the sole pole of semantic attraction off *the long coast of Chili*. The idea is to suggest a moment of rest, tranquillity as well as of protection and safety: *in the harbour of St. Maria*. This is a moment which bespeaks the realization of the process of the identification of the I in its sameness, a process that we have understood in terms of a circular movement, wherein is given the start and the return of an ego to itself (we shall come back to the aetiology of this very process). Again, let's move on: *A small, desert, uninhabited island toward the southern extremity of the long coast of Chili*. While the very first part of the phrasal entity aims at centralizing the furnished data around a more or less stable centre (this is indeed a latent instability, for it is anchored to the deeps of water, so to speak), the second one conversely works at destabilizing this very centrality; as well as contributing to the opening up of the horizon within which the first moment of the phrase is contained. In effect, on a referential plane (plane of identity, of certainty), if the geographical datum, for example, helps to map (to nominate, to formalize, to normalize) the perceptive horizon, it at the same time disturbs, disorientates it. The emphatic presence of the monemes *southern extremity* and *long coast* can be said to put to the test (and into question) the capacity of retention and protention of the perceptive/nominative act, precisely by stretching it to the excess. As to, more specifically, the time of this second phrasal moment, it is given connotatively by the adjective *desert* and denotatively by the verbal form *uninhabited*. The first moneme does in fact suggest emptiness, absence, it signifies what is not present, so to speak: what eludes representation as such. An idea which is to be confirmed by the presence of a 'passive',

mute verbal form: an adjectival past participle. The alterity of the second part of the first phrase is, therefore, deducible starting from time or, to be more precise, from the absence of time, from atemporality itself: from a past without memory, without any trace of presence.

The textual analysis has then led us to the individuation of two isotopies or semantic structures comprising the very first phrase: that is, a surface one, anchored to the subject of the enunciated, and a deep one, around which are gathered the notions of alterity, absence, emptiness and impersonality. At first sight, the first structure would seem to be superimposed on the second one⁴, preexisting the former, but without necessarily succeeding in fixing, containing, comprehending it. Far from it: the idea is, ultimately, that of a very precarious stability of the first structure, 'abandoned' to the mercy of the absolute ontological unpredictability of the second one. This is an idea that would come to reverse radically the relation of power between the first structure and the second one. Within the first phrase, despite the apparent calmness, stillness and safety, there is, and one should not undervalue it, as the sensation of 'something' lurking, paradoxically, in the notion itself of emptiness.⁵ There is like the buzzing, the murmur itself of nothingness, like the 'density of the void', as Lévinas puts it. Like the dark, unfathomable background of existence, eternally 'consuming' itself. Like the return of a presence within (an) absence. This is a 'something'⁶ that exists, we say, without being necessarily correlated to an existing (in this case, *the large sealer*). The idea of negation, defining the second phrasal moment, does not in fact resolve its alterity but, on the contrary, proceeding from the idea of negation properly, it seems possible the revelation of a nondescript, mute, neuter, unrelated and unrelatable field of forces⁷; which would invest (contain always and already) the first field of forces, the first documented structure. The effect is indeed that of an almost absolute alienation or estrangement: Delano's ship would rest upon a surface made of pure transcendence, indeterminateness. It would be

⁴ This is an imposition which is also denoted to a grammatical plane: the very first sequence of the phrasal entity counts in fact thirty-one monemes with respect to the eleven comprising the second one. Additionally, the second segment, unlike the first one, contains a passive verbal unit.

⁵ "But this universal absence is in its turn a presence, an absolutely unavoidable presence...presence of absence, the *there is* ['il y a': according to the French philosopher the anonymous and impersonal being in general, like in 'it rains' or 'it is cold'] is beyond contradiction; it embraces and dominates its contradictory". Lévinas, *De l'existence à l'existant*, Vrin, Paris, 1993, p.94 and p.105; English translation by Alphonso Lingis in *The Levinas Reader*, p. 30 and p.35.

⁶ The impersonal character of existence exceeds the epistemological categories of the subject and the object. It exceeds descriptive phenomenology, so to speak.

⁷ We shall call it 'elemental': water, earth, the sky. In short, the elemental would signify the eternal existing of creation, the eternity of being in general. According to Lévinas the *il y a* is nothing but the dark 'extension' of the elemental.

exposed to its silent menace⁸, exposed to a universal nothingness. A nothingness which is, to be sure, a 'whole' overhanging, weighing in its primordial indifference, in its silent verbalism (*uninhabited*): in its antique, immemorial (that is, anterior to representation) mystery, in its chronotopic *éternullité* (Laforgue).

In conclusion, the subject that we have individuated within the first phrase is, until further proof, unable to possess its identity: theoretically speaking, the concept of same cannot, as yet, be sustained. Its aetiology needs to be demonstrated. For the time being, the I remains, we shall say, subject-ed to the elemental: it does not differentiate itself, it does not determine itself but stays, despite itself, undetermined. Its essence, like that of the phrase, is in dissemination.

Apparently then, the problem hereby posited is that of the very 'birth' or even constitution of the I in its sameness, whereas the I *can* be the same, so to speak, only in so far as it gains its separation from the impersonal character of existence. Only in so far as it differentiates itself from it: in sum only in so far as he coincides with itself by having returned to itself. How then has the I come to wrest itself free from the 'infinite depth of the past' (Lévinas)? How can the idea of an accomplishment of the identity, an idea which has been 'informally' announced by the active verbal syntagm *lay at anchor*, be "justified"? Of necessity, we must answer: *there he had touched for water*. This second phrasal entity does only contain six monemes with regard to the forty-five comprising the first one. Its incisiveness slows down, so to speak, the motion of rhythmical acceleration that we have registered at the end of the incipit, suggesting arrest, immobility, stillness. Moreover, one can note the anaphoral nature of the phrase, which is realized by the presence of the deictic term *there*. The positional adverb does in fact permit the activation, we say, of a feedback effect (referring back, in this case, to the syntagm *in the harbor of St. Maria*), causing the closing up, by way of analepsis, of the very first moment of the incipit. Not only that: by actualizing (materializing) its (ontological) sense, it also effects its (virtual) separation from the semantic indeterminacy of the second phrasal segment: *a small, desert, uninhabited island* [...]. This separation is ultimately confirmed by the presence of a causative verbal form: *had touched for water*, which is moreover connoted temporally. The temporal declination of the syntagm does indicate the possession of the present (a possession preceding, by force of the pluperfect, the verbal unit *lay at anchor*): it

⁸ "For the insecurity does not come from the things of the day world which the night conceals; it is due to the fact that nothing approaches, nothing comes, nothing threatens; this silence, this tranquillity, this void of sensations constitutes a mute, absolutely indeterminate menace. The indeterminateness constitutes its acuteness". Lévinas, *De l'existence à l'existant*, p.96; English translation: p.31.

suggests synchrony, coincidence, synthesis. Therefore, the very interruption or suspension of the temporal immemorability of the elemental on the part of a subject: *be*. Initially then, it is need which opens up space, which opens to its circumscription within the elemental, securing the utopian extraterritoriality of the I: *there*; and which starts the (finite) time of the ego, attesting to its presence within an horizon of absence.⁹ Ultimately, it is properly through the fulfillment of need that the separation (differentiation) of the I from the elemental gets accomplished: it is in the satisfaction of its needs that it is the same¹⁰; whereas to be same, let's repeat it once more, is for an I to have made its return to its self: *lay at anchor*. Rest attests to this very return. A being at rest has no longer anything to worry about: it is replete. It enjoys its own enjoyment in memory of its thirst: it is satisfied. Nothing pushes it to move, nothing troubles it, nothing menaces its peacefulness: it is back to its own self, it is in itself, *chez soi*.¹¹ Indifferent to the foreignness of the sky above it, to the 'impersonal vigilance of the night'¹², to the unfathomable deeps of the ocean, it has (corporally) established its base, its nest, its microcosm within the spaceless and timeless cosmos of the anonymous being. It can abandon itself to sleep.¹³

The dynamics of need defines in conclusion a negative (yet ingenuous¹⁴) movement: that is, that of involution. As a matter of fact, if the finality of need realizes (throughout its fulfillment) the separation (differentiation) of an I from the inhuman verbalism of the *there is*, this very realization does not render the I different but rather indifferent, so to

⁹ "The present is thus a situation within being where there is not only being in general, but where there is a being, a subject [...] despite its evanescence in time from whence we envisage it exclusively (the subject), or rather, thanks to this evanescence the present is the accomplishment of a subject". Lévinas, *De l'existence à l'existant*, pp.125-126 (my translation from French).

¹⁰ As Lévinas affirms, "to be cold, hungry, thirsty, naked, to seek shelter – all these dependencies with regard to the world, having become needs, save the instinctive being from anonymous menaces and constitute a being independent of the world, a veritable *subject* capable of ensuring the satisfaction of its needs, which are recognized as material, that is, as admitting of satisfaction [...] *in the satisfaction of need the alienness of the world that founds me loses its alterity: in satiety the real I sank my teeth into is assimilated, the forces that were in the other become my forces, become me* (and every satisfaction of need is in some respect nourishment). Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.116 and p.129, my emphasis.

¹¹ "To enjoy, to refuse the unconscious prolongations, to be thoughtless, that is, without ulterior motives, unequivocal, to break with all the implications – to maintain oneself at home with oneself". Lévinas, *ibid.*, p.139.

¹² The following paragraph opens at dawn: *not long after dawn*.

¹³ "To sleep, precisely means to confine our existence to a place, to a position [...] sleep re-establishes the relation with the place in so much as base. By lying down, by snuggling into a corner to sleep, we abandon ourselves to a place: it becomes our shelter in so much as base. All our efforts to be consist then in anything but to rest. To sleep is to enter into contact with the protective virtues of the place". Lévinas, *De l'existence à l'existant*, pp.119-120 (my trans. from French).

¹⁴ Devoid of evil: the naivety of need (its innocent egoism) is such out of its physiological thoughtlessness.

speak: the subject acts here solely for itself¹⁵ so as to retire, to snuggle up, once replete, into its own self. The fulfilment of need inaugurates the egoism of the ego: the well-being of a self-sufficient, autonomous, free but above all solitary existence.¹⁶

Awakening:

On the second day, not long after dawn, while lying in his berth,
his mate came below, informing him that a strange sail was coming into the bay.
Ships were then not so plenty in those waters as now.
He rose, dressed, and went on deck. (p.52)

The second paragraph is constituted by three phrases. The adverbial unit 'below' and the temporal moneme 'now' can be said to delimit its semantic core. The first part of the first phrase is closely related to the previous lexia: it is its natural projection. Daylight breaks in: nothing stirs, everything rests or seems to: *while lying in his berth*. The verbal form 'lying' retakes and expands conceptually the value of the initial 'lay', suggesting temporal duration.¹⁷ Within the first phrase it is also worth pointing out, with regard to the preceding paragraph, a progressive concentration or even contraction of space: ocean

¹⁵ "It is for itself as in the expression 'each for himself'; for itself as a 'famished stomach that has no ears', capable of killing for a crust of bread, is for itself; for itself as the surfeited one who does not understand the starving and approaches him as an alien species, as the philanthropist approaches the destitute." Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.118.

¹⁶ "Separation in the strictest sense is solitude, and enjoyment, happiness or unhappiness, is isolation itself [...] in enjoyment I am absolutely for myself. Egoist without reference to the Other [...] innocently egoist and alone. Not against the Others, not *as for me* [...], but entirely deaf to the Other, outside all communication and all refusal to communicate – without ears, like a hungry stomach". Lévinas, *ibid.*, p.117 and p.134. Elsewhere, the French philosopher affirms: "From the 'there is', the enveloping presence of anonymity, which weighs heavily on the human being, subjectivity emerges, despite that which annuls it. This first existing from self, an eruption from being, begins with the recognition of things [*choses*], but it is also a stage of enjoyment of life, of self-sufficiency. This love of self is an egotism that founds being and constitutes the first ontological experience. This experience foreshadows the opening and true existing from self. The human will pass through another decisive step, in which the subject, despite its satisfaction, fails to be sufficient unto itself. All existing from self represents the fissure that opens up [or may open up] in the same toward the other". Lévinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, Athlone, London, 1999, p.99. The importance of the semes 'pleasure' and 'solitude', constituent and contingent the subject of the enunciated, is also stressed out to a toponymic plane: Delano's ship bears the name *The Bachelor's Delight*. This toponymic detail, aimed at the identification of the American Captain with his vessel (utero-dwelling-world of the I), attests then to the correctness of our analysis. Additionally, one can notice that the moneme *delight* contains the seme *light*. As to the semic value of both light and darkness, see in particular the first and third chapter of this thesis. Finally, with regard to the signified of solitude, one should consider that Delano's adventure on board of the *strange sail* (see next paragraph) will be connoted not only by what we shall call 'metaphysical solitude' but also by a physical one: once on board, the American will be completely on his own.

¹⁷ The phenomenon of duration (*durée*), in which the following synchronizes itself, as Lévinas would put it, designates the occurred laceration of the 'cyclical' temporality of the elemental (that lasts without becoming) on the part of a subject.

(absolute outside) >ship (outside-inside) >berth (absolute inside: space of intimacy, coziness, sensibility and protection; nothing but the perimeter of a happy unconscious¹⁸). The intention is that of focusing on the subject of the enunciated, underlying its being *chez soi*, so to speak. Finally, let's consider the proleptic value of the temporal unit 'while': it announces the interruption of the time (time of pleasure) of the I, the epilogue of its well-being: *his mate came below, informing him that a strange sail was coming into bay*. The advent of the *strange sail* opens to diachrony or infinite that means the other. It opens to transcendence: *strange/was coming*, also compromising the spatial sovereignty of the 'Bachelor's Delight': *into the bay*. The slumber of the subjective entity is definitely broken, and so is the substantial auto-referentiality of the first paragraph: the finite can be said to have been breached by the infinite, the present by the future, the identity by the alterity; whose nature is evidenced by the second phrase: *ships were then not so plenty in those waters as now*. The metalepsis does here work to emphasize the extraordinary, unique but, above all, disturbing character of the event. Delano's awakening is anything but serene, tranquil: it is in truth almost violent. The other comes in without notice: it bursts into, disquieting, disturbing the I. The captain is immediately called outside: *he rose, dressed, and went on the deck*. The use of the asyndeton tones up the phrase (and the whole paragraph) dramatically, suggesting quickness, speediness: peculiar to someone who does not take its time.¹⁹ As to space, its order can be said to have been, once again, reversed: berth (absolute inside: in-itself) >ship (inside-outside: in-itself/ for-itself); containing, respectively, the signifieds of protection, security, happiness and vulnerability, uncertainty, unhappiness. The value of the interruption caused by the entering the scene of the *strange sail* should, therefore, be considered further. We should attentively consider the effects it has brought about and may bring about to an ontological plane. A situation that can be defined as 'heavenly' is suddenly interrupted, suspended. The unexpected comes to deflect the course of the events from their original path. Indeed, this is an unpleasant and painful deviation, precisely because the affirmation and firming up of the ego in its sameness has been put into question. We definitely have to take note of this. In other words, we suspect the need and will on the part of the I in its sameness to restore (as soon as possible) the former order of the events. That is to say, to go back to its original condition. Dialectically speaking, the

¹⁸ The berth is 'more' than a room: it is precisely the corner where a being, jealous of its own well-being, snuggles up.

¹⁹ Let's not forget that Lévinas, in the attempt of substantializing the concept of grasping of the present on the part of an I, recalls the etymology of the French word 'maintenant' (now): literally, holding something in one's own hand.

interruption of the time of pleasure can be thought as the unwanted emptying out of a fullfilled belly. This analogy well renders the idea then as to the necessity to fill up again the ego's 'hungry stomach', whatever the costs.²⁰ Delano's present condition is that of an I eager for itself, innocently moved to repatriate to its own self: ingenuously selfish and alone. This fact, as we shall demonstrate, is fundamental.

Exodus:

The morning was one peculiar to the coast. Everything was mute and calm; everything gray. The sea though undulated into long roods of swells, seemed fixed, and was sleeked at the surface like waved lead that has cooled and set in the smelter's mould. The sky seemed a gray surtout. Flights of troubled gray fowl, kith and kin with flights of troubled gray vapors among which they were mixed, skimmed low and fitfully over the waters, as swallows over the meadows before storms. Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come. (p.52)

With regard to the first two paragraphs, this one is structurally more complex. It comprises six phrases. To a topical plane, the first two refer transphrastically to the second clause of the first moment of the first lexia, as suggested by the syntactical-semantic centrality of the predicative adjectives 'peculiar', 'mute', 'calm' and 'gray'. The field of forces we are dealing with is, once again, that of the elemental: the suspension of the time of pleasure, determined by the entering the scene of the *strange sail*, reawakens to the anonymity of being in general, temporarily 'removed' with the accomplishment of the identity. The other un-does (intentional) time: it ruins the representation provoking the re-representation of the elemental in its spatio-temporal *éternullité*. In its mythical chronotopy: *the morning was one peculiar to the coast*. The I that is about to come to the world will be a sub-ject again: 'sobered up', as Lévinas would put it, from its identity and being. The morning Delano is about to see is one devoid of (de)light and clarity: uncertain, insecure, menacing, despite the apparent calmness and tranquillity. Within the first two phrases, one can also notice that to the ongoing syntactical desubstantialization corresponds a progressive semantic evanescence: the second phrase somehow works at expoliating the first one of its body, of its corporeity, so to speak. This hollowing or emptying out comes to define an absolute loss of referentiality: the drifting of the signifier. Being (*everything*) is not assumed, it is not assimilated: it does not respond (*mute*). It is pure existence without name. And note that the final clause, comprised by two

²⁰ Therefore, the entering the scene of the other would not break with monistic existence of the subject but, on the contrary, it would come to reinforce its own solitude and isolation.

monemes only, more specifically, an impersonal subject and a predicative adjective, is verbless. The verblessness, the ‘without-answer’ designates that one is in presence of the *there is*: it is in presence of absence, if we may say so.

And, it is precisely within the horror of the impersonal being, within its void of sensations that Delano is about to appear. The third phrasal entity, like the fourth and the fifth ones, inhere in fact to the subject of the enunciated: *the sea though undulated into long roods of swells, seemed fixed, and was sleeked at the surface like waved lead that has cooled and set in the smelter’s mould*. The look’s work can be said to be solidifying: it subtracts (or seems to: *seemed fixed*) the elemental from its indeterminateness (*gray*), transmuting it into (anonymous yet) form: *waved lead*. The elemental would coagulate, congeal in the receptacle of consciousness; delineating the shaping up of a world. The ungraspable lends itself (or seems to: *seemed*, once again) to perception’s grasp, to nominal substantialization, to noematization: *the sky seemed a gray surtout*. The lexeme *surtout* pertains to the dimension of the known, the familiar, the domestic. Its presence is in sum normalizing. It stills, as Lévinas would say, the anonymous rustling of the *there is*.²¹ It stills it precisely, yet it does not arrest it: *seemed; gray*. The image is not stable: it wavers on the limen of the abyss.²² The ‘funambulatory’ character of the image is intensified starting from the fifth phrase, within which is present but one active verbal form: *skimmed*, anything but a verb of stasis. The idea of grasping (of the present) is more and more evanescent. To an etymological plane, one can note that both the substantives *flights* and *fowl* share the same origin from German ‘fliegen’ (to fly), and consider also that the adjective ‘volatile’ (from Latin ‘volatilis’, from ‘volare’, literally ‘to fly’), in its substantival acceptation signifying a group of birds, means the process of evaporation of a substance at normal temperatures: *flights of troubled gray fowl, kith and kin* (the kinship is now clear) *with flights of troubled gray vapors among which they were mixed*. The sense of the phrase is volatility, evanescence, transcendence. The image is restless: *troubled* (repeated twice). It remains undetermined: the reiteration of the adjective *gray*. The subject is subtracted from the presence of the present, so to speak: he does not assimilate, he is unable to return to itself. The instant does not last: it passes without becoming. The present is, for the time being, one of absence, open onto the unknown of the future.²³

²¹ Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.160.

²² This unsteadiness, this ‘defective’ coagulation of the image, this faulty semiotic processing is due to the other *qua* diachronic time. See also next footnote.

²³ The following phrase: *shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come*. It has to be clear that the non-synchrony of the instant, of the following is not determined by the elemental’s temporality, but by the advent of the *strange sail*, whose temporality (latently) sustains the image.

Finally, let's focus on the analogical instance concluding the phrasal entity: *as swallows over the meadows before storms*. The analogy would seem to resolve in identity the alterity of the preceding imagery, thus confuting what we have said just now: one can consider the replacement of the impersonal moneme *fowl*²⁴ with *swallows*²⁵, as well as the substitution of the substantive *waters*, connotative of semic profundity, with *meadows*, whose connotative meaning defines stability, firmness, permanence, therefore possibility of grasping. Nevertheless, the idea of comprehension, of grasping of the present on the part of a subject, cannot be entirely sustained. The present is not fully realized: it remains open onto the yet-to-come. The analogy is in fact internally disturbed by diachrony: *before storms*. The image is disquieted by the yet-to-come, by the unknown; though it is about an unknown, and here is the point, resolved in terms of familiar. The menace that may be lurking in the future if not neutralized is thus, by force of the analogy, (imprudently) reduced. Or, to put this in other terms, normalized.

The idea of this normalization or reduction, as one prefers, demands further reflection. Let's question then, what, first and foremost, the very presence of the analogical instance does express? What does its formulation signify? A consciousness-of, we must answer: Delano knows that something is about to happen, to take place. The future is somehow conceived as such: the analogy does indicate primarily this. But then, what does it mean to conceive the future *as such*? It means to pre-vent it, better yet, is to be wanting to prevent it: to be conscious (of...) is to look forward to distance ourselves with regard to what we have unwillingly been associated with. It is ultimately to have the "possibility of making use of time", as Lévinas sharply puts it.²⁶ The having-consciousness-of would come to delineate the constituting of a temporal hiatus (the 'pre'), insinuating itself in-between the self and the imminence of the yet-to-come. The individuation of this interval, whose arising answers to the temporality of need²⁷, is extremely important: the impossibility of actualizing the yet-to-come in its entirety leaves open a margin, starting precisely from the idea of being-conscious-of, to the possibility of facing its in-coming by forestalling it, by anticipating it, by 'being on the safe side', so to speak. To an ontological plane, the subject is, in fact, in no way willing to 'bump into' the future, especially if he can conceive it as such. More than ever, if he has (or believes he has) time

²⁴ The identity of these birds is not only unknown but their foreignness is reinforced by the neuter lexeme *gray*.

²⁵ Note that the swallow is a commonly represented bird. It also pertains to the proverbial universe. The analogy itself inheres to a popular, doxological kind of heritage.

²⁶ Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.166.

²⁷ The 'pre' of the 'to prevent' is nothing but the 'for' of the 'for-itself'.

(read power) towards it. As we shall demonstrate, Delano maintains himself in a sort of indisposition towards the future: he forestalls it instead of letting it come, he approaches it full of presumption. The aetiology of this indisposition is in some way ingenuous: it is dictated by the ‘physical pain or evil’ of need. Once we are put in relation with what we do not know, we are instinctively moved to anticipate its possible threat: we always give ourselves a distance with regard to it. To forestall means to be able to still the fear of the unforeseeable: it is to reassure ourselves. Yet, it is precisely proceeding from the idea of possibility, the possibility (innocently haughty, arrogant) itself of playing time with time, of assuming the unknown, that the naïvety of need runs the risk of revealing its real face, so to speak: that is, surprisingly enough, that of imprudence. The chrono-ideological distance (already) separating the self from the imminence of the yet-to-come, risks in effect to slacken the subject’s vigilance with regard to it, namely, to drowse its sense of alertness towards the unknown. Delano would in sum indulge himself within the illusion of having gained a sort of a (security) distance: in conclusion, the analogy indicates precisely this. The notion of rest is, therefore, to be replaced by that of drowsiness.²⁸

Finally, let’s carry on with the exegesis of the last phrase: *shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come*. The phrasal texture relies on the syntactical centrality of the lexeme *shadow*, which is present both to a substantival and verbal plane (*foreshadowing*). The phrase’s main semes are those of absence, transcendence, profundity, connoted once again by the idea of time. Despite having already widely dealt with its phenomenology, we have left behind the principal question: that is, that of death. As a matter of fact, the alterity of the future is here ‘described’ in all its absoluteness: *foreshadowing deeper shadows to come*. In its mysterious diachrony, death is the event *par excellence*: pure futurity, total unforeseeability. The non-representable itself. The absolutely or ‘wholly other’, as Jankélévitch would say. The supervening future is to be sure one of radical absence.

²⁸ The image of the “white noddy, a strange fowl, so called from its lethargic, sonnambulistic character, being frequently caught by hand at sea” (p.54), would refer then to Delano’s figure.

(To desire...)

L'homme charnel pense seulement
à ce qu'il voit.

Jankélevitch

La séduction des yeux. La plus
immédiate, la plus pure.

Baudrillard

(d) The strange sail:

But whatever misgivings might have obtruded on first seeing the stranger, *would almost*, in any seaman's mind, have been dissipated by observing that, the ship, in navigating into the harbor, was drawing too near the land, for her own safety's sake, owing to a sunken reef making out off her bow. This seemed to prove her a stranger, indeed, not only to the sealer, but to the island; *consequently*, she could be no wanted freebooter on that ocean. (p.52-53, my emphasis)

The perception that the vessel may be in danger and that it may be a sail foreign to that particular geographical context, rouses Delano's curiosity: *with no small interest*, Captain Delano continued to watch her / *the longer the stranger was watched*. This paragraph, like the following one, is marked by the intention of making sense of the movements of the *strange sail*²⁹, of fixing, realizing its presence. This intention is somehow frustrated by the vapors partly mantling the hull, through which the far matin light from her cabin streamed equivocally enough and by a baffling wind, which the more increased the apparent uncertainty of her movements. First, we should focus on the semantic value of the adjectival unit *apparent*. Its presence is semantically equivocal: in the sense that it indicates both the idea of a factual evidence (lexically prevalent) and the illusion of this very evidence. The first semantic realm, inherent to the field of the visible, accommodates itself upon an evidence; the second one, pertaining to the oversensible (to a 'beyond of/behind vision'), should make us question the perceptive given. The first realm refers to the subject of the enunciated, the other would instead wink at the reader himself. In other words, to suspect the perceptive given is to suspect the movements of the *strange sail*: maybe to intuit, behind them, the shadow's calculus but is, above all, to pass from a surface-like reading of the text (able to actualize itself semantically) to a deep one (possibly destined to the drifting of the signifier): it ultimately means to convert a phenomenal uncertainty into a noumenal uncertainty. To identify the uncertain *qua* constitutive quality rather than *qua* formative

²⁹ "The longer the stranger was watched, the more singular appeared her maneuvers. Ere long it seemed hard to decide whether she meant to come in or no – what she wanted, or what she was about" (53).

one. In short, if read in its denotative character the syntagm *apparent uncertainty* becomes positive: the uncertainty of the *strange sail* is, for sure, certain (actualization of both the *Figuregebung* and *Sinngebung*); read ‘profoundly’ the syntagm negatives itself absolutely: the uncertainty of the sail’s movements is uncertain (*apparent*), the other remains wrapped in its mystery. The conclusive part of the following paragraph should, however, help to clarify our ideas:

With no small interest, Captain Delano continued to watch her – a proceeding not much facilitated by the vapors partly mantling the hull, through which the far matin light from her cabin streamed equivocally enough; much like the sun – by this time hemisphered on the rim of the horizon, and apparently, in company with the strange ship, entering the harbor – which, wimpled by the same low, creeping clouds, showed not unlike a Lima’s intrigante’s one sinister eye peering across the Plaza from the Indian loop-hole of her dusk *saya-y-manta*. (p.53)

The last phrase suggests in fact the existence of a perceptive reciprocity, so to speak: Delano observes the *strange sail* as the *strange sail* regards Delano. With a difference though: namely, the Captain is not aware of being watched (over). While the *strange sail* resists to a complete synopsis, the *Bachelor’s Delight* is totally exposed: it lies bare, without secrets. Finally, if Delano’s interest is apprehensive, benevolent, the stranger’s one is certainly not: *creeping clouds*, *intrigante*, *sinister eye*, *peering*, *dusk saya-y-manta*. The lexical choice is more than precise in this regard. There would be, then, as Jankélévitch puts it, “autre chose que l’actualité plate des apparences”.³⁰ Despite this, to the level of the enunciated, anticipation (imprudently) rules: “surmising, at last, that it might be a ship in distress, Captain Delano ordered his whale boat to be dropped, and, much to the wary opposition of his mate, prepared to board her, and, at the least, pilot her in” (p.53). The to-come is determined, comprehended, somehow transmuted into destiny. As a corroboration of what we have previously said, one can note that the temporality of the paragraph relies entirely on the idea of the ‘pre’: “*surmising at last / presuming* that the stranger might have been long off soundings, the good Captain put several baskets of fish, for presents, into his boat, and so pulled away [...]”/ “*deeming her in danger*, calling to his men, he made all haste to apprise those on board of their situation”(ibid.). Delano acts by being on the safe side, by (impatiently) preventing the event, and he does so precisely in the attempt to resolve its disorder in order, its ‘malaise’ into well-being. Finally, consider that to the

³⁰ “There would be something else than the flat actuality of appearances”. Jankélévitch, *La mort*, p.48 (my trans.).

apparent passivity of the *strange sail* opposes (but also corresponds) Delano's frantic activity. The following paragraphs describe the semic contrast appearance/essence:

Upon gaining a less remote view, the ship, when made signally visible on the verge of the leaden-hued swells, with the shreds of fog here and there raggedly furring her, appeared like a white washed monastery after a thunder-storm, seen perched upon some dun cliff among the Pyrenees. But it was no purely fanciful resemblance that nothing less than a ship-load of monks was before him. Peering over the bulwarks were what really seemed, in the hazy distance, throngs of dark cowls; while fitfully revealed through the open port-holes, other dark moving figures were dimly described, as of Black friars pacing the cloisters. (p.53-54)

Upon a still nigher approach, this appearance was modified, and the true character of the vessel was plain – a Spanish merchantman of the first class; carrying negro slaves, amongst other valuable freight, from one colonial port to the other. A very large, and, in its time, a very fine vessel, such as in those days were at intervals encountered along the main, sometimes superseded. Acapulco treasure-ships, or retired frigates of the Spanish king's navy, which, like some superannuated Italian palaces, still, under a decline of masters, preserved signs of former state. (p.54)

The first lexia is dominated by the analogy: *appeared like a white washed monastery after a thunder-storm, seen perched upon some dun cliff among the Pyrenees* [...]. The analogical instance translates the semantic apathy of the event (gray: *leaden-hued swells, shreds of fog here and there raggedly furring her*) into a binary system³¹ (white and/or black: *white washed monastery; monks, dark cowls, dark moving figures, Black Friars*). Yet, despite the improved visibility (*when made signally visible*), the object's resolution is still disturbed: *hazy distance, dimly described*. The presence's present remains open onto the future. Nevertheless, one can consider, with respect to the first analyzed similitude, the delineating of an idea (however fragile, precarious it may be) of continuity, *durée: before storms/after storms*. The two temporal indicators mark, respectively, a 'before' and 'after' the event. Precisely with reference to the idea of the 'before' and 'after', it is worth pointing out an opposite movement of the intentional consciousness: the first analogy somehow conceives the future by stepping back into the field of memory; the yet-to-come is determined through a retrospective movement. The second one on the other hand, where there is consciousness that the event has taken place, tends to prospection, it is projected ahead of itself. As to the isotopy of space, with regard to the first analogy, it is possible to outline the following opposition: low (*meadows: connotative of immanence*) versus high ([...] *seen perched upon some dun cliff among the Pyrenees*). Finally, let's note the different nature of the two images: while

³¹ The 'two' is the number of the identity, of equivalence: of the double.

the first one pertains to a familiar context, the second one appertains to an exotic milieu. The comparative analysis delineates, then, an (imprudent) disconnection from the real: the second image can be said to be suspended above the abyss: nothing sustains it, it has no 'body'; although the represented object appears as real, concrete, material to the perceiving consciousness: *what really seemed*. Still further, the intentional approach to the other is of an inverse sense. The first similitude suggests the idea of comprehension: the alterity of the event is presumed, somehow assimilated, possessed. The object of vision is absorbed within the subject's field of forces, resolved in *sa-voir*. In the second one, the concept of *sa-voir* is not sustainable as the representation would not, to speak properly, connote a *gnōsis* but rather an ecstasis. What appears infinitely surprises the onlooker: *a white washed monastery [...]*.³² Delano is here, in some way, emotionally overwhelmed by what he himself imaginatively constitutes: his imagination takes over, superimposing itself on reality.³³ The notion of height, representing the main sense of the analogy, does but evidence this fact: the self is subject-ed *to* the vision rather than being the subject of the vision. He can be said to be opiated by its mystery, by its magic. He is simply bursting with excitement, he throbs with impatience in view of his delight.³⁴ Yet, *this appearance was modified, and the true character of the vessel was plain*. The *strange sail* is now present. The use of temporal-figurative isotopies (mythically connoted) in the presentation of the vessel is curious: *in its time; such as in those days; at intervals encountered; like superannuated Italian palaces*. The temporal isotopies in the strict sense also define *durée*, temporalization: the former existence of the representation in opposition to its actual ruin: [...] *still, under a decline of masters, preserved signs of former state*. The adverbial unit *still* functions as a temporal connector, weaving a mythical past with a present of total

³² The ecstatic character of the representation is due to the absolute alterity of the event: in the impossibility of determining the unknown through the filter of the known, consciousness is moved, as Sartre would say, by its emotions, which end up in attributing to the object "something that infinitely transcends it". "Indeed", affirms the French philosopher, "there is a world of emotion. All emotions have this in common, that they evoke the appearance of a world, cruel, terrible, bleak, joyful, etc., but in which the relations of things to consciousness are always and exclusively magical. We have to speak of a world of emotion as one speaks of a world of dreams or of worlds of madness". Sartre, *Sketch for a theory of the emotion*, p.81.

³³ Sartre affirms: "the magical world appears, takes form, and then closes in on the consciousness and clutches it: it cannot even wish to escape, it may seek to flee from the magical object, but to flee from it is to give it more magical reality than ever. And this very condition of captivity is not in itself realized by the consciousness, which attributes it to the object – it is they (the emotions) that are captivating, imprisoning it, they have taken total possession of the consciousness. *Liberation can come only from a purifying reflection or from the total disappearance of the emotional situation*". Sartre, *Sketch for a theory of the emotion*, p.82 (my emphasis).

³⁴ "Enjoyment is an enjoying of enjoyment, always wanting with regard to itself, filling itself with these lacks for which contentment is promised, satisfying itself already with this impatient process of satisfaction, enjoying its own appetite". Lévinas, *Otherwise than being*, p.92.

absence. The *San Dominick*³⁵, this is the name of the ship, is nothing less than the echo of its antique splendour. *Like superannuated Italian palaces*, its presence lasts without becoming, so to speak. The impression is that of a vessel coming out of the deeps of the past: it's as if it were just emerged from the night of times³⁶, step-by-step un-veiling its transtemporal monumentality, its sublime beauty, its unspeakable mystery. Finally, one can consider how to the illusion of fullness, suggested in the preceding paragraph, (already) opposes and succeeds the reality of an (absolute) emptiness.

For the sake of conciseness, we shall summarize the description of the *strange sail* in three main fields of semantic attraction.³⁷ Images of decline, decadence and carelessness:

A1- "the cause of the peculiar pipe-clayed aspect of the stranger was seen in the slovenly neglect pervading her" (p.54).

A2- "the spars, ropes, and great part of the bulwarks, looked wholly, from long unacquaintance" (ibid.).

A3- "the tops were large, and were railed about with what had once been octagonal network, all now in sad disrepair" (ibid.).

A4- "battered and mouldy, the castellated fore-castle seemed some ancient turret, long ago taken by assault, and then left to decay" (ibid.).

A5- "but the principal relic of faded grandeur was the ample oval of the shield-like stern-piece, intricately carved with the arms of Castille and Leon" (ibid.).

A6- "in stately capitals, once gilt, the ship's name, "San Dominick", each letter streakingly corroded with tricklings of copper-spike rust" (p.55).

Images of closedness, impenetrableness, mystery and semantic ambiguity:

B1- "the balaustrades here and there covered with dry, tindery sea-moss" (p.54).

B2- the lights from the state cabin "for all the mild weather, were hermetically closed and chalked" (ibid.).

B3- "uppermost and central of which (the shield-like stern-piece) was a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked" (ibid. my parenthesis).

B4- "whether the ship had a figure-head, or only a plain beak, was not quite certain, owing to canvas wrapped about that part" (ibid.).

Images of absence, death and mourning:

³⁵ The name of the vessel summarizes and 'justifies' the conventual imagery. Let's not forget that the members of the St. Dominic's orders became known as Black Friars.

³⁶ The following image: *the ship seems unreal; these strange costumes, gestures, and faces, but a shadowy tableau just emerged from the deep, which directly must receive back what it gave.* (p.56). It is the image of the "Phantom Ship". As to, more specifically, this very last phrase, the idea of creation (*ex-nihilo*) is accompanied with that of decreation: *which directly must receive back what it gave.* Idea defined by death itself: "la mort", as Jankélévitch claims, "est littéralment decreation". Jankélévitch, *La mort*, p.73.

³⁷ We retain here the schematic pattern used by Mario Materassi in his brilliant analysis of "Benito Cereno". Vide Materassi, Mario, "L'idolo nell'occhio", in *Melvilliana*, pp.79-107.

- C1- the ships seems to have been launched “from Ezekiel’s Valley of Dry Bones”³⁸
 C2- the state cabin is “unoccupied” (ibid.).
 C3- the lights from the state-cabin are “dead” (ibid.).
 C4- the balconies toward the stern are “tenantless” (ibid.).
 C5- “like mourning weeds, dark festoons of sea-grass slimily swept to and fro over the name, with every hearse-like roll of the hull” (p.55).

The semic density is given by the following semes: ruin (of the representation), mystery (read profundity, transcendence), absence in connection with the principal seme of death. The presence’s present is not entirely present, so to speak: it does not actualize itself, it does not materialize itself. It is ultimately yet to come.

(e) Suggestion³⁹:

Then the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the nations of the world in all their greatness and splendor. And he said, ‘All this I will give you, if you kneel and worship me’.

Matthew 4, 8-10

Climbing the side, the visitor was at once surrounded by a clamorous throng of whites and blacks, but the latter outnumbering the former more than could have been expected, negro transportation-ship as the stranger in port was. But, in one language, and with one voice, all poured out a common tale of suffering; in which the negresses, of whom there were not a few, exceeded the others in their dolorous vehemence. The scurvy, together with a fever, had swept off a great part of their number, more especially the Spaniards. Off Cape Horn, they had narrowly escaped ship-wreck; then, for days together, they had lain tranced without wind; their provisions were low, their water next to none; their lips that moment were baked. While Captain Delano was thus made the mark of all eager tongues, his one eager glance took in all the faces, with every other object about him. (p.55)

The allusion to the vision of Ezekiel, furnished in relation to the *strange sail*, realizes here all its pertinence: in the famous symbolical vision of God’s potency, the bones of the dead will in fact reassemble and cover themselves with flesh, changing into real persons, just as, metaphorically, happens on board of the *San Dominick*.⁴⁰ On a semantic plane, it is possible, then, once again, to draw the following semic inversions: to an (absolute)

³⁸ Materassi, Mario, ibid. p.91.

³⁹ We shall interpret this lexeme in its theological acceptation: in the sense “an incitement to evil; a temptation of the Evil One”.

⁴⁰ “I prophesied as I had been commanded and then there was a noise and commotion; the bones joined together. I looked and saw that they had sinews, that flesh was growing on them and that he was covering them with skin. But there was no spirit in them...I prophesied as he had commanded me and breath entered them; they came alive, standing on their feet – a great, immense army!”. Ezekiel 37, 7-8 and 10. Source: Bianchi, *I racconti della Veranda*, p.56, footnote 6.

absence succeeds presence, to obscurity light, to emptiness the possibility of fullness. These constant semic overturnings not only come to exacerbate the absolute semantic precariousness of the real, but they structure, it should be clear, its essential ambiguity.

Let's proceed with the analysis of the paragraph as such. First, we shall identify under the notion of materiality or matter (as a product of the phenomenon of the embodiment of the real) the umbrella-sense of this lexia. In this regard, one can consider the choral, univocal, monosemic character of the Other's presence: *but in one language, and with one voice, all poured out a common tale of suffering*. The Other (docilely, submissively) opens/offers itself to the gaze's grasp without opposing any (semantic) resistance⁴¹, letting itself be encompassed, comprehended in all its totality: *While Captain Delano was thus made the mark of all eager tongues, his one eager glance took in all the faces, with every other object about him*. The temporal unit *while* defines synchrony: the outside does perfectly coincide with the inside. The use of the same adjectival entity within the two clauses (*eager*) also bespeaks an absolute intentional reciprocity between the subject and the object of its vision: if, on the one hand, one is waiting 'to be grasped', on the other, one cannot wait 'to grasp', so to speak. To Delano's eyes, the Other's presence is, in this sense, not just tranquillizing: the comprehension of the present signifies (to the American) a having-consciousness of his height⁴² and sovereignty⁴³ with regard to the manifested world, but it is equally tempting: starting precisely from the idea of erection, the Captain is being seduced by dreams of power and possession.⁴⁴ His look widens as far as embracing the horizon in all its entirety: *with every object about him*. The future is in sum being contemplated and therefore forthwith understood in terms of material achievement: Delano would no longer be

⁴¹ What opposes resistance is indeed painful.

⁴² Another semic inversion or, at least, the illusion of an inversion is here actualized (this elevation, promoted by the Other, is but a deceit: it is equal, as we shall demonstrate, to a falling of the self). In this particular context, the idea of height, already containing the signifieds of self-sufficiency, power, solitude and free-will, comes to acquire an extra connotation: Delano is in fact elevated to a sort of divine figure, capable of liberating from sufferance. He can be said to be elevated or even elected to Lord or Master of the visible. The concept sustaining the image is, ultimately, that of the Man-God.

⁴³ This sovereignty is connoted ethnically (whites *versus* blacks: "surrounded by a clamorous throng of whites and blacks, but the latter outnumbering the former more than one could have expected") as well as posited on a gender-like basis (man *versus* woman: "in which the negresses, of whom there were not a few). As to the first isotopy, it is worth underlining that, starting precisely from the de-position of the Other in the hands of the Same, the ethnical prevalence of the Blacks is somehow annulled. We might even venture to say that the idea of sovereignty (of 'white' dominion) comes to resolve, in the eyes of the American, another isotopy which, though still connected to the latter, is of a higher degree: that is, that culture *versus* nature, within which the second isotopy is also to be included (woman/nature *v* man/culture). In relation to the figure of the woman in the American literature of the nineteenth century (we are thinking of Edgar Allan Poe in particular, who diffusedly influenced Melville's work), it is worth recalling to mind the fact that she generally embodies transcendence: the woman often epitomizes the 'spirit of change' (let's think of Berenice for example), beside being a symbol of seduction.

⁴⁴ "The 'I can' proceeds from this height", says Lévinas. Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.117.

confronted with hundreds of apparently long-suffering human beings but rather with hundreds of slaves (seemingly without master), whose sufferance is now to him nothing less than a profitable investment. The sight of the *clamorous throng* beneath him ultimately “opens all space to desire”, to borrow Starobinski’s excellent expression.⁴⁵

We clearly have to think this further: first and foremost if desire does originate from its object rather than starting off from the subject itself as need for instance, it follows that the object one sees/desires *must* already carry with itself ‘something’ that makes it desirable to the subject that sees/desires it. In short, something which is able to seduce us, triggering (hence coinciding with) our inmost desires: something which is *for us* (*pour nous*).⁴⁶ Without entering here into a round of speculations and to come back to our analysis, we say that the hundreds of people on deck represent to Delano’s eyes that very ‘something’ that is able to animate his desire. The other ultimately seduces the same precisely by effecting the habitual, the familiar and more particularly by effecting a very tranquillizing isotopy: that is, that of master/slave; which indeed generates its passion. Delano would be therefore thrown into the ‘turbulence’ (Heidegger) of desire, from which, according to Petrosino, echoing Nietzsche, there is no redemption (and therefore, as far as we are concerned, no rest either).⁴⁷ Yet, the question is: what does render (ontological or equally economic) desire such a dangerous, fatal feeling? In this very case, we say that its danger properly resides in the fact that the American is allusively made to conceive the future as possible of realization. The ‘evil or physical pain’ of the not-yet of this very realization would in fact be euphorically removed by force of a certainty. A certainty which is, of course, but illusory: the comprehension of the present, like a *démon de la tautologie* (Rosset), *does* push the subject into what Heidegger calls “the tranquillized supposition that it possesses everything, or that everything is within its reach”.⁴⁸ The other finally opens to the security of a future devoid of resistance (devoid of death) in

⁴⁵ Starobinski, *The Living eye*, p.4. The subject would thus perceive the world both in the measure of (its) need(s) but also, at the same time, in the ‘beyond measure’ of (its) desire(s). In this regard, we shall retain the distinction between desire and need formulated by Lévinas: “desire”, says the philosopher, “is an aspiration that the Desirable animates; *it originates from ‘its object’*; it is revelation – whereas need is a void of the Soul; *it proceeds from the subject*” [...] “in need I can sink my teeth into the real and satisfy myself in assimilating the other; in Desire there is no sinking one’s teeth into being, no satiety, but an uncharted future before me”. Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.62 and p.117 (my emphasis).

⁴⁶ The formula is V. Descombe’s from his *L’incosciant malgré lui*, in Baudrillard, Jean, *De la séduction*, Galilée, Paris, 1979, p.96.

⁴⁷ Petrosino, *Visione e Desiderio*, p.196. In relation to this, Heidegger affirms: “When Dasein, tranquillized, and ‘understanding’ everything, thus compares itself with everything, it drifts along towards an alienation [Entfremdung] in which its ownmost potentiality-for-being is hidden from it. *Falling Being-in-the-world is not only tempting and tranquillizing; it is at the same time alienating*”. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.222.

⁴⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.223.

which everything is for sure within reach: that is, ready to hand, graspable. Delano can be said to feel as if he were invested with an extraordinary, fabulous power but of which he does neither question the origin nor the effectiveness. Finally, the ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ that determines desire as such can also be said to push one into a total inattentiveness or, equally, irresponsibility with regard to the “to the world as it is”.⁴⁹ Indeed, a black spell has been casted onto the American:

Always upon first boarding a large and populous ship at sea, especially a foreign one, with a nondescript crew such as Lascars or Manilla men, the impression varies in a peculiar way from that produced by first entering a strange house with strange inmates in a strange land. Both house and ship, the one by its walls and blinds, the other by its high bulwarks like ramparts, hoard from view their interiors till the last moment; but in the case of the ship there is this addition; that the living spectacle it contains, upon its sudden and complete disclosure, has, in contrast with the blank ocean which zones it, *something of the effect of enchantment*.⁵⁰ (p.55, my emphasis)

The two following paragraphs complete the description of the *San Dominick* and its crew. Looking up towards the upperdeck (that is, towards the bow):

the conspicuous figures of four elderly grizzled negroes, their heads like black, doddered willow tops, who, in venerable contrast to the tumult below them, were couched sphynx-like, one on the star-board cat-head⁵¹, another on the larboard⁵², and the remaining pair face to face on the opposite bulwarks above the main-chains.⁵³ They each had bits of unstranded old junk in their hands, and, with a sort of stoical self-content, were picking the junk into oakum, a small heap of which lay by their sides. They accompanied the task with a continuous, low, monotonous chant, droning and druling away like so many gray-headed bag-pipers playing a funeral march. (p.56)

With regard to Delano, the position of the *four elderly grizzled negroes* is denoted by height: the Captain is below them, together with the rest of the blacks and the minority of the whites. The idea of height is to be associated with that of order: *in venerable contrast to the*

⁴⁹ “To be fascinated is the height of distraction. It is to be prodigiously inattentive to the world as it is”. Starobinski, *The living eye*, p.2.

⁵⁰ “To seduce is to die *qua* reality and produce oneself *qua* deception. It is to assume oneself deceitfully and move in an enchanted world”. Baudrillard, *De la séduction*, p.98 (my trans. from French and my emphasis) In relation to this, we should take note of the symbolical value of the term ‘enchantment’: in the sense “a reduction to an inferior state” (Cirlot). Still further, note that the enchantment “can also take the form of disappearance, translation to a distant place, or illness (generally: paralysis, dumbness, blindness)” [Cirlot]. Furthermore, “in traditional tales, if the enchantment is the work of a malign power (necromancer, black magician, sorcerer, dragon etc.), it will always be lifted by the action of a hero who providentially intervenes with his powers of salvation and liberation”. Cirlot, J.E., *A Dictionary of symbols*, p.97.

⁵¹ On the right hand side.

⁵² On the left hand side.

⁵³ That is, looking in the direction of the stern.

tumult below. The idea of order is also stressed out onto a spatial plane: note that each unit of the two couple is symmetrical to the other. The first couple is located on the bow, the second on the stern, respectively on the upper and quarter-deck. Delano occupies a central position on the main-deck: he finds himself at the very centre of a quaternary system.⁵⁴ Still further, given the singular height of the bulwarks (*its high bulwarks like ramparts*), the American would not only be at the centre of it but ‘within’ it (from whence, the ‘normalizing’ equation house/ship⁵⁵). Yet, the graticulated form of the tops (*railed about with what had once been octagonal net-work*), *hanging overhead like three ruinous aviaries*, finally crystallizes the impression of being enclosed within a prison, within a *strange sail*, in the midst of *the blank ocean which zones it*.

The concept of enclosure or imprisonment should be interpreted within the thematic horizon previously outlined: Delano is, first and foremost, prisoner of his own self in the manner of a subjection to matter.⁵⁶ To conclude, the phenomenon of chant, of the sing-song can also be said to have a seductive effect on him: *they accompanied the task with a continuous, low, monotonous chant; droning and druling away like so many gray-headed bag-pipers playing a funeral march*. As Baudrillard argues: “if seduction is artificial, it is also sacrificial. Death is at stake, it is always about to captivate or immolate the other’s desire”.⁵⁷

The quarter-deck rose into an ample elevated poop, upon the forward verge of which, lifted, like the oakum-pickers, some eight feet above the general throng, sat along in a row, separated by regular spaces, the cross-legged figures of six other blacks; each with a rusty hatchet in his hand, which, with a bit of brick and a rag, he was engaged like a scullion in scouring; while between each two was a small stack of hatchets, their rusted edges turned forward awaiting a like operation. Though occasionally the four oakum-pickers would briefly address some person or persons

⁵⁴ As well as at the centre of a circumference (enclosed within the quaternary): “climbing the side, the visitor was at once *surrounded by a clamorous throng*”. The circumference, according to Cirlot, is “a symbol of adequate limitation, of the manifest world, of the precise and the regular”. Cirlot, J.E., *ibid.* p.48. As to the symbology of the quaternary and the number four, Cirlot, quoting Plato, states: “the quaternary is the number pertaining with the realisation of an idea [...] the quaternary, then, corresponds to earth, *to the material pattern of life*. *Ibid.* p.268 (my emphasis).

⁵⁵ However, the result of this equation remains semantically unstable: as a matter of fact, the removal of the lexemes *ship*, *sailors* and *ocean* for *house*, *inmates* and *land* (and consider the substitution of the semanteme *water* with *earth*) not only fails to eliminate the disturbing character of the real but it seems to reinforce it: *a strange house with strange inmates in a strange land*. Instead of attaining a full normalization of reality, the semiotic process ends up in turning what is, at first, foreign into something strangely or even disturbingly familiar.

⁵⁶ “Matter”, says Lévinas, “is hypostasis’ unhappy fate. Solitude and matter are inseparable”. Lévinas, *Il tempo e l’Altro*, p.31 (my trans.). Additionally, Heidegger affirms: “The phenomena we have pointed out - temptation, tranquillizing, alienation and self-entangling (entanglement) – characterize the specific kind of being which belongs to falling. This ‘movement’ of Dasein in its own being, we call its ‘downward plunge’ [Absturz]. Dasein plunges out of itself into itself, *into the groundlessness and nullity of inauthentic everydayness*”. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.223 (my emphasis).

⁵⁷Baudrillard, *De la séduction*, p.120 (my trans.).

in the crowd below; yet the six hatchet-polishers neither spoke to others, nor breathed a whisper among themselves, but sat intent upon their task, except at intervals, when, with the peculiar love in negroes in uniting industry with pastime, two and two they sideways clashed their hatchets together, like cymbals, with a barbarous din. (p.56)

This lexia shares common senses with the previous one: especially, those of height and order. However, with respect to the *four oakum-pickers*, the position of the *hatchet-polishers* does benefit of a higher elevation: *the quarter-deck rose into an ample elevated poop/ some eight feet above the general throng*. It is possible, then, to define the existence of three planes of reality, so to say: Delano would occupy the lowest level of it, the *oakum-pickers* the intermediary one and the *hatchet-polishers* the highest. The visible space would then be arranged in order of rank.

Further to this and in relation to the metaphorical occurrence: *with the peculiar love in negroes of uniting industry with pastime*, is evident its prejudicial nature. Yet, the actualization of the 'pre' is again set off by the outside, so to speak: the semic couple labor+music does in fact perfectly suit the American's 'views', namely, his racism. The effecting of the habitual is certainly the main objective of the Africans: by allowing a domestic comprehension/possession of the 'world as it is', not only do they prevent the subject from critically questioning it⁵⁸ but they also maintain it fatally focused on the ahead-of-itself of desire.

But that first comprehensive glance which took in those ten figures, with scores less conspicuous, *rested but an instant upon them, as, impatient of the hubbub of voices*⁵⁹, the visitor turned in quest of whomsoever it might be that commanded the ship. (p.56, my emphasis)

⁵⁸ In the legal deposition comprising the very last pages of the text, we are told: "that of this sort was the device of the six Ashantees before named, who were his [Babo's] bravoos; that them he stationed on the break of the poop, as if to clean certain hatchets (in cases, which were part of the cargo), but in reality to use them, and distribute them at need, and at any given word he told them". p.118. Note also that in symbology the hatchet is commonly associated with the idea of power and more precisely of the power of light as well as with the idea of death (ordered by a deity). Source: Cirlot, *Dictionary of symbols*, pp.21-22. Ponzio's distinction between ontological and critical knowledge should here also be borne in mind: "we call *ontology* the knowledge of things that relies on the illusion that they have been reduced to the firm possession of the I and that, ultimately, annuls their heterogeneity with regard to the I; and we call *critic* the knowledge that aims at respecting things, that puts into question what is considered to be the I's firm possession, that lets the known being manifest itself the way it is and that, thus, puts in doubt what was retained to be an unquestionable knowledge [...] It can be said, then, that the critical knowledge [...] puts into question the totalization of reality actualized by the I (ontology), and moves the I to reconsider things with more attention and attaining more to the way they present themselves, that is, respecting them." Ponzio, Augusto, *Responsabilità e alterità in Emmanuel Lévinas*, Jaca, Milano, 1995, p.98 (my trans. from Italian).

⁵⁹ "Far from expressing an interest for the real, desire does instead posit itself outside its orbit, working to reduce all contact with it. The relation between desire and reality, gets reduced to a mere relation of allergy, of intolerance [...]" Rosset, *ibid.* p.43.

(f) Benito Cereno:

When I take a retrospective view of my life, I cannot find in my soul that I have ever done anything to deserve such misery and ingratitude as I have suffered at different periods, and in general, from the very persons to whom I have rendered the greatest services.

A. Delano, "Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres" (1817)

The Work, thought as far as possible, demands a radical generosity of the Same who, in the Work, goes towards the other. In consequence the Work demands an *ingratitude* of the other. Gratitude would be precisely the return of the movement to its origin.

Lévinas⁶⁰

But as if not unwilling to let nature make known her own case among his suffering charge, or else in despair of restraining it for the time, the Spanish Captain, a gentlemanly reserved-looking, and rather young man to a stranger's eye, dressed with singular richness, but bearing plain traces of recent sleepless cares and disquietudes, stood passively by, leaning against the main-mast, at one moment casting a dreary, spiritless look upon his excited people, at the next an unhappy glance toward his visitor. By his side stood a black of small stature, in whose rude face, as occasionally, like a shepherd's dog, he mutely turned it up into the Spaniard's, sorrow and affection were equally blended. (p.57)

Like Delano, Benito Cereno is on the main-deck, that is, on the lowest level of the ship. However, unlike most of the people on board, he occupies a very isolated position: *stood passively by, leaning against the main-mast casting a dreary, spiritless look upon his excited people...*⁶¹. He stands immobile *just like a block* (p.59).⁶² Yet, to a physical inertia opposes a mental restlessness: *but bearing plain traces of recent sleepless cares and disquietudes*. Once again, for the very sake of conciseness, we shall summarize the main traits constituent and contingent Benito's figure in: images of absence, closedness, passivity and illness (both physical and mental) in connection with the semanteme of death:

⁶⁰ Commenting on this very passage from *The Trace of the Other* (in *Deconstruction in Context*, ed. Mark Taylor, Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1986, p.348), Simon Critchley affirms: "In order to stop the ethical work returning to the Same, the Other must receive the work *ungratefully*, because the movement of gratitude returns to the Same, as in the case of philanthropy. Therefore, one should not be grateful for ethical works". Critchley, S., "BOIS"- *Derrida's final word on Lévinas*, in *Re-reading Lévinas*, Indiana Univ.Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1991, p.164. In other words, to allow the ethical work to *work* there must be a resistance (indeed ethical) on the part of the Other towards the Same: there must be the casting of a *no*, which is to guarantee the breaking up of the circle of ipseity, that is, the eternal return of the I to itself.

⁶¹ Consider the contrast *dreary, spiritless/excited* (passivity *versus* activity, darkness *versus* light).

⁶² Further on, Delano is said to be *a man at the block*. The idea of motionlessness pertains to the semantic realm of death.

A1- Cereno's look towards his people is "dreary" and "spiritless".

A2- "His mind appeared unstrung, if not still more seriously affected".

A3- "Shut up in these oaken walls, chained to one dull round of command, whose unconditionality cloyed him, like some hypochondriac abbot he moved slowly about, at times suddenly pausing, starting or staring, biting his lip, biting his finger-nail, flushing, paling, twitching his beard, with other symptoms of an absent or moody mind.

A4- "He was rather tall, but seemed never to have been robust, and now with nervous suffering was almost worn to a skeleton.

A5- "His voice was like that of one with lungs half gone, hoarsely suppressed, a husky whisper". (All quotations, except A1 (p.57), are at p.58)

In A1 (semes: absence/death) and A3 [semes: closedness (imprisonment), illness, absence] is suggested a precise semantic link with the *San Dominick* and, more especially, with the description of the *unoccupied state cabin*⁶³, whose *dead lights...were hermetically closed and calked*.⁶⁴ In A4, the connection is even more explicit: the skeleton-like figure of the Captain recalls to mind the skeletal keel of the vessel, which seems to have been launched from Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones. Still in A3, the presence of the lexeme *abbot* refers back thematically to the image of the *San Dominick* as a *white washed monastery*. The monastic imagery is also retaken further on, though indirectly: *his (Cereno's) manner upon such occasions was, in its degree, not unlike that which might be supposed to have been his imperial countryman's, Charles V, just previous to the anchoritish retirement of that monarch from the throne*.⁶⁵ Moreover, A4 and A5, connoted temporally (past *versus* present⁶⁶), would express the idea of decline, decadence and destitution. Finally, still in A3, it is significant the presence of the adjective *hypochondriac*. The evil (in the sense of physical and mental pain) afflicting Cereno is here maliciously reduced to an imaginary one. Delano can be said to be far from taking the Spaniard's *incurable disorder* seriously. Yet, before investigating the character of relation between the two Captains, we should opportunely focus on Babo's figure. And this, simply because the American perceives both Cereno and his faithful servant at the same time. The character of relation or non-relation, as we shall see, between Delano and the Spaniard should in fact be read starting from and within the character of relation between Delano and Babo and, more profoundly, within the thematics of desire:

⁶³ The syntagm would express, first and foremost, a void of power. Cereno is not where he should be.

⁶⁴ The *dead lights* like eyes.

⁶⁵ Charles V retired (and died) in the monastery of Yuste, in Estremadura. This datum anticipates the exit of the tale: "[...] and across the Rimac bridge looked towards the monastery, on Mount Agonia without; where, three months after being dismissed by the court, Benito Cereno, borne on the bier, did, indeed, follow his leader. Bianchi, Ruggero, *I racconti della veranda di Herman Melville*, footnote 13.

⁶⁶ This present (of absence) would be open onto the to-come of death. In A5, Cereno's imminent death is announced: in medicine, difficulty of breathing is always associated with death.

B1- Babo is “like a shepherd’s dog”.

B2- Babo performs his offices towards the Spaniard “with that affectionate zeal which transmutes into something filial or fraternal acts in themselves but menial; and which has gained for the negro the repute of making the most pleasing body servant in the world”.

B3- Babo is “less a servant than a devoted companion, whom a master need to be on no stiffly superior terms with, but may treat with familiar trust”.

B4- With regard to the “noisy indocility of the blacks” and to “what seemed the sullen inefficiency of the whites”, Captain Delano witnesses “the steady good conduct of Babo” with “humane satisfaction”. (p.57-58)

The semes of servility, familiarity and fidelity are common to all instances. Indeed, these are positive, ‘solar’ semes: namely, ego-syntonic ones. To Delano’s eyes, Babo is not just a servant but an ideal one, *whom a master may treat with familiar trust*. It can be said that the subject of the enunciated enjoys what he is looking at: he enjoys the spectacle/representation (in particular B2 and B4). Babo is *present* to Delano, so to speak: he concedes himself to the donation of sense, he lets himself be com-prehended; whereas the phenomenon of comprehension defines the knotting of time, representation; real wonder, as Lévinas puts it, of immanence. The character of relation that Babo opens to is, thus, reassuring, pleasing, devoid of any resistance. The black, like a personified demon of tautology, makes the American feel ‘at home’, so conquering his sympathy of white master. Still further, the notion of tranquillizing is to be associated, necessarily so, with that of temptation. In effect, Babo (consider the catchiness of his name) not only does come to fulfil the American’s want of comprehension but he nourishes his desire, directing towards himself (Babo) the libidinal investment of it. We shall come back to this. Suffice here to think the couple Cereno/Babo in so much as the two sides of reality itself.⁶⁷ The semantic field, with respect to the perceiving consciousness, is given by the following semic antithesis: absence *versus* presence (representation, immanence), void *versus* full, in connection with the main semic antithesis: (absolutely) other *versus* same. In other words, while Babo satisfies the American’s expectations, offering himself *qua* disposable given (to knowledge and enjoyment), Cereno does not, in any way, meet them:

A prey (Cereno) to settled dejection, as if long mocked with hope he would not now indulge it, even when it had ceased to be a mock, the prospect of that day or evening at furthest, lying at anchor, with plenty of water for his people, and a brother captain to counsel and befriend, seemed in no perceptible degree to encourage him. (p.58)

⁶⁷ Whose synthesis to be sure gives voice to the ambiguity wrapping the *San Dominick*.

Delano does not understand the Spaniard's behaviour: "why does he not come towards me?" "Why does he not greet me?" "Why does he not deign me of his attention?" "Why is he not, like everybody else, happy that I am here?" Why he is so hostile, so inhospitable? Cereno answers to none of these questions: from the depths of his suffering and silence, he leaves them unattended. The dimension of the Spaniard is not, we say, of the order of the synthesized and synchronous (order constituent and contingent a consciousness able to think its repose), where the other is reduced to same, to the firm possession of an I, or even where the other docilely lets itself be reduced to the same, as in the case of Babo and the Africans. Cereno can be said to exceed (to put into question then) this very order. He (infinitely) resists the Other's grasp, possession, comprehension; so piercing, as Lévinas would say, 'the continuity of the concrete', the continuity of the representation.⁶⁸ In this sense, we might say that the Spaniard attests to a moment of impotence, of dispersion and indeed of suffering: with regard to a world which has promised itself in its total gratuitousness, a world which lets itself be regarded in an affirmative way, so to speak, his presence surprises the onlooker with the 'casting' of a 'no'.⁶⁹

It is in the light of what we have pointed out, that we should read Delano's following inferences:

A1- "Still, Captain Delano was not without the idea, that had Benito Cereno been a man of greater energy, misrule would hardly have come to the present pass".

A2- "The Spaniard's individual unrest was, for the present, but noted as a conspicuous feature in the ship's general affliction. Still, Captain Delano was not a little concerned at what he could not help taking for the time to be Don Benito's unfriendly indifference towards himself."

⁶⁸ This is, of course, a fundamental notation: in resisting comprehension, the Spaniard opens up a real passage in time. He breaks through representation, making the access to time in its diachrony possible to the subject of the enunciated, who is dangerously being maintained within what Lévinas calls the "monistic hypostasis of the present" (representation itself: immanence).

⁶⁹ As Lévinas stresses: "The face resists possession, resists my powers. In its epiphany, in expression, the sensible, still graspable turns into total resistance to the grasp [...] the expression the face introduces into the world does not defy the feebleness of my powers, but my ability for power. The face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it. This means concretely: the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge". A few lines before, the philosopher remarks: "But the relation is maintained without violence, in peace with this absolute alterity. The 'resistance' of the other does not do violence to me, does not act negatively; it has a positive structure: ethical. The first revelation of the other, presupposed in all the other relations with him, does not consist in grasping him in his negative resistance and circumventing him by ruse. I do not struggle with a faceless god, but I respond to his expression, to his revelation". Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp.197-198.

A3- Cereno is like someone who, “forced to black bread, deems it but equity that each person coming nigh them should, indirectly, by some slight or affront, be made to partake of their fare.”

A4- “But ere long Captain Delano bethought him that, indulgent as he was at the first, in judging the Spaniard, he might not after all, have exercised charity enough. At bottom it was Don Benito’s reserve which displeased him; but the same reserve was shown towards all but his faithful personal attendant”.

A5- “Proud as he was moody, he condescended to no personal mandate. [...] So that to have held this undemonstrative invalid gliding about, apathetic and mute, no landsman could have dreamed that in him was lodged a dictatorship which, while at sea, there was no earthly appeal.”

A6- “Thus, the Spaniard, regarded in his reserve, seemed as the involuntary victim of mental disorder. But, in fact, his reserve might, in some degree, have proceeded from design.”

A7- “But the Spaniard perhaps that it was with captains as with gods: reserve, under all events, must still be their cue”.

A8- “But more probably this appearance of slumbering dominion might have been but an attempted disguise to conscious imbecility – not deep policy, but shallow device”.

A9- “Wonted to the quiet orderliness of the sealer’s comfortable family of a crew, the noisy confusion of the San Dominick’s suffering host repeatedly challenged his eye. Some prominent breaches not only of discipline but of decency were observed. [...] What the San Dominick wanted was, what the emigrant ship has, stern superior officers. But on these decks not so much as a fourth mate was to be seen”. (all inferences p.57-59)

In most occurrences, one can notice the presence of the connectors *still* (A1;A2) and *but* (A4;A6;A7;A8;A9). Within the cognitive process, they do inevitably suggest contrast, opposition, aversion. On a semantic plane, these semes dominate all instances. In A2 and A4, the aetiology of this semic dominion is made clear: “still, Captain Delano was not little concerned at what *he could not help* taking for the time to be Don Benito’s unfriendly indifference towards himself “/ “at bottom it was Don Benito’s reserve which *displeased him*”. It can be said that aversion is resentment’s expressive modality or quality. Filled with indignation, the American perceives/deems, falsely and prejudicially, the object of his displeasure. Let’s observe, in particular, A5, where Cereno is compared to a dictator; but also A6 and A7 where the sense of the analogy is extended to the uncanny: the captain is depicted as a god, as ‘somebody’ who has supernatural powers. Despite this, it is worth noting in A8 a radical change of perspective: the Spaniard would not be a god (genial and fiendish) but rather an inept. Within the phenomenology we are following, this perceptive overturning is significant: it lowers and raises, namely, it transforms what was retained to be uncanny or supernatural into something terrestrial (read corporeal) and familiar, it renders what was considered to be unmeasurable measurable, ultimately resolving its power into a factual impotence. Nobody, in simple words, wants to

compete, to be confronted with a god. Yet what, in our opinion, does render resentment such a negative emotion is the fact that the look perceiving/deeming in its measure (in the measure of its own impotence with regard to the 'no' pronounced by the other) is never sincere, frank or straightforward (first and foremost towards itself⁷⁰): anger, resentment and in general all ill-will passions make us look in an oblique kind of way, thus contributing to a further reduction of our (already limited) point of view. Yet, oblique perception is the only way we have, so to speak, to render the sight of the object of our anger somehow pleasing to ourselves. The very last occurrence is a perfect example of this. By (unfairly) confronting the *Bachelor's Delight* with the *San Dominick*, Delano cannot help pointing out the inefficiency or ineptitude of its Captain. The American weighs, with satisfaction (with arrogance), (his own) power against (the other's) impotence. Finally, one can note that A9 comes to conclude the cognitive circle. The inferential movement is circular (it defines the return of the I to itself): A9 refers back semantically to A1, actualizing the 'pre' of Delano's *pre*-sumption: *still, Captain Delano was not without the idea, that had Benito Cereno been a man of greater energy, misrule would hardly have come to the present pass.*⁷¹

(...To Envy)

(g) The world upside down, or of envy⁷²:

The visitor's curiosity was roused to learn the particulars of those mishaps which had brought such absenteeism [...] The best account would, doubtless, be given by the captain. *Yet at first the visitor was loth to ask it, unwilling to provoke some distant rebuff.* But plucking up courage, he at last accosted Don Benito Cereno, renewing the expression of his benevolent interest, adding, that did he (Captain Delano) but know the particulars of the ship's misfortunes, he would, perhaps, be better able in the end to relieve them. *Would Don Benito favor him with the whole story?* Don Benito faltered; then, like some somnambulist suddenly interfered with, vacantly stared at his visitor, and ended by looking down on the deck. He maintained this posture so long, that Captain Delano, almost equally disconcerted, and involuntarily almost as rude, turned suddenly from him, walking forward to accost one of the Spanish seamen for

⁷⁰ This is clear in A4: "but ere long Captain Delano bethought him that, indulgent as he was at the first, in judging the Spaniard, *he might not, after all, have exercised charity enough. At bottom it was Don Benito's reserve which displeased him*". Delano's conscience is bad.

⁷¹ In this regard, Petrosino affirms: "the name of the experience of the obliquity within the act of perception, of the running short of sight's natural straightforwardness, the name of the experience of the indirect perception realized by resentment is *envy: resentment does not see, but envy, by seeing it cannot but envy.*" Petrosino, *Visione e desiderio*, p.151 (my trans. and my emphasis).

⁷² Let's examine the etymology of envy: Middle English (also in the sense 'hostility, enmity'), from Old French *envie* (noun), *envier* (verb), from Latin *invidia*, from *invidere* 'regard maliciously, grudge', from *in-* 'into' + *videre* 'to see'.

the desired information. But he had hardly gone five paces, when with a sort of eagerness Don Benito invited him back, regretting his momentary absence of mind, and *professing readiness to gratify him*. (p.61, my emphasis)

While the most part of the story was being given, the two captains stood on the after part of the main-deck a privileged spot, no one being near but the servant. [...] The Spaniard proceeded, but brokenly and obscurely, as one in a dream. “Oh, my God! Rather than pass through what I have, with joy I would have hailed the most terrible gales; but-“ His cough returned and with increased violence; this subsiding, with reddened lips and closed eyes he fell heavily against his supporter. “His mind wanders. He was thinking of the plague that followed the gales”, plaintively sighed the servant; “my poor, poor master!” wringing one hand, and with the other wiping the mouth. “But be patient, Señor,” again turning to Captain Delano, “these fits do not last long; master will soon be himself.” (p.62)

Let’s consider this last paragraph. The Spaniard’s inconclusive and indeed enigmatical way of proceeding is, to be sure, peculiar of the insomnia⁷³: an (un)condition whereby an I is unable to return to itself, to coincide with itself. One can consider the value of the connector *but* which introduces, within the analepsis, the idea of an irremissable, irrevocable reality, of an adversity against which the subject is as yet totally powerless. An adversity whose heredity still disquiets its present in the mode of an absolute passivity: Cereno would be in sum hostage to an unspeakable (hence, to be sure terrifying) past with regard to which he hasn’t as yet come to terms. Further to this, one can note the contrast between the Spaniard’s aphasia and Babo’s words. The black prudently intervenes to fill up Cereno’s blank spaces, to synchronize the non-synchronous, to normalize what is retained to be surprising. He tranquillizes, reassures, satisfies the American’s curiosity: he allows comprehension.

“But throughout these calamities, “huskily continued Don Benito, painfully turning in the half embrace of his servant, “I have to thank those negroes you see, who, [...] have conducted themselves with less of restlessness than even their owner could have thought possible under such circumstances.” Here he again fell faintly back, again his mind wandered: but he rallied, and less obscurely proceeded. “Yes, their owner was quite right in assuring me that no fetters would be needed with his blacks; so that while, as it wont in this transportation, those negroes have always remained upon deck – not thrust, as in the Guineamen- they have, also, from the beginning, been freely permitted to range within given bounds at their pleasure.” (p.63)

The variation in the expressive modality is quite significant: “the Spaniard proceeded, *but brokenly and obscurely* / again his mind wandered: *but he rallied, and less obscurely proceeded*. The enunciative alteration, clearly indicated, functions as a sort of latent indicator: it is

⁷³ Thus, anything but an imaginary or oneiric experience: “as one in a dream”.

somehow meant to (responsibly) alert the receiver (Delano/reader). Cereno's first speech differs from his second one in structure: that of the first one is disturbingly open; that of the second reassuringly closed, *lisible*, to borrow Barthes' terminology. As a matter of fact, this latter would not require (at least apparently) any interpretative effort, any whatsoever participation other than the assimilation of its sense. Nevertheless, once comprehended in its referentiality, the enunciated does not say anything, that is, it does not add anything new with regard to what Delano already knows: it is evident to him that the slaves are without chains, that they are all situated on the ship's decks and that, though within given bounds, they are all free to wander about. The (apparent) semantic poverty of the enunciated, its redundancy within the discursive economy should, at this point and to some extent, stimulate the receiver (be it Delano or the reader) to a critical reaction. It should dispose him for a re-reading of the 'said', starting especially from the disquieting presence of the phrasal's antithesis. The American however, by limiting himself (and being limited) to an ontological rather than critical approach, is clearly unable to grasp their (phrasal antithesis) inner sense, namely, to intuit, within the enunciated, their revealing status: no fetters would be needed / as is wont in this transportation; those negroes have always remained upon deck / not thrust below, as in the Guineamen. Unable, ultimately, to grasp beyond grasp the face of the other: its saying. Delano does not listen, does not enter into relation: he is absolutely for himself.

Once more the faintness returned – his mind roved – but recovering, he resumed: “But it is to Babo here to whom, under God, I owe not only my own preservation, but likewise to him, chiefly, the merit is due, of pacifying his more ignorant brethen, when at intervals tempted to murmurings.”

“Ah, master,” sighed the black, bowing his face, “don't speak of me; Babo is nothing:

what Babo has done was but duty.”

“Faithful fellow!” cried Captain Delano. “*Don Benito, I envy you such a friend; slave I cannot call him.*” (p.92, my emphasis)

First, we should focus on the nominal syntagm *Babo is nothing*, and, more particularly, on the 'symbolic efficacy' (Baudrillard) of the moneme *nothing*, on its power of seduction. To the bewitched eyes of Delano, this *nothing* to be sure opens all space to desire. The efficacy of the lexeme, namely, its fascinating force can in fact be said to reside in its absolute ductility or, even better, in its semantic arbitrariness: it in some way imposes itself out of its inconsistency, its non-referentiality, its irreality and would come to acquire ontological 'thickness' (however illusory) starting from the intentional discretion

of the subject of desire. It would be the very 'act' of the signification itself to liberate the seductiveness of this signifier (always and already empty) and to render its libidinal appeal somehow infinite: "such is the spell of the magical word, such is the bewitchment of seduction", Baudrillard affirms.⁷⁴ Babo imposes himself then *qua* object of desire and, more exactly, *qua* object of envy: *Don Benito, I envy you such a man.*⁷⁵ Accordingly, we can draw the following actantial triangle: given Babo in so much as object of envy, Cereno becomes systematically subject *of* envy, while Delano can be said to be subject-ed *to* envy. First and foremost, we should take note of the fact that the envious man envies proceeding exclusively from the measure of its power; whereas this measure, as Petrosino claims, is necessarily that of impotence" (in relation to whatever he/she envies).⁷⁶ It may therefore be argued that it is precisely because he envies, that the American doesn't see the Spaniard's sufferance. Indeed, what he rather *sees* is always and already this latter's well-being, that is, always and already his satisfaction in the possession of Babo. More profoundly yet, what he sees and feels then is not the Other's impotence (his passivity, his lack of energy) but, on the contrary, always and already his

⁷⁴ Baudrillard, *De la séduction*, p.106 (my transl. from French). As to the power of fascination of the 'blank' term, the French philosopher affirms: "But this can well be the direct fascination of the void, as in the physical spell of the abyss, or in the metaphorical spell of a door opening on the void. 'This door opens on the void'. If you read that on a panel, would you resist the desire of opening it?". Ibid., p.105.

⁷⁵ In his analysis of envy, Helmut Schoeck questions the employment of this term in language (English; American English; French; Spanish...). As to its use in American English, the sociologist takes as reference text the 'Webster's Third International Dictionary of the English Language' (dated 1961). He states: "the emphasis, in the definitions of 'envy' and 'envying' in Webster's, is laid on the desire to possess what belongs to the other, *not to see it destroyed*. Indeed, this shift in emphasis corresponds almost exactly to the present American view of envy"; as we shall see though, left with no choice, Delano will precisely conceive destruction as the only way to appropriation. Still further, in relation to the phenomena we have dealt with, it is worth pointing out that Schoeck underlines the impossibility of disjoining envy from black magic. Taking into account myths and traditions of some primitive cultures (mainly tribes of Africans and American Indians), he is able to attest to the connection between envy and suspected witchcraft. There is a significant passage which is worth quoting: "the connection (of witchcraft) with the evil eye, the eye of the envious man, appears early. From time immemorial suspicion of witchcraft or black magic has fallen upon those who have had cause to be envious [...]". Schoeck, Helmut, *Envy: a theory of social behaviour*, Secker & Warburg, London, 1969, respectively p.14 and p.33 (my emphasis). Finally, it seems interesting to us to report that Schoeck, in chapter ten of his study ('The Envious Man in Fiction'), deals widely with Melville's last work, that is, *Billy Budd, sailor* (posthumous 1924). Besides attesting to the extraordinary ability on the part of Melville's critics to have almost completely overlooked the problem of envy in this work (and not only this one as far as I am aware), he reasonably defines "Billy Budd" as "probably the most profound attempt in fiction to discuss the problem of envy in human existence". Ibid., see in particular pp.134-141.

⁷⁶ Petrosino, *Visione e desiderio*, p.199 (my transl.). The Italian scholar also states: "the sentiment of envy can never take place as the simple result of a confrontation wherein on the one side it is given the possession of a good and on the other its lack; as a matter of fact, *only an ens able of desire, moved by desire, can envy*. Petrosino, *ibid.*, p.183 (my transl. and my emphasis).

power, namely, the power of limiting his (Delano's) freedom (in fulfilling his desires).⁷⁷ In this sense, it could be said that Cereno's enigmatic presence is ultimately being understood as *problematic*: namely, the Spaniard would represent to the American an impediment and a cause of disorder with regard to an order (that of representation) *already* established. In other words, Cereno would say 'no' precisely "to the tranquilized supposition that he possesses everything, or that everything is within his reach" and more particularly he would say no to a power that has (allusively) been conferred upon the American by the Africans. As far as Delano is concerned, the only problem on board and therefore the only problem that needs to be resolved is the Spaniard.

The character of relation with the Other is thereby founded exclusively on unfriendliness, aversion, resentment, incommunicability and injustice's terms.⁷⁸ Within this relation or non-relation, as one prefers, there is certainly no space for the Other, there is no space for ethics as we mean it. By positing himself *qua* object of envy, Babo inevitably perverts the relationship between the two captains: Delano is set *against* Cereno.⁷⁹ Yet, what does it mean here to be *against* Cereno? What are the implications of this being-against? We have claimed just now that Delano perceives the Spaniard only in relation to the envied object, that is, in view of it: sole obstacle, Cereno. Moreover, it is necessary to recall to mind the fact that the Captain of the *San Dominick* is a seriously ill man. As to this, we have inferred that the American does not see his illness, his proximity to death but exclusively his well-being. He does not see, he envies. The

⁷⁷ According to Petrosino, "the subject participates to two measures: it experiences the measure of its power ultimately in so much as essential impotence and at the same time experiences the 'beyond measure' in which its desire has, from the very start, thrown it". Petrosino, Silvano, *ibid.* p.199.

⁷⁸ "The extent to which envy is a social form of behaviour, i.e., necessarily directed at someone else, is also apparent from the fact that without the other person the envier could not envy. Yet as a rule he specifically rejects any social relationship with the envied person. Love, friendliness, admiration – these approaches to another person are made in the expectation of reciprocity, recognition, and seek some kind of link. The envier wants none of this". Schoeck, *Envy*, p.5. The sympathy Delano shows to Cereno is purely formal: given the choice, he would prefer not to associate.

⁷⁹ Let's re-read this passage from *Totality and Infinity* dedicated to the dynamics of need and its satisfaction: "In enjoyment I am absolutely for myself. Egoist without reference to the Other...innocently egoist and alone. Not against the Others, not 'as for me [...]' – but entirely deaf to the Other..." Lévinas, Emmanuel, *Totality and Infinity*, p.134. Now, it can be said that if in need one is absolutely for itself but not against the Other, in the envious desire the 'for itself' and the 'against the Other' co-exist. Moreover, we can add that by rendering himself object of envy, Babo disposes completely of Delano: he calculably influences this latter's intentions. The American is indeed *slave* of his own desire (slave of the desirable). Accordingly, the very terms of the dialectics white-master / black-slave would be reversed. Many are also the occurrences which bespeak Babo's control over Cereno. The black constantly rests his eyes upon this latter: like a shepherd's dog, he mutely turned it (his look) up into the Spaniard's [...]; the black with one arm still encircled his master, at the same time keeping his eye on his face, (as if to watch for the first sign of complete restoration, or relapse, as the event might prove) [...]; his disengaged face meantime, (with humble curiosity), turned openly up into his master's downcast one. Respectively p. 57; p.61 and p.72 (the material put in parenthesis indicates Delano's inferences).

etymology of the term should be now taken into consideration. As a matter of fact, Delano does but comment maliciously and sarcastically about Don Benito's health: this latter is perceived as *some hypochondriac abbot (that) moved slowly about*; a few lines down, he will be simply seen as *the hypochondriac*. Still further, considering the sumptuous character of the Spaniard's apparel⁸⁰, it suggests to the American the image of *an invalid coutier tottering about London streets in the time of the plague*. The indirect allusion to death (*in the time of the plague*) and to a scenario that recalls Eliot's *The Waste Land*, is opposed to the image of the *invalid coutier* (Cereno himself) tottering about like an idiot. The tone of the metaphorical occurrence is, to be sure, dark, grotesque, veined with bitter humour. The Spaniard is depicted in a caricatural way. A few pages ahead, Delano even questions the genuineness of Cereno's mortal disease:

For even to the degree of simulating mortal disease, the craft of some tricksters had been known to attain. To think that, under the aspect of infantile weakness, the most savage energies might be couched – those velvets of the Spaniard but the silky paw of his fangs. (p.71)

He who envies, sees without love, without charity, without *pietas*. He is absolutely indifferent towards the Other, his fellow man. As a matter of fact, one can consider that Delano never expresses, and this 'never' should be underlined, preoccupation or fear for Cereno's condition.⁸¹ However surprising this may sound, we have to read here the possibility to absolute evil. As Lévinas affirms, "the relation to the Face is both the relation to the absolutely weak – to what is absolutely exposed, what is bare and destitute, the relation with bareness and consequently with what is alone and can undergo the supreme isolation we call death – and there is, consequently, in the Face of the Other always the death of the Other *and thus, in some way, an incitement to murder, the temptation to go to the extreme, to completely neglect the Other [...]*"⁸². This is, of course, a disturbing inference. One could, however, object that Babo, to Delano's eyes, acts like a

⁸⁰ Which is of course *too* formal for the occasion.

⁸¹ "Fear and responsibility for the death of the other person, even if the ultimate meaning of that responsibility for the death of the other person is responsibility before the inexorable, and at the last moment, the obligation not to leave the other alone in the face of death. Even if, facing death – where the very uprightness of the face that asks for me finally reveals fully both its defenseless exposure and its very facing – even if, at the last moment, the not-leaving-the-other-alone consists, in that confrontation and that powerless facing, only in answering 'Here I am' to the request that calls on me. Which is, no doubt, the secret of sociality and, in its extremes of gratuitousness and futility, love of my neighbor, love without concupiscence". Lévinas, *Entre Nous*, pp.130-131.

⁸² Lévinas, *Entre Nous*, p.105 (my emphasis).

sort of a keeper; as if to say: there is already the black to take care of Don Benito.⁸³ Yet, this notation can hardly answer for the general insensitivity and irresponsibility of the American. The temptation to go to the extreme, to abandon the Other, and, thus, to render oneself accomplice of its death, to kill it cannot, in its aetiology, be in any way separated from the problematics, here fundamental, of envious desire (or, simply, of envy) and from the torment of impotence to which it inevitably confines its subject. We shall come back to this.

The portion of the narrative which, perhaps, most excited interest, as well as surprise, considering the latitudes in question, was the long calms spoken of, and more particularly the ship's so long drifting about. Without communicating the opinion, of course, the American could not but impute at least part of the detentions both to clumsy seamanship and faulty navigation. *Eying Don Benito's small, yellow hands, he easily inferred* that the young captain had not got into command at the hawsehole, but in the cabin-window; and if so why wonder at incompetence, in youth, sickness, and gentility united? (p.64)

Indeed, the American perceives only what does confirm his envy, that is, exclusively what has the power to lower and raise. Delano sees/deems but presumptuously and maliciously, namely, always and already in the measure of his own impotence. Yet, what we should insist upon here, bearing in mind what we said just now, is that this begrudging look, this look full of envy, of hostility, this look devoid of love, in its oblique seeing but uses the eyes like two stilettos: it reduces, de-grades the Other, and he does so in the very attempt to annihilate, to destroy, to kill it, at least to a verbal or else metaempirical plane. To kill it in the name of an already established order. Similarly, a few pages down, *struck by one of those instances of insubordination previously alluded to* and, of course, surprised by Don Benito's indifference towards it⁸⁴, Delano, not without a mixture of satisfaction, concludes to himself:

Is it, thought Captain Delano, that this hapless man is one of those paper captains I've known, *who by policy wink at what by power they cannot put down? I know no sadder sight than a commander who has little of command but the name?* (p.65, my emphasis)

⁸³ Further down, Delano comments to himself: "there is something in the negro which, in a peculiar way, fits him for avocations about one's person". p.91.

⁸⁴ Two black lads, armed with a knife, rage at a Spanish boy, causing him *a gash from which blood flowed*. To the gravity of the event, Cereno, once questioned by Delano, but answers that *it was merely the sport of a lad*. "Pretty serious sport, truly," rejoined Captain Delano. "*Had such a thing happened on board the Bachelor's Delight, instant punishment would have followed.*" My emphasis, p.65.

(h) The ritual:

Or la séduction n'est jamais de l'ordre
de la nature, mais celui de l'artifice, jamais
de l'ordre de l'énergie, mais de celui du
signe et du rituel.

Jean Baudrillard

At this moment, with a dreary grave-yard toll, betokening a flaw⁸⁵, the ship's fore-castle bell, smote by one of the grizzled oakum-pickers, proclaimed ten o'clock through the leaden calm; when Captain Delano's attention was caught by the moving figure of a gigantic black, emerging from the general crowd below, and slowly advancing towards the elevated poop. An iron collar was about his neck, from which depended a chain, thrice wound round his body; the terminating links padlocked together at a broad band of iron, his girdle. (p.68)

The following scene, by surreal contours, casts Atufal in the role of a mulish mutineer coy of begging for Don Benito's forgiveness; Babo, playing the stage-director and finally the American as the dumb spectator. The absurdity of the performance does inevitably trigger Delano's curiosity⁸⁶:

"Excuse me, Don Benito," said Captain Delano, "*but this scene surprises me; what means it, pray?*"

"It means that the negro alone, of all the band, has given me peculiar cause of offence.

I have put him in chains; I..." Here he paused [...] but meeting his servant's kindly glance seemed reassured, and proceeded: "I could not scourge such a form. But I

⁸⁵ It is an avatar of death. In this regard, we deem necessary to report the following event (which takes place shortly before the scene of the ritual): "Don Benito, with Castillian bows, solemnly insisted upon his guest's preceding him up the ladder leading to the elevation; where, one of each side of the last step, sat for armorial supporters and sentries two of the ominous file (the Ashantee). Gingerly enough stepped good Captain Delano between them, *and in the instant of leaving them behind*, like one running the gauntlet, *he felt an apprehensive twitch in the calves of his legs*". (p.68, my emphasis) Bachelard says, "sometimes to deepen up a space oneirically only a few steps are needed (...) Pierre Loti going back to live in the house of his own childhood, writes: 'it is already dark on the stairs. When I was a kid, by night, I was afraid on those stairs; *it seemed to me that the dead emerged from behind me to clutch my legs*.'" Bachelard, *La Terre et le rêveries du repos*, p.98 (my emphasis and my transl.). In our case, however, the presentiment of death would not be activated by the evocation of an unconscious fear which for Loti channels the death imagery. Rather, it is inspired, so to speak, by a reality which has remained so far unsensed. "But when, facing about, he saw the whole file, like so many organ-grinders, still stupidly intent on their work, unmindful of everything beside, he could not but smile at his late fidgeting panic". (p.65) The normalization of the real proceeds starting from the idea of height: *but when, facing about* [...]; that is, from the idea of power itself. The foreboding of death (the exposition to time in its diachrony, in its mystery; the exposition to the Other in its authentic presence) is removed precisely by force of this very idea.

⁸⁶ The scene intrigues for its insignificance. Baudrillard says "it renders visible the power of the insignificant signifier, the power of the unsensed signifier [...] consciousness is irresistibly bewitched by the place left unattended by sense". Baudrillard, *De la séduction*, pp.104-105 (my transl. from French).

told him he must ask my pardon. As yet he has not. At my command, every two hours, he stands before me.”

“What, pray, was Atufal’s offence, Don Benito?” asked Captain Delano; “if it was not something very serious, take a fool’s advice, and, in view of his general docility, as well as in some natural respect for his spirit, remit him his penalty.”

“No, no, master will never do that,” here murmured the servant to himself, “proud Atufal must first ask master’s pardon.. The slave there carries the padlock, but master here carries the key.” His attention thus directed, Captain Delano now noticed for the first time that, suspended by a slender silken cord, from Don Benito’s neck hung a key. At once, from the servant’s muttered syllables divining the key’s purpose, he smiled and said: -“So, Don Benito –padlock and key – significant symbols truly.” Biting his lip, Don Benito faltered. (p.68-69, my emphasis)

Let’s linger over the conclusive section of the paragraph. First, note the sleaziness with which Babo intervenes to deviate the sense of the conversation between Delano and Don Benito: “*No, no, master will never do that,*” here murmured the servant to himself. The black never (or almost never) comes out in an open manner but always acts by whispering or suggesting *sotto voce* to Delano, with the view of dislocating his attention towards pre-established targets: *his attention thus directed*. It can be said that the phenomenon of dislocation pilots the subject of the signification towards a reaching of the sense other than the one presupposed originally. In this case, Delano’s question “*What, pray, was Atufal’s offence, Don Benito?*” is left unattended by Babo’s abrupt yet prudent intervention. As a matter of fact, the answer to that question would, perhaps, have opened either to an unwanted deepening of the conversation or to possible misunderstandings, or even to a radical deviation from the realization of the pre-established sense. The black to be sure channels Delano through a very precise perceptive/semantic path. Still further, the difficulty was, on the part of Cereno, to come out with an answer able to justify the egocentrism of a ritual which had been repeating itself every two hours for approximately sixty days: “*And how long has this been?*”/ “*Some sixty days*”. Yet, Babo’s intention is exactly that of turning the attention from Atufal to Cereno⁸⁷, and to emphasize, to the American’s envious eyes, both the inflexibility of his (Don Benito’s) authority⁸⁸ and the vastness of his sovereignty, this latter highlighted by force of the contrast between the imposing figure of Atufal and the thin one of the white.⁸⁹ Further

⁸⁷ That is, reversing the sense of the perception: Atufal>Cereno / Cereno>Atufal.

⁸⁸ Or, even better, to emphasize his authority and, of this, the inflexibility. The black does literally render to Delano the invisible visible: ‘Captain Delano now noticed for the first time that, *suspended by a slender silken cord*, from Don Benito’s neck hung a key’. Cereno’s authority has the inconsistency of silk, so to speak.

⁸⁹ As a matter of fact, Delano remarks: ‘this is some mulish mutineer, thought Captain Delano, surveying, *not without a mixture of admiration, the colossal form of the negro*’. The slave is a real wonder of nature, enchained by his captain (*I have put him in chains*), as Delano would seem to be

down, speculating upon some peculiarities concerning the captain of the *San Dominick*, the American lingers over the above-mentioned event: second, the tyranny in Don Benito's treatment of Atufal, the black; *as if a child should lead a bull of the Nile by the ring in his nose* (p.86). The obliqueness of Delano's observation is certainly directed against the authority of the Spaniard but, more specifically, against the excess of it: that *a child* should lead the colossal form of the black *by the ring in his nose* is indeed unjust. Yet the unjustness would not so much regard, in our opinion, Atufal's mean treatment as the 'excess' of Cereno's power. This excess can be said to be perceived as an offence to the measure and the logic of the calculating, to which the enormous figure of the black would set as a limit: 'the excess', to say that with Petrosino, 'is/becomes the evidence itself of the affront'.⁹⁰ In other words, the affront would concern the distance separating the impotent Delano from the authoritarian Cereno. Ultimately, the unjustness and the offence inhere to the surplus of the Other's power with respect to the power of the Same, that is, with respect, let's repeat it once more, to its own impotence. Babo's intention is clear: he aims at fuelling Delano's malevolent passion.⁹¹

To conclude the exegesis of this analytical section, we would like to stress the unequivocally theatrical character of the scene and, more specifically, its excessive spectacularity. The scene is introduced by the toll of the ship's forecandle bell striking ten o'clock. The bell inaugurates the time of the representation (horological, intentional, synchronic time: time of deception): it is the beginning of a ritual which should go on repeating itself every two hours. This ritualization of time functions, we say, as a tranquillizing element: again, it effects the habitual, the familiar, the expected-to-come. Not only that: the rumour that the ritual has been repeating itself for over two months, comes to consolidate the idea of a past which in reality never took place. Finally, in relation to the excessive scenic spectacularity, the outcoming impression is that of a *troupe*

thinking, out of pure whim. In relation to this, it is worth quoting the conclusive part of the paragraph: 'though the remark of Captain Delano, a man of such native simplicity as to be incapable of satire or irony, had been dropped in playful allusion to the Spaniard's singularly evidenced lordship over the black; yet the hypochondriac seemed in some way to have taken it as a malicious reflection *upon his confessed inability thus far to break down, at least, on a verbal summons, the entrenched will of the slave*. Deploring this supposed misconception, yet despairing of correcting it, Captain Delano shifted the subject'. In reality, the American would not be afraid of having been misunderstood but rather of having exposed himself with inexplicable malice: "So, Don Benito – padlock and key – significant symbols, truly". The material that we have put in italics further attests to Delano's envy, which is a real passion for turning things upside down. Envy's sin could be described as a sin against reality. The envious man, let's repeat it, only perceives what can confirm his envy: Don Benito's authority is, in this case, reduced, degraded, not without satisfaction, to inability.

⁹⁰ Petrosino, *Visione e desiderio*, p.201.

⁹¹ What we assist to is, to be sure, a progressive loss of innocence on Delano's part and, therefore, a progressive access to sin.

de réalité (Baudrillard): everything is, of course, too clear, too present, too evident. Everything recalls too much what it is. In its luci-ferous use, the semantic (and referential) sphere is so emphasized that it necessarily becomes the parody of itself. What we assist to is in the end nothing less than the ironical and malign simulation of a real to which one has ultimately proclaimed the burial. As to Delano, occupied as he is in measuring power against power, he cannot, before all that excess of clarity, but *se tromper*.⁹²

(i) The impostor:

Presently the Spaniard, assisted by his servant, somewhat discourteously crossed over from his guest; a procedure which, sensibly enough, might have been allowed to pass for idle caprice of ill-humour, had not master and man, lingering around the corner of the elevated skylight, began whispering together in low voices. *This was unpleasing*. (p.70, my emphasis)

The singular alternations of courtesy and ill-breeding in the Spanish captain were unaccountable, except on one of two suppositions – innocent lunacy, or wicked imposture. But the first idea, though it might naturally have occurred to an indifferent observer, and, in some respect, had not hitherto been wholly stranger to Captain Delano's mind, *yet, now that, in an incipient way, he began to regard the stranger's conduct something in the light of an intentional affront, of course the idea of lunacy was virtually vacated*. But if not lunatic, what then? Under the circumstances, would a gentleman, nay, any honest boor, act the part now acted by his host? *That man was an impostor. Some low-born adventurer, masquerading as an oceanic grandee...*(pp.70-71, my emphasis)

Delano accuses Cereno both of impoliteness and duplicity. As to Cereno's bad manners we can agree with the American but the accusation of duplicity has here certainly no legitimate ground: it simply doesn't hold. Yet, Delano proceeds to such a (malicious and resented) conclusion with undoubted confidence: he is sure that *that man was an impostor*. Further down, recalling the event, he won't be able to explain what exactly had originated his temporary *distrust* towards the Spaniard.⁹³

⁹² According to Baudrillard the goal of the *trompe-l'oeil* is to produce a playful semblant of reality "through the excess itself of the appearances of the real [...]enchanted simulation: the *trompe-l'oeil* – falsier than falsehood – such is the secret of appearance". Baudrillard, *De la séduction*, p.90 (Baudrillard's emphasis). Let's not forget Melville's keen interest for figurative arts (*The Encantadas* will appear under the pseudonym *Salvator R.* Tarmoor: *Salvator Rosa* was one of Melville's favourite artists) and techniques in painting.

⁹³ "Relieved by these thoughts and other better thoughts, the visitor, lightly humming a tune, now began indifferently pacing the poop, so as not to betray Don Benito that he had at all mistrusted incivility, much less duplicity; for such mistrust would yet be proved illusory, and by the event; *though, for the present, the circumstance which had provoked that distrust remained unexplained*. But when that little mystery should have been cleared up, Captain Delano thought he might extremely

That strange ceremoniousness, too, at other times evinced, seemed not uncharacteristic of one playing a part above his real level. Benito Cereno – Don Benito Cereno – a sounding name. One, too, at that period, not unknown, in the surname, to supercargoes and sea captains trading along the Spanish main, as belonging to one of the most enterprising and extensive mercantile families in all those provinces; several members of it having titles; a sort of Castilian Rothschild, with a noble brother, or cousin, in every great trading town of South America. The alleged Don Benito was in early manhood, about twenty-nine or thirty. *To assume a sort of roving cadetship in the maritime affairs of such a house, what more likely scheme for a young knave of talent and spirit?* But the Spaniard was a pale invalid. *Never mind.* For even to the degree of simulating mortal disease, the craft of some tricksters had been known to attain. To think that, under the aspect of infantile weakness, the most savage energies might be couched – those velvets of the Spaniard but the silky paw to his fangs. (p.71, my emphasis)

Delano's envious resentment towards Cereno comes out strong. Yet, what also comes out here is his sufferance and more particularly his sufferance with regard to the unfairness of a providence that has spread '*kings and counsellors*' on the one side, so to speak, and 'common' people on the other. The occurrence of envy can in fact be said to proceed from a (value) comparison between the others and ourselves: in this case, between the noble captain of the *San Dominick* and the 'common' captain of the *Bachelor's Delight*. Envy can arise only where such a comparison is possible, to paraphrase Petrosino.⁹⁴ In effect it is worth pointing out here that Delano's envious look is not tended to the possession of a concrete good (Babo), whose temporal plane is still that of the 'possible' (hence, that of conquest), but rather to the possession of a metaempirical good, namely, the nobility of the other's descent (the same of the paragraph is indeed that of value), whose temporal plane is forever closed to the idea of realisation.⁹⁵ "Why him and not me?", seems in conclusion to be the painful question of the envious man. As Alberoni makes clear: "envy's turning point, is not the desire of whatever concrete thing, but *the unbearableness of a difference. A difference of being.* I suffer for an insufficiency of being in myself, an insufficiency evoked by the presence of the Other...In envy there is the metaphysical experience of one's own inconsistency with regard to the Other consistency, *which seems to stand out almost like a divinity before us...Envy uses objects but aims at*

regret it, did he allow Don Benito to become aware that he had indulged in ingenuous surmises. In short, to the Spaniard's black-letter text, it was best, for awhile, to leave open margin". (pp.71-72, my emphasis)

⁹⁴ Petrosino, Silvano, *Visione e desiderio*, p.118.

⁹⁵ Here indeed lies the possibility to the most intense, the most violent, the most authentic envy.

value. Without the value confrontation, the object loses in importance, it does not count anymore.”⁹⁶

But let's proceed with the analysis of the conclusive moment of the passage. Delano's inference is dominated by the signified of menace: *to think that, under the aspect of infantile weakness, the most savage energies might be couched – those velvets of the Spaniard but the silky paw to his fangs*. Whether legitimate or not on the plane of evidences, the American's supposition should first and foremost be questioned on an emotional ground. In other words, what does animate the American's scopical obliqueness? Fear, we must answer. We said and repeated a few times that Delano understands the manifested world to be *within his reach*. Now, as the power of the other (namely, the power of saying 'no') becomes greater and greater to his eyes, so does, we say, his fear of getting expropriated of what he has been led to perceive/consider from the very start as 'his own': as within his reach. Heidegger states: “proximally and for the most part, Dasein *is* in terms of *what* it is concerned with. When this is endangered, Being-alongside is threatened. *Fear discloses Dasein predominantly in a privative way*”.⁹⁷ The threat that may be coming from the Other would quite reasonably then concern the field of the possible: the Other menaces, proximally and for the most part, the Same in the very expropriation or privation of a potentiality-for-Being that has been understood as *properly* belonging to it.⁹⁸ That for which the Other may constitute a threat would ultimately pertain to being in the modality of the in-view-of-its-proper-self.⁹⁹ If we are correct, one wouldn't be mistaken in claiming that Cereno represents Delano's worst enemy (*hostis*):

⁹⁶ Alberoni, Francesco, *Gli Invidiosi*, Garzanti, Milano, pp.41-42 and p.53 (my emphasis and my transl.).

⁹⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp.180-181.

⁹⁸ Heidegger makes clear: “*Understanding is the existential Being of Dasein's own potentiality-for-Being; and it is so in such a way that this Being discloses in itself what its Being is capable of...* understanding has in itself the existential structure which we call 'projection'. With equal primordiality the understanding projects Dasein's Being both upon its 'for-the-sake-of-which' and upon significance, as the worldhood of its current world. The character of understanding as projection is constitutive for Being-in-the-world with regard to the disclosedness of its existentially constitutive state-of-Being by which the factual potentiality-for-Being gets its leeway. And as thrown, Dasein is thrown in the kind of being which we call 'projecting'. Projecting has nothing to do with comporting oneself towards a plan that has been thought out, and in accordance with which Dasein arranges its Being. *On the contrary, any Dasein has, as Dasein, already projected itself; and as long as it is, it is projecting. As long as it is, Dasein always has understood itself and always will understand itself in terms of possibilities*”. Heidegger, *ibid.*, pp.184-185 (the first emphasis is Heidegger's, the second one mine.).

⁹⁹ As Heidegger states: “Only an entity for which in its Being this very Being is an issue, can be afraid”. Heidegger, *ibid.*, p.180.

From no train of thought did these fancies come; *not from within, but from without*; suddenly, too, and in one throng, like hoar frost; yet as soon to vanish as the mild sun of Captain Delano's good-nature regained its meridian. (p.71, my emphasis)

The material we have put in italics ultimately attests to the malicious nature of the thoughts overwhelming the American: they certainly do not come from *within, but from without*; not from within the subject but, of course, from the object, from a 'something' in the capacity to make one lose one's head.

Presently, his pale face twitching and overcast, the Spaniard, still supported by his attendant, moved over towards his guest, when, with even more than his usual embarrassment, and a strange sort of intriguing intonation in his husky whisper, the following conversation began [...] (p.72)

The subject of the conversation is *The Bachelor's Delight*: the Spaniard gives the third degree to Delano in the attempt to get as many informations as possible about the shipment, the value of it, the totality of the seamen on board that same night and the weapons at their disposal.¹⁰⁰ Questionings that the American will then consider, reflecting upon the event, too explicit *as if with the view of setting him on his guard*.¹⁰¹ Despite this, right after the 'interrogation', the gloomy curiosity of the Spaniard triggers and reinforces the American's old suspicions:

In connection with the late questionings [...] these things now begat such return of involuntary suspicion [...] observing the ship now helplessly fallen into the current [...] drifting with increased rapidity seaward; and noting that, from a lately intercepted projection of the land, the sealer was hidden [...] he began to feel a ghostly dread of Don Benito. And yet he roused himself, dilated his chest, felt himself strong on his legs, and coolly considered it – what did all these phantoms amount to? (p.74)

This paragraph is followed by a series of inferences that, for the sake of succinctness, we won't report in their totality. Suffice here to take into consideration the most significant of them:

¹⁰⁰ In the legal deposition, furnished at the end, we are told: [...] that upon one occasion, while the deponent was standing on the deck conversing with Amasa Delano, by a secret sign the negro Babo drew him (the deponent) aside, [...] the negro Babo proposed to him to gain from Amasa Delano full particulars about his ship [...] the deponent at first refused to ask the desired questions [...] that the negro Babo showed the point of his dagger [...]p.119.

¹⁰¹ "How unlikely a procedure was that? Absurd, then, to suppose that those questions had been prompted by evil designs [...]" p.74.

A1- Had the Spaniard any sinister scheme, it must have reference not so much to him (Captain Delano) as to his ship (*The Bachelor's Delight*).

A2- Beside, was it not absurd to think of a vessel in distress – a vessel by sickness almost dismantled of her crew – a vessel whose inmates were parched for water... be of piratical character; or her commander, either for himself or those under him, cherish any desire but for speedy relief and refreshment?

A3- But then, might not general distress, and thirst in particular, be affected? And might not that same undiminished Spanish crew, alleged to have perished off to a remnant, be at the very moment lurking in the hold?

A4- The present destination of the ship was the anchorage. There she would be near his own vessel. Upon gaining that vicinity, might not the San Dominick, like a slumbering volcano, suddenly let loose energies now hid?

A5- He recalled the Spaniard's manner while telling his story. There was a gloomy hesitancy and subterfuge about it [...] But if that story was not true, what was the truth? That the ship had unlawfully come into the Spaniard's possession?

A6- Don Benito's story had been corroborated not only by the wailing ejaculations of the indiscriminate multitude, white or black, but likewise – what seemed impossible to be counterfeit – by the very expression and play of every human feature, which Captain Delano saw. If Don Benito's story was throughout an invention, then every soul on board, down to the youngest negress, was his carefully drilled recruit in the plot: an incredible inference.

A7- At last he began to laugh at his former forebodings; and laugh at the strange ship [...] for the rest, whatever in a serious way seemed enigmatical, was now good-naturedly explained away by the thought that, for the most part, the poor invalid scarcely knew what he was about [...] Evidently, for the present, the man was not fit to be entrusted with the ship. On some benevolent plea withdrawing the command from him, Captain Delano would yet have to send her to Conception, in charge of his second mate, a worthy person and a good navigator [...] (All occurrences at p.74-76)

All inferences, apart from the last one, proceed from the identification of Cereno *qua* villain, in Delano's former words: *some low born-adventurer*, apparently plotting the boarding of *The Bachelor's Delight*. Also note that, precisely on the basis of this identification, the American does not only question the very presence of the Spanish crew on board, but he is implicitly led to perceive all the Spaniards as (his possible) enemies.¹⁰² In A6, the conspiracy theory raises the extraordinary: *an incredible inference*; and it raises it precisely because what is being put into question here is nothing less than the order of the visible: “[...] but likewise – what seemed impossible to be counterfeit – by the very expression and play of every human feature, *which Captain Delano saw*”. For the first time, “the world as it is” is being doubted. Although, it is truth that Delano's forebodings still proceed from the unquestioned identification of Don Benito as a

¹⁰² Further down, Delano affirms: “these Spaniards are all an odd set; the very word Spaniard has a curious, conspirator, Guy-Fawkes twang to it”; p.86. Guy Fawkes was hanged for his part in the Gunpowder Plot, to blow up James I and his Parliament on 5 November 1605. The allusion to Guy Fawkes is anything but redundant: it is nevertheless inherent to a conspiracy against power, authority, sovereignty and, in our case, against the I.

supreme plotter, that is to say, originarily, as subject of envy. Whether one wants it or not, what does pilot, from behind the scene, the play of questions and answers of the American is nothing but desire. Envious desire can be said to mould or even channel, time after time, Delano's own comprehension-interpretation of the world. Truth is, to be sure, always and already shaped to the measure of desire, to the measure of the 'I want / I can't', to the I's own measure:

"but if that story was not true, *what was the truth? That the ship had unlawfully come into the Spaniard's possession?*".¹⁰³

The formulation of this question cannot but find its profound sense within the perspective of envy: the American interrogates the Spaniard's ownmost and he interrogates it, originarily and for the most part, with the view of symbolically dispossessing him of it; so cherishing the wild idea, perhaps, not just to see the Other (virtually) expropriated of all his possessions [illegally accumulated: that is, stealing the Other's (Delano) ownmost] but to see him humiliated and brought before justice.¹⁰⁴ Finally, in A7, the 'playful' normalization of the real brings back to the original order of the representation¹⁰⁵; an order that gets its structure, to say that with Heidegger, from a *fore-having*, a *fore-sight* and a *fore-conception*. An order, moreover, whose temporal field is still that of the possible/realizable: Cereno is nothing less than a poor idiot, *putting idle questions without sense or object*. Therefore, *not fit to be entrusted with the ship*. The tranquillizing and somehow self-persuading nature of this inference is due, we say, to the ability it has of 'lowering and raising' absolutely. It suggests to Delano the possibility of exercising a very great power: namely, that of withdrawing the command from the Spaniard and, accordingly, of substituting himself in his stead. To destitute the Other is to take his place. Getting rid of Cereno, Delano would come to gain total sovereignty, ultimately captaining, disposing of two vessels: the *Bachelor's Delight* and the imposing *San Dominick*. It is therefore clear that this taking-upon-oneself the Other's destiny has indeed very little to do with the word 'ethics' (in the way we have come to understand this term). The American's benevolence would respond, in reality, to a desire, to a finality, to an absolute aspiration. Intentionality here properly indicates the idea of a supreme erection or

¹⁰³ And let's recall to mind here Cereno's words to Delano: "I am the owner of all you see".

¹⁰⁴ The most intense envy is tempted by vindictiveness.

¹⁰⁵ The work of laugh liberates from fear. Its effect is a positive, beneficial, therapeutic one.

elevation: a will to totally impose oneself over the Other. To be the master (and to be the master in the house of the master/host itself, so to speak¹⁰⁶).

Such were the American's thoughts. They were tranquillizing...Nevertheless, it was not something of a relief that the good seaman presently perceived his whale boat in the distance. Its absence has been prolonged by unexpected detention at the sealer's side, as well its returning trip lengthened by the continual recession of the goal. (p.76)

(j) The offer:

While waiting for his whaleboat to approach, Delano is, once again, witness to an episode of insubordination:

"Don Benito," said Captain Delano quickly, "do you see what is going on there? Look!" But, seized by his cough, the Spaniard staggered, with both hands to his face, on the point of falling. Captain Delano would have supported him, but the servant was more alert, who with one hand sustaining his master, with the other applied the cordial. Don Benito restored, the black withdrew his support, slipping aside a little, but dutifully remaining within call of a whisper. (p.77)

His glance thus called away from the spectacle of disorder to the more pleasing one before him, Captain Delano could not avoid again congratulating his host upon possessing such a servant, who, though perhaps a little too forward now and then, must upon the whole be invaluable to one in the invalid's situation.

"Tell me, Don Benito," he added, with a smile – "I should like to have your man here myself – what will you take for him? Would fifty doubloons be any object?"

"Master wouldn't part with Babo for a thousand doubloons," murmured the black, overhearing the offer, and taking it in earnest, and with a strange vanity of a faithful slave appreciated by his master, scorning to hear so paltry a valuation put upon him by a stranger. But Don Benito, apparently hardly yet completely restored, and again interrupted by his cough, made but some broken reply. (ibid.)

Once more, Babo calculably intervenes to distract the American, displacing his attention away from the *hic et nunc* of the event, that is, he dislocates it towards the 'elsewhere' and the 'in-view-of' of pleasure and (envious) desire¹⁰⁷, and in any case towards representation. But let's get to the heart of the matter, from whence we shall draw our conclusions. The captain of the *Bachelor's Delight* finally discloses his intentions regarding

¹⁰⁶ The guest (*hostis*) becomes the enemy (*hostis*). We shall come back to this in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁷ As to envy, intended especially in its scopical acceptance, it is worth quoting the following inference, placed in between the above-mentioned paragraphs: "such discretion was here evinced as quite wiped away, in the visitor's eyes, any blemish of impropriety which might have attached to the attendant, from the indecorous conferences before mentioned; showing too, that if the servant were to blame, it might be more the master's fault than his own, since when left to himself he could conduct thus well".

Babo; who, by acting *sotto voce* on Cereno's behalf, can be said to condemn the American to envy's most authentic, most sincere and most intense torment. In short, Delano knows he won't have the black. The American ultimately experiences his impotence, his passivity, his not-being-able-to-be-able before the 'empirical' 'no' indirectly pronounced by Don Benito. In the context we have developed, this experience is, no doubt, a moment of extreme lucidity and, of course, of sufferance. The Other does not only reflect to the Same the failure (however partial) of his intentional (fore-)sights, but he becomes, precisely *qua* sign of this very failure, the cause of it. In sum, Delano would 'perceive' Cereno as in the very act of dispossessing him of a 'possible' or even a 'potentiality-of-being' that he has comprehended-interpreted, from the very start, as truly belonging to him: in fact, as 'his'.¹⁰⁸

The next chapter should attest to, necessarily so, a reinforcement of what we call 'counter' dynamics: namely, the perception of the Spaniard as villain, conspirator, enemy. This should also mean an increase of emotive situations such as apprehension, fear (for oneself) and possibly terror: being can be said to be threatened in its ownmost potentiality-for-being, in its having to be its already (pre)comprehended being. What is an issue is indeed being in its effort to be. Yet, alongwith fear, we shall come across another emotive phenomenon, definitely more profound and 'authentic' than fear: that is, that of anxiety or even insomnia, to refer to Lévinas. The putting into question of the future, understood as a tranquillizing presumption of being able to reach or possess everything, signifies the irreparable piercing of its continuity (the continuity of the concrete), the forming of a non synchronizable fissure within representation itself. If, to borrow Heidegger's terminology, the ahead-of-itself of fear is determined, that of anxiety is not. Anxiety is precisely the fact of feeling less and less at ease in a world intuited, at intervals, in its inconsistency, in its mystery, in its irreducibility. A world somehow less desirable, so to speak. It ultimately signifies, within the I's field of forces, a progressive re-opening to the Other and alterity. The putting into question of the intentional time is in fact, as we shall see, a being put before a question.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ As Petrosino makes clear: "envy does not concern then, originally, the plane of possession, but that of the possible, of the possible like 'the whole' that, from the very beginning, opens/offers itself as within one's reach". Petrosino, *Visione e Desiderio*, p.180 (my transl.).

¹⁰⁹ Question that comes from the face of the Other, from his regard, and which is not intelligible in being.

Chapter 5

An Eye for an Eye, or the Avenger

The time is out of joint.

Hamlet, II.1

(k) Diachrony and alterity:

Left to himself, the American, to while away the time till his boat should arrive, would have pleasantly accosted some one of the Spanish seamen he saw; but recalling something that Don Benito had said touching their ill conduct, he refrained, as a ship-master indisposed to countenance cowardice or unfaithfulness in seamen. (p.78)

Proceeding from the 'no' indirectly casted by Cereno, we have inferred the putting into question of a future always and already promised to the (fore)sights of the noesis, on the basis of the "tranquillizing presumption of being able to reach and possess everything". This is a future not only comprehended-interpreted, from the very start, as possessable but as one's own and, more particularly, as one's own *alone*. The putting into question of this future can thus be said to attest to the laceration of the protentional or even representational time and, consequentially, to the forming of a non-synchronizable and therefore *critical* singularity within the being of the representation itself. Delano would in sum be no longer in the capacity of grasping what-lies-ahead of himself, thereby put in an (un)condition of impotence or subjection with respect to it, that is, to time in its mystery (the mystery itself of death construed as the event *par excellence*). His confidence, his certainties and ultimately his tranquillizing knowledge are being put in doubt.

His perception of the cutter: *left to himself, the American, to while away the time till his boat should arrive...* does, however, work to reassure him and it does so precisely in the effecting of the familiar, the domestic, the same. Its sight certainly announces the satisfaction of the need by the I to regain ontological stability. Yet again, the distance separating Delano from his boat still defines the existence of a lapse, an interval. A time-gap with respect to which, despite all the efforts of the identifying intentionality, the I remains essentially subjected. This non-intelligible, non-economizable *écart* can be sensibly described as a 'malaise', whose intensity is to increase or decrease, as we shall

see, according to the regresses or progresses of *Rover* (this is the name of the cutter) in its forthcomingness. Waiting thus marks the time of this first analytical section, in relation to which the semes (all connoted: see the following occurrences) of anxiety, impatience, frustration, uneasiness, isolation in connection with the main signified of impotence can be identified. But let's deepen the temporal exegesis on the grounds of the following instances:

A1- At last he looked to see how his boat was getting on; but it was still pretty remote. He turned to see if Don Benito had returned; but he had not.

To change the scene, as well as to please himself with a leisurely observation of the coming boat [...]

A2- He leaned against the carved balustrade, again looking off toward his boat [...]

A3- Not unbewildered, again he gazed off for his boat. But this was temporarily hidden by a rocky spur of the isle. As with some eagerness he bent forward, watching for the first shooting view of its beak, the balustrade gave way before him like chaircoal.

A4- All this is very queer now, thought Captain Delano, with a qualmish sort of emotion; but as one feeling incipient seasickness, he strove, by ignoring the symptoms, to get rid of the malady. Once more he looked off for his boat. To his delight, it was now again in view, leaving the rocky spur astern.

A5- What? Yes, she has fallen afoul of the bubbling tide-rip there. It sets her the other way, too, for the time. Patience.

A6- Meantime, one moment turning to mark "Rover" fighting the tide-rip, and next to see Don Benito approaching, he continued walking the poop. Gradually he felt a vexation arising from the delay of his boat; this soon merged into uneasiness...Ah, thought he - gravely enough - this is like the ague: because it went off, it follows not it won't come back.

A7- By way of keeping his mind out of mischief till the boat should arrive, he tried to occupy it with turning over and over, in a purely speculative sort of way, some lesser peculiarities of the captain and crew.

The totality of these occurrences, opening and closing several scenes of the *histoire*, is spread across some ten pages of the narrative (pp.78-86). It should be pointed out, however, that the last four instances are concentrated within less than two pages of it. In this regard, we might venture to say that their diegetic density or even intensity reflects, on the thymic plane of the utterance, the acuity of a malaise experienced (if we are allowed to speak of a receptivity of suffering¹) in all its irreducibility: *ah, thought he - gravely*

¹ "Suffering is, of course, a *datum* in consciousness, a certain 'psychological content' [...] but in this very 'content' it is in-spite-of-consciousness, the unassumable. The unassumable or 'inassumability' [...] at once what disturbs order and disturbance itself [...] Suffering, in its woe, in its in-spite-of-consciousness, is passivity. In this case apprehension, a taking into the consciousness, is no longer, strictly speaking, a 'taking', no longer *the performance of an act of consciousness*, but, in adversity, a submission to submission, since the 'content' that suffering consciousness is conscious is precisely this same adversity of suffering - its woe. But, here again, *passivity* - that is, a modality - signifies a *quiddity*, and perhaps as the locus in which passivity signifies originally, independently of its conceptual opposition to activity". Lévinas, *Entre Nous: thinking-of-the-Other*, pp.91-92, Lévinas'

enough – this is like the ague: because it went off, it follows not it won't come back. As we suggested a moment ago, the negativity of this uneasiness and this uneasiness as negativity from which the I is clearly unable to wrest itself free, can be understood to affect it precisely by effecting its subjection to time in its diachrony, namely, its subjection to the critical and thus questioning *presence* of the Other. Face-to-face with the Other would the I then be able to comprehend him beyond all that there is of 'prehending' in this 'comprehension' and, therefore, to finally ex-pose itself by answering to the ethical call its (the Other's) face always and already articulate? Or, is the laceration of the continuity of the concrete to exhaust its sense only in so much as production of uncertainty, anxiety, fear (for oneself), impatience, nostalgia, need and will of the I to repatriate to itself? Is it to signify exclusively as *homesickness* and thus as indifference, irresponsibility? And, if so, what originally is to determine the I's aphasia but also at one and the *same* time its inaction, its apathy, its lack of e-motions, its failure to exit itself for good ('to pull itself out of the first person', as Lévinas puts it) and, ultimately, its failure to place itself within the truth?

(1) An eye for an eye or, the avenger:

Let us set a trap for the righteous for he annoys us and opposes our way of life, he reproaches us for our breaches of the Law and accuses us of being false to our upbringing.

Wisdom,2,12

No doubt, the questions raised above need to be contextualized starting from and within the problematic, of great importance in this tale, of envy, of the evil eye. Before proceeding with the textual analysis, we should in fact make ultimately clear that the feeling of impotence to which Delano is being subjected in the waiting for his boat, does necessarily refer, in its aetiology, to the consciousness of another impotence, perceived moreover as ineluctable: that is, that of no longer being able to have Babo, epitome of all a world secretly longed for. We should thus take into account the fact that if, on the one hand, Delano remains tied up to the desire of that which, from the very start, he has been let to comprehend-interpret as his own, namely, he is referred ontologically to what

emphasis. In *Of God who comes to mind*, the French philosopher is even more precise: "In the appearing of evil, in its original phenomenality, in its *quality*, there is announced a *modality* or a manner: it is the non-finding-the-place, the refusal of any accommodation with [...]; a counter-nature, a monstrosity, the disturbing and foreign in itself. *And in this sense transcendence!*"; p.128, Lévinas' emphasis.

he still considers to be his ownmost possible or even his ownmost potentiality-of-being, he is *now* tied up to it in the painful realization of the impossibility of achieving it: “in the misery of an experience of the no-longer-possible and no-longer-his”.²

In effect, the chrono-ontological decapitalization of the I does not stifle its desire; far from it. Starting precisely from the memory of what he was about to reach but is now prevented from reaching, Delano desires more than ever, he is thrown into desire’s turbulence as never before. From whence, most likely, envy’s declination into hate, into a ‘fierce desire’³ to avenge oneself on the Other.⁴ The American can be said to be at war with the Spaniard, who is *responsible*, in the eyes of the former, for an irreparable and unforgivable damage. This is certainly an undeclared, unprofessed and thus very much secretive kind of war. As a matter of fact, envy can be said to hide itself: undeclared, unconfessable, this is certainly a *speechless* passion, a mute one. As Alberoni makes clear: “envy is an aphasic sentiment. *And it is also a shameful one.* It is something we don’t dare to tell anybody and that we can hardly admit to ourselves [...] *to do so it is more than exposing ourselves*, it is to reveal the meanest and most vulnerable side of our soul [...] to speak of our envy is to speak of our inmost hopes [...] our failures, our incapacity [...] it is to speak of the wrongs we think we have suffered and we don’t dare to confess for were they really wrongs or simply our own incapacities?”. Further down, the sociologist states: “he who envies is obliged to put on a mask, to show the contrary of his feelings. He is mortified, humiliated, yet he pretends he is serene, satisfied and confident. He is crossed with the Other but shows him his friendship, affection, esteem”.⁵ This is, to be sure, Delano’s attitude towards Cereno from the start until the end: a fantastic play of friendship, esteem and respect. The American is beyond doubt the greatest interpreter of the artful mask organized by Babo (the concept of falsehood as well as that of bad faith will be discussed at length later on). In this concern, it’s also worth recalling what Melville has said in relation to envy and, more specifically, to envy’s aphasia: “Is Envy then such a monster? Well, though many an arraigned mortal has in hopes of mitigated penalty pleaded guilty to horrible actions, *did ever anybody seriously confess to envy? Something there is in it universally felt to be more shameful than even felonious crime.* And not only does everybody disown it, but the better sort are inclined to incredulity when it is in earnest

² Petrosino, S., *Visione e desiderio*, p.118. The Italian philosopher also adds: “from this point of view, envy is a modality of dwelling upon the irrecoverable and no-longer possible” (p.120). It can be said that it is Cereno to have forever realized the possibility of being Delano longs for.

³ “While I to hell am thrust, whether neither joy nor love, but fierce desire”. Milton, John, *Paradise Lost*, iv.

⁴ Envy would be nothing less than the ‘lived’ (*Erlebnis*) of an ontological loss, so to speak.

⁵ Alberoni, Francesco, *L’invidia*, pp.20-21; 97, my transl. and emphasis.

imputed to an intelligent man. But since its lodgement is in the heart not the brain, no degree of intellect supplies a guarantee against it”.⁶ As to this latter phrase, one might consider that Delano, despite that the critics have always deemed him a little naïve, a little stupid, is absolutely not an idiot but only an envious man.⁷ But, let’s carry on with the text:

While, with these thoughts, standing with eye directed forward towards that handful of sailors, *suddenly he thought that one or two of them returned the glance with a sort of meaning*.⁸ He rubbed his eyes, and looked again; but again he seemed to see the same thing. Under a new form, but more obscure than any previous one, the old suspicions recurred, but in the absence of Don Benito, with less panic than before. *Despite the bad account given of the sailors*, Captain Delano resolved forthwith to accost one of them. (p.78, my emphasis)

Previously, we are told: *but recalling something that Don Benito had said touching their* (the sailors) *ill conduct*; further down, we read: *and then again recalling Don Benito’s confessed ill opinion of his crew* [...] This is certainly curious but not surprising. It is curious, in the first place, simply because groundless. Within the textual economy, there is no trace of this: despite what Delano *believes* he has heard, we can undoubtedly affirm that Cereno neither explicitly nor implicitly refers in a negative way with regard to his seamen. It is true instead that the captain of the San Dominick doesn’t miss an opportunity to stress the extremely singular good behaviour of the slaves and, this, of course, with the sole intent to suggest to Delano the opposite. Later on, the American cannot help in fact remarking

⁶ Melville, *Billy Budd*, in *The Complete Shorter fiction*, pp.432-433

⁷ In that would lie his incapacity to comprehend the other beyond all that there is of ‘prehending’ in this ‘comprehending’ (see also Ponzio’s distinction between ontological and critical knowledge, footnote 95, p.120 of this work). The American cannot see, he cannot see *properly* or even straightforwardly: “though upon the wide sea, he seemed in some far inland country; prisoner in some deserted chateau, left to stare at empty grounds, and peer out at vague roads, where never wagon or wayfarer passed” (p.81). He cannot see properly simply because he envies, because he sees askance. ‘Benito Cereno’ does anticipate, thematically, the other great novel of *inward* life which is ‘Billy Budd’. The other sublime *fresco* on and of envy.

⁸ It is not the first time that Delano experiences the unintelligible regard of the Spaniards: “the visitor turned the face to the other side of ship. By so doing, his glance accidentally fell on a young Spanish sailor, a coil of rope in his hand, just stepped from the deck to the first round of the mizzen-rigging. Perhaps the man would not have been particularly noticed, were it not that, during his ascent to one of the yards, he with a sort of covert intentness, kept his eye fixed on Captain Delano” (p.70). Not to speak of the several occurrences where Don Benito’s vacant look *enigmatically* calls out to Delano. As Derrida declares, referring to Lévinas’s ‘ethical philosophy’, “the face-to-face eludes all categories. For the Face gives itself simultaneously in so much as expression and *parole*. Not just as regard, but as an original unity of regard and *parole*, eyes and mouth – [...] its signification is thus irreducible. Beside, the Face does not signify [...] it does but signal itself (or, it is but the sign of itself), soul, subjectivity, etc”. Derrida, Jacques, *Violence et Métaphisique*, pp.148-149, my transl. from French and my ellipsis. Or, as Lévinas himself puts it, the Face is “phenomenologically irreducible [...] (here) meaning means [...] it [the Face] falls beneath the sense”. Lévinas, E., *Violence of the Face*, in *Alterity and Transcendence*, p.172 and 175, my ellipsis. See also what we have said in chap.ii and iii.

that the Spaniards *seemed as docile as the latter the contrary* (p.82). It is not surprising, in the second place, as Delano's oblique perceiving of the seamen is nothing but the result of a malicious association of ideas: namely, it would be borne of the identification of Cereno *qua* villain, thief, impostor and, originally, let's recall it, *qua* subject of envy. Delano's resentment can be said to be projected indifferently onto a whole culture: the Spaniard is a felon, accordingly, all Spaniards are felons. As simple as this.

What follows can be divided into two scenes. In the first one, which we shall summarize into four lexias, the American's attention is turned to a young-looking sailor:

A1- While thinking which of them to select for his purpose, he chanced to observe a sailor seated on the deck engaged in tarring the strap of a large block, with a circle of blacks squatted round him inquisitively eyeing the process.

A2- The mean employment of the man was in contrast with something superior in his figure. His hand, black with continually thrusting it into the tar pot held for him by a negro, seemed not naturally allied to his face, a face which would have been a very fine one but for its haggardness [...] Whether this haggardness had aught to do with criminality, could not be determined.

A3- (However) observing so singular a haggardness combined with a dark eye, averted as in trouble and shame, and then again recalling Don Benito's confessed ill opinion of his crew, insensibly he was operated upon by certain general notions, which, while disconnecting them pain and abashment from virtue, invariably link them with vice.

A4- If, indeed, there be any wickedness on board this ship...be sure that man there has fouled his hand in it, even as now he fouls it in the pitch. I don't like to accost him. (all occurrences p.79)

The second scene can also be summed up into four sequences:

B1- He advanced to an old Barcelona tar, in ragged red breeches and dirty night-cap, cheeks trenched and bronzed, whiskers dense as thorn hedges.

B2- Seated between two sleepy-looking Africans, this mariner, like his younger shipmate, was employed upon some rigging...the sleepy-looking black performing the inferior function of holding the outer parts of the ropes for him.

B3- Being addressed, he glanced up, but with what seemed a furtive, diffident air, which sat strangely enough on his weather-beaten visage, much as if a grizzly bear, instead of growling and biting, should simper and cast sheep's eyes [...]

B4- Despairing of getting into unembarrassed talk with such a centaur, Captain Delano, after glancing round for a more promising countenance, but seeing none, spoke pleasantly to the blacks to make way for him; and so, amid various grins and grimaces, returned to the poop [...] (ibid.)

It appears that both sailors are being engaged in some maintenance work of the ship, respectively assisted (or so it seems) by *a negro* and *two sleeping-looking Africans* (A1/B2). The function performed by the blacks, *necessarily* inferior to that of the whites, to be sure confirms, to Delano's eyes, the familiar isotopy white-master *versus* black-slave (again

A1/B2). Yet, what disturbs the American is rather the exteriority or even the outerness of the two seamen: in A2, the filthy job carried out by the young-looking one definitely stands out against the disquieted beauty of his face, *which would have been a very fine one but for its haggardness*.⁹ Still further, in B3, Delano seems to be very much bothered by the elusive look of the Spaniard: *what seemed a furtive, diffident air which sat strangely enough* on his face of experienced sailor. Yet, instead of critically suggesting to the American, their expressive unnaturalness considered within the context of the situation in which they are grasped, has the counter-effect of producing feelings of repulsion on the one hand (A4) and diffidence on the other (B4). The ambiguity of their faces, starting precisely from what Delano considers *Don Benito's confessed ill opinion of his crew*, does but accredit their duplicity, deceitfulness, machiavellianism.

Far from discerning the suffering, the fear, the exposition to death, far from being able to *bear a silent* calling out for help, the face of the Other, intended here inasmuch as an indivisible unity of look and speech, is ultimately comprehended as the expression of evil. It can be said that Delano does not see with love but rather with the hardness (*insensibly he was operated upon by certain general notions*) of rancour, resentment and anger. His envy clearly works here through the medium of a third party. Yet, our analysis is all but concluded. We have to go further, we have to dig further down into this 'depravity according to nature'¹⁰ which is precisely envy. The semiosis of the two seamen is dominated by the presence of four semes: falsehood, viciousness (A3; by implication within the second scene), aggressiveness or harmfulness (latently within the first scene, clearly in the second one¹¹) shame (A3;B3) with reference to the semanteme of guilt. Now, what one should consider is the connection, the relation, certainly not casual, between these semes and envy itself. In effect, these very semes outline a model of the envious man: he who envies, as we mentioned earlier on, always and necessarily lies; envy is then a vice or at any rate we generally refer to it as a vice, a most violent, destructive one and it is also a shameful passion, *more shameful*, as Melville himself puts it, *than even felonious crime*.¹² But, above all, envy is a fault, a sin¹³: the envious man is, first and foremost,

⁹ It is worth bearing in mind here that Melville firmly believed in the platonic idea of beauty, namely, that the external beauty reflected an internal one.

¹⁰ Melville cites Plato. See *Billy Budd*, p.431.

¹¹ In B2, the sailor's sideburns are as "dense as thorn edges". His look makes Delano think of a "grizzly bear" (B3); his attitude is "ursine" (not reported). He is also defined as "a centaur" (B4).

¹² It could be said that shame is the realization of a moral fall (an original fall). See also what we have said concerning the concepts of highness v lowness; ascension v fall in chapter iv of this work.

¹³ According to many the worst sin of all. In the *Parson's Tale* for example, Chaucer writes: "Certes, thanne is Envye the worst synne that it is. For soothly, alle othere synnes been somtyme oonly agayns o [one] special vertu; but certes, Envye is agayns alle vertues and agayns alle goodneses." Chaucer,

a guilty man. What we are dealing with here is, to be sure, at once a process of removal and projection of disvalues, whose phenomenology needs to be thought about. Three questions necessarily arise: first of all, what determines the activation of this *transfer*? What is it for? What are the implications for the plane of the plot?

How plainly, thought he, did that old whiskerando yonder betray a consciousness of ill-desert. No doubt, when he saw me coming, he dreaded lest I, apprised by his Captain of the crew's general misbehaviour, came with sharp words for him, and so down with his head. And yet – and yet, now that I think of it, that very old fellow, if I err not, was one of those who seemed so earnestly eying me here awhile since. (p.23)

Let's consider, in the first place, the self-indulgent nature of this series of inferences, as if Delano, lacking confidence, had to convince himself as to the rightness of his own perceptions-judgments/(pre)judgments-perceptions with respect to the Spaniards. Observe for instance the use the American makes of non-dubitative expressions: *how plainly; no doubt*. Indeed, they attest to a deep uncertainty. They bespeak an essential insecurity. Delano is definitely not sure, yet, he tries his best to silence this uncertainty of his. He does his outmost to still it and, more profoundly, to still the sentiment (or the emotion, necessarily ethical in structure) determining it. The suspicion that Delano is not sure but only does his best to appear as if he were, is moreover legitimated by the substantial ambiguity that generally marks envy: "the envious man", as Alberoni affirms, "knows his arguments have little weight, he knows his opinions lack consistency. Every now and then, he is called into question and were it not for the fact that he is obliged at all times to wear a mask, he would yield up. By lying to other people, it is easier for him to lie to himself".¹⁴ Yet, the question is: what is Delano trying to persuade himself of? It is clear, of his own innocence. Let's proceed with caution: *despite the bad account given of the sailors*, that is, in spite of his envy, the American accepts (*with less panic than before*: the same is anxiety) to come *face-to-face* with the Other.¹⁵ This movement towards the Other thus presupposes, in some way, the putting-into-question of his own method of evaluation, his convictions, his prejudices and, more profoundly, his moral rectitude, his uprightness. The face of the Other, *so earnestly eying him, does* call into question this alleged

Geoffrey, *The Canterbury Tales*, Everyman's Library, London, 1958, p.561 (source: Petrosino, S., *Visione e desiderio*, p.73). Besides, let's not forget that the sin of envy is originally and for the most part attributed to Satan (Petrosino, S., *ibid.*). Finally, the Holy Scriptures attest that death was brought into the world because of Satan's envy: "the envy of the devil brought death to the world"; Wisdom, 2,24. This is maybe why envy is often considered as the deadliest of sins.

¹⁴ Alberoni, F., *L'invidia*, p.98.

¹⁵ And let's recall here Lévinas's *difficult* formula: "the Face that looks at me affirms me".

straightforwardness of his, thereby obliging him to question himself: why does the Other regard me? By looking at me in such a sincere way, what does he accuse me of? Maybe of the fact that I envy¹⁶(Cereno)? To be sure, had Delano recognized and bravely accepted his fault (the very fact that he envies), this would have clearly indicated to him an orientation, a way, a *sense*. A sense indubitably beyond the egological and egoistic persistence in being and ultimately beyond the persistence in the survival of its being (we shall come back to this). But the American evades the other judgement, that is, he denies, in bad faith, being what he essentially is: an envious man.¹⁷ Precisely because he constitutes his reality *qua* being-what-he-is-not, namely, he transcends his facticity of *invidiosus*, he does not believe the Other: the other consciousness is mathematically what-it-is-not, that is, false. From whence, basically, the deceitfulness, the dishonesty of the Other and at the same time the actualization (always already *actualized* within envy) of the semic transfer. But why does Delano negate (and here the negation should to be conceived in so much as a negation of all responsibilities: at once towards oneself and the Other), namely, why does he *put* himself in bad faith? Of fear and, more specifically, of fear of a sufferance sensed in its fatality: the sufferance of an ineluctable truth. The very unpleasant truth of defeat, of the loss of value: “the Other (Cereno) is a man of

¹⁶ Envy's scopic quality or even modality should also be taken into consideration.

¹⁷ Envy is based on falsehood but also and more specifically on bad faith, in the sense J.P.Sartre confers to this term in *Being and Nothingness*. The French philosopher convincingly distinguishes between lie as such and bad faith. He argues that, unlike falsehood, bad faith has an unitary ontological structure: while in falsehood one lies exclusively to the interlocutor/s, that is, one is fully conscious of the fact that he/she is lying (from whence the intrinsic structural duality of falsehood: “by the lie consciousness affirms that it exists by nature as *hidden from the Other*; it utilizes for its own profit the ontological duality of myself and myself in the eyes of the Other [...], p.49), in bad faith one essentially lies to oneself: “[...] *it is from myself that I am hiding the truth* [...] It follows first that the one to whom the lie is told and the one who lies are one and the same person, which means that I must know in my capacity as deceiver the truth which is hidden from me in my capacity as the one deceived. Better yet I must know the truth very exactly *in order* to conceal it more carefully – and this is not at two different moments, which at a pinch would allow us to re-establish a semblance of duality – but in the unitary structure of a single project (ibid.) [...] And what is the goal of bad faith? To cause me to be what I am, in the mode of ‘*not being what one is*’, or not to be what I am in the mode of ‘*being what one is*’” (p.66). Finally, we shall single out some other interesting assertions by the philosopher: A1- But bad faith is not restricted to denying the qualities which I possess, to not seeing the being which I am. It attempts also to constitute myself as being what I am not (pp.66-67). A2- The true problem of bad faith stems evidently from the fact that bad faith is *faith*. A3- The decision to be in bad faith does not dare to speak its name; it believes itself and does not believe itself in bad faith; it believes itself and does not believe itself in good faith. It is this which from the upsurge of bad faith, determines the later attitude and, as it were, the Weltanschauung of bad faith. A4- What it [bad faith] decides first, in fact, is the nature of truth. With bad faith a truth appears, a method of thinking, a type of being which is like that of objects; the ontological characteristic of the world of bad faith with which the subject suddenly surrounds himself is this: that here being is what it is not, and it is not what it is. A5- One *puts oneself* in bad faith as one goes to sleep and one is in bad faith as one dreams. Once this mode of being has been realized, it is as difficult to get out of it as to wake oneself up; bad faith is a type of being in the world, like waking or dreaming. A6- The first act of bad faith is to flee what it can not flee, to flee what it is (pp. 66-70).

worth, while I am not; he has reached what in my wildest dreams I always longed for, he has forever realized what I always wished to achieve: the high-status of captaining a prestigious vessel, of possessing immense fortune¹⁸, leading a life of success and glory, being surrounded by the most faithful of all slaves, having great power. He is *everything*, I am *nothing*".¹⁹ To ultimately elude the face-to-face with the Other by denying in bad faith the extremely painful truth that this confrontation brings about is thus necessary, ontologically necessary: *no doubt, when he saw me coming, he dreaded lest I, apprised by his Captain of the crew's general misbehaviour, came with sharp words for him, and so down with his head [...].* As if to say: "I am certainly not the guilty one here, it's definitely the Other, this very Other who dared to regard-judge me (read confront-offend me) and who now, with bent head, timorously implores me for my forgiveness" and, still further, "If I failed, I failed not out of incapacity, it's unquestionably the Other's fault, who, unfairly (that is, by stealing), has deprived me of a possibility-of-being which was mine and mine alone from the very start"; thus reasons-lies (inhumanly, like crazy) the envious man.²⁰

Delano's *finale* is therefore and undoubtedly so a parody of justice, wherein the roles of the subjects are being reversed, wherein the responsibilities are being inverted or even perverted (innocence-guilt), wherein the value confrontation with the Other (via third party) is turned into one's own advantage, but, it is also an act of self-defence or even self-preservation. This is exactly the point we are trying to make for envy is, first and foremost, a mechanism (however perverse) of protection, safeguard of the being of the I. As Alberoni claims "it [envy] is indubitably a device to avoid one's being being put into

¹⁸ Let's recall Cereno's (surely painful) reply to Delano when this latter asks him: "You are part owner of ship and cargo, I presume, but not of the slaves, perhaps?" "I am owner of all you see", impatiently returned Don Benito [...] pp.66-67.

¹⁹ As Natoli reasonably claims: "envy is nothing but the expiation of one's ambitiousness". Natoli, Salvatore, *Il tormento dell'impotenza*, in AA.VV, *L'invidia. Aspetti sociali e culturali*, Scheiwiller, Milano, 1990, p.38, my transl.

²⁰ Once again, the semic oppositions verticality *v* horizontality; highness *v* lowness, superiority *v* inferiority in relation to the main opposition haughtiness *v* humility dominate. One can also note that what Delano 'experiences' here is nothing less than his own guilt. Finally, in what concerns the typology of the envious man, it is worth bringing to mind Melville's sharp description in *Billy Budd*: "Though the man's even temper and discreet bearing would seem to intimate a mind peculiarly subject to the law of reason, not the less in heart he would seem to riot in complete exemption from that law, having apparently little to do with reason further than to employ it as an ambidexter implement for effecting the irrational. That is to say: Toward the accomplishment of an aim which in wantonness of atrocity would seem to partake of the insane, he will direct a cool judgement sagacious and sound. These men are madmen, and of the most dangerous sort, for their lunacy is not continuous, but occasional, evoked by some special object, it is protectively secretive, which is as much as to say it is self-contained, so that when, moreover, most active it is to the average mind not distinguishable from sanity; and for the reason above suggested: that whatever its aims may be – and the aim is never declared – the method and the outward proceeding are always perfectly rational". Melville, *Billy Budd*, pp.431-432.

question”²¹, it is an *instrument* of defence of the integrity of the subject, of its identity, its ontological value. An instrument though, one would agree, certainly not perfect precisely because (moral) doubt remains *present* within the subject, like a ghost that keeps coming back and back, haunting its consciousness and thus producing anxiety, disruption to its well-being. Despite all the efforts of the identifying intentionality, the synthesis of the present operated by the subject of the signification, despite the diabolical work of envy, the I remains in sum exposed to time in its diachrony, namely, exposed to the presence of the Other and to the question its face unequivocally articulates:

Gradually he felt rising a dreamy inquietude, like that one who alone on the prairie feels unrest from the repose of the noon.
He leaned against the carved balustrade, again looking off towards his boat [...]
(p.81)

To conclude, we shall propose the following equation: Delano believes (and does not believe) he is not what he is, that is, he lies to himself, in the same way as on board the San Dominick everything is not what it is, namely, Babo (always and *already*) lies to Delano.²² In both instances, reality is transcended into fiction: mainly by way of bad faith in the first case (Delano also lies to Cereno) and by way of falsehood as such in the second. As to this, one may reasonably infer that were the American brave enough to confess his envy, that is to say, were he not at all time ‘seeking shelter’ in bad faith, Babo’s mask would most likely come to an end, his plotting would almost certainly clear up. That Delano envies is therefore necessary to the maintenance of the appearances but also that the reality on board of the Spanish vessel is masquerade and fabrication (infinite entertainment, as Blanchot would put it) is *now* necessary to Delano’s ontological integrity (“I do not envy; I am not guilty of anything: Cereno is really a villain”). The two realities would then not only imply each other but would need each other in order not to be what they in fact are: indeed, their interplay substantialize the (false) identity of both. Despite their interests and scopes being dissimilar, it can be said that both Babo and Delano share a common task: namely, the very eradication of all differences (although the American is not aware or we should say *not fully conscious* of Babo’s machinations). They both work to the removal (or, if one likes, perversion) of the truth: that everything

²¹ Alberoni, *L'invidia*, p.8 *et passim*.

²² As a matter of fact, we should not forget that Babo lies to the American in the first place: that is, he makes him *believe* that everything (as far as his eye can see) will be within his reach.

remains in the mode of being-what-is-not or *viceversa*, that is, according to the pre-established order of the representation is ultimately *vital* to both of them.²³

To conclude, it should be clear by now that what is at stake here for Delano would not, originally, concern his *having-to-be* but rather his being what he (really) is, so to speak. What is an issue, what is dangerously called into question by the Other (Cereno and the Spaniards), is the in-itself of the being of the I, its essence of *invidiosus*. It's in that that the face of the Other can be said to represent a threat to the American, a *mortal* threat indeed precisely because it calls him out to a responsibility which entails the very sacrifice of his egological and egoistic persistence in being²⁴ (not what he is, namely, an envious man) and ultimately his persistence in its well-being. A threat, however, whose eschatology may still be susceptible, independently of the conceptual dialectics of fullness and emptiness, being-able-to-be-able and not-being-able-to-be-able-anymore and, ultimately, of being (someone; something) and not-being, it may still be susceptible, we say, of a one-way sense, so to speak: a sense preceding and exceeding ontology; better yet, we might venture to say that this eschatology may still be invested of a sense (to be sure ethical), whose (certainly) passive genesis within the subject and whose direction (*straight-forwardness*) and destination would proceed starting from and beyond the breaking up with the theoretical or thematical determination of the aforesaid dialectics. Beyond

²³ The motif of the Face as opposed to that of the mask could be developed further, that is to say, in connection with the semic couples truth/ *Verbum* v lie/perversion of the *Verbum*; Good v Evil; God v satan (let's recall that the Hebraic word 'satan' means 'he who plots against'). Both Babo and Delano not only wear masks [the two engraved figures on the San Dominick's stern piece would represent respectively the negro and the American (but also the negro and the Spanish), whom the former detains the soul: "uppermost and central of which was a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked", p.54. The image will be reversed at the end of the story, when Delano's "right hand foot (...) ground the prostrate negro", p.107.] but also work to the covering up of the Other *qua* Face. They operate its carnivalization (to borrow Bakhtin's terminology), namely, they pervert the *Verbum* the Face expresses (*Thou Shall not Kill*). A *Verbum* always already inscribed in the Face of the Other as a trace of the divine, of the invisible God whose idea, to paraphrase Lévinas, comes to the mind (or we should say is susceptible of coming to the mind) starting from the responsibility to which the Other (*qua* embodied *Verbum*) commands the Same: "Should we not call that demand or that challenge or that assignment of responsibility the word of God? Does not God come to the mind precisely in this assigning rather than in the thematization of something thinkable, even rather than in any invitation to dialogue?"; Lévinas, *Entre Nous: thinking-of-the-Other*, p.147.

²⁴ "But Levinas agrees with Hegel and Heidegger in emphasizing that whether death approaches by the hand of another or as an accident or disease and ageing, it comes as a threat. It comes, according to Levinas, *as an accusation. The other's look is an accusing look*. This does not only mean that I am *accusé* by the other in the sense of made by the other's look to stand out like a figure on the ground. In Levinas's destructuring ethical revision of this figure ground-structure of Gestalt or Form Psychology, my physiognomical and phenomenological appearance as *apparaître* is *dis-figured* by my appearance *as comparâître before the face of another who pursues and prosecutes me as though in a court of law*", says Llewelyn. John, "The impossibility of Levinas's death", in *The Limits of Death*, my emphasis.

knowledge, calculation which would start the subject the opportunity to choose, so discounting responsibility (in the way we have come to understand this term).

The American's action (his acting towards the *dénouement* of the complications of the plot-ting), his being (moved) *for-the-Other* cannot thus but ultimately coincide with the (an-archival, as Lévinas would word it, despite oneself and indeed radically disinterested) casting of a *yes*: yes, I envy - yes, yes, 'here I am'.²⁵ To say *yes*: that is, to answer for one's own responsibilities *already* answering (giving him the 'good' eye: *eyes* and *yes*) to the Other.²⁶

²⁵ "Wonder of the *I* relieved of self and fearing for the other [...] [suspension] of the eternal and irreversible return of the identical to itself, and the inviolability of its logical and ontological privilege. A suspension of its ideal priority, with its negation of all otherness through murder or through encompassing and totalizing thought. A suspension of war and politics, which pass themselves off as relation of the Same to the Other. *In the laying aside by the self of its sovereignty of self, in its modality of detestable self, ethics signifies, but also probably the very spirituality of the soul, and certainly the question of the meaning of being, that is to say, its call to justify itself [...]* The human is the return to the interiority of nonintentional consciousness, to bad conscience, to its possibility of fearing injustice *more than death*, of preferring injustice undergone to injustice committed, and what justifies being to what guarantees it". Lévinas, *Entre Nous: thinking-of-the-Other*, pp.147-148, my emphasis. And: "The subject in responsibility is alienated in the depths of its identity with an alienation that does not empty the same of its identity, but constrains it to it, with an unimpeachable assignation, constrains it to it as no one else, where no one could replace it [...] (this is) an assignation to an identity for the response of responsibility, where one cannot have oneself be replaced without fault. To this command continually put forth only a 'here I am' (*me voici*) can answer, where the pronoun 'I' is in the accusative, declined before any declension, possessed by the other, sick ('I am sick with love', *The Songs of Songs*, 6:8; Lévinas' footnote to the text), identical. *Here I am – is saying with inspiration, which is not a gift for the fine words or songs. There is a constraint to give with full hands, and thus a constraint to corporeality.*" Lévinas, *Otherwise than being or beyond essence*, p.142, my emphasis.

²⁶ "Yes marks that one is addressing the other", says Derrida. "This addressing is not necessarily dialogue or interlocution, since it supposes neither the voice nor the symmetry, but first and foremost the precipitation of an answer already demanding. For if there is the other, if there is the yes, then the Other does no longer let itself be produced by the same or the ego. *Yes, qua condition of every signature and every performative, addresses the other that does not constitute and whom it can not address unless it starts to demand, in answer to a question always anterior, demanding it to say yes [...]* the auto-position in the yes [...] is preontological [...] the circle does not close itself [...] Now, the relation of a yes to another, of a yes to another and of a yes to the other yes, has to be such that the contamination between the two of them remains inevitable. And not only as a threat, but also as a possibility. With or without the word, intended in its minimal happening, a yes requires its own repetition a priori, its being remembered by heart [...] One can not say yes without having promised to confirm and remember it, to safeguard it, endorsed in an another yes, without the promise and the memory, the promise of memory [...]". Derrida, Jacques, *Ulysse gramophone*, Galilée, Paris, 1987, pp.127-137, my transl. from French and my emphasis. Silvano Petrosino, echoing Derrida but also Lévinas, adds: "the word itself as yes, does not wait for what may empirically be defined as language or *langue* understood as a system of signs, it in fact precedes the code and the syntax of the message, it is that word that precedes the order of words and the organization of discourse as such [...] *the yes is essentially non-monological*, it certainly *signs* itself, testifies to itself and so it firms itself up and affirms itself, but always and already to address the Other, to answer and demand, to demand to answer, to say 'Here I am: ask me', to cast itself to the Other in the answer that thus demands." Petrosino, *Visione e desiderio*, p.42, my emphasis and my trans.; as to Petrosino's work and in relation to the phenomenology of the 'yes', see also *L'esperienza della parola. ;l;;Testo, moralità e scrittura*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano, 1999, in particular pp.113-167. Finally, to go back to Lévinas, we may venture to say that, to a certain extent, the ethical message he articulates in his philosophical work gravitates around a *yes*, and, more precisely, a *yes* that exceeds the freedom of the ego: "yes, unconditioned [...] *yes* more remote of the infantile spontaneity [...] Have we not committed the

(m) Delano's *knot*:

You prayed to the Devil... *O si certo!*

Ulysses, 46

Presently he thought something moved nigh the chains. He rubbed his eyes and looked hard. Groves of rigging were about the chains; and there, *peering from behind a great stay*; like an Indian from behind a hemlock, a Spanish sailor, a marlingspike in his hand, was seen, who made what seemed an imperfect gesture towards the balcony, but immediately, as if alarmed by some advancing step along the deck within, vanished into the recesses of the hempen forest, like a poacher. (p.82)

A first series of inferences follows:

A1- What meant this? Something the man had sought to communicate, unbeknown to anyone, even to his captain.

A2- Did the secret involve aught unfavorable to his captain?

A3- Were those previous misgivings of Captain Delano's about to be verified?

A4- Or, in his haunted mood at the moment, has some random, unintentional motion of the man, while busy with the stay, as if repairing it, been mistaken for a significant beckoning?

A5- Not unbewildered, again he gazed off for his boat. But this was temporarily hidden by a rocky spur of the isle.

Next to the stealthy reappearing of the sailor, "reconnoitering from a port-hole like a fox from the mouth of its den", a second series of inferences occurs:

B1- From something suddenly suggested by the man's air, the mad idea now darted into Captain's Delano mind, that Don Benito's plea of indisposition, in withdrawing below, was but a pretense: that he was engaged there maturing some plot, of which the sailor, by some means gaining an inkling, had a mind to warn the stranger against; incited, it may be, by gratitude for a kind word on first boarding the ship.

B2- Was it from foreseeing some possible interferences like this, that Don Benito had, beforehand, given such a bad character of his sailors, while praising the negroes; though, indeed, the former seemed as docile as the latter the contrary? The whites, too, by nature, were the shrewder race.

B3- A man with some evil design, would he be not likely to speak well of that stupidity which was blind to his depravity, and malign that intelligence from which he might not be hidden? Not unlikely perhaps.

imprudence of affirming that the first word, that which makes all the other possible [...] is an unconditioned *yes*?" and "The unconditionality of this *yes* is not that of an infantile spontaneity. *It is the very exposure to critique*, the exposure prior to consent, more ancient than any naïve spontaneity." The quotes are respectively from Lévinas, *Quatre Lectures Talmudiques*, Minuit, Paris, 1968, p.106 (my transl.) and *Otherwise than Being...*, p.122, emphasis added.

B4- But if the whites had dark secrets concerning Don Benito, could then Don Benito be in any way in complicity with the blacks? But they were too stupid. Besides, who ever heard of a white so far a renegade to apostatize from his very species almost, by leaguering in against it with negroes? (all occurrences p.82)

The two series of inferences are indicative of the way the American proceeds. Although initially crossed by self-doubt, Delano cannot help going back to the thesis he has been working on from the very start. Here, one can see him maniacally doing and undoing scenarios which are potential in theory but most improbable in reality, compulsively inverting the roles of the secondary personae of the drama, now finding an ally in the Spaniards, now an enemy in the blacks: now considering the gratitude of one of the sailors in his regard (B1)²⁷, now considering the whites' superior intelligence as opposed to the stupidity of the negroes and, further down, considering the strange assonances of the word 'Spaniard' and so on²⁸; so frantically and infinitely reversing the order of the good and the bad ones. In short, he tries over and over, but in vain, to put together once for all the pieces of the puzzle that torments him, that is to say, to work out his perception of Cereno *qua* villain, thief, impostor.

Delano's problem is the same every time: namely, a problem of bad faith and at any rate of *faith*: he does believe and does not believe the Spaniard in the measure in which he believes himself and does not believe himself to have a bad consciousness, despite all his efforts not to believe him (Cereno). There is no doubt as to the fact that the play of questions and answers, of which the above mentioned inferences are but one example out of many, this "exchange of ideas" of the split thought aims but to the affirmation of one reason: that of an I thinking itself other than what it is, that is, always already a *raison d'être*. Or, to put this in different terms, it can be said that this only apparent duality of thinking answers to the necessity of accrediting but one reality: namely, that the Spaniard is not what he appears to be: a man of immense worth. It answers to the will of substantializing one crazy idea (*the mad idea*), so as to finally get rid of the recurrently disturbing ghost of another (that of envy itself and therefore by the same token that of its guilt). As a matter of fact, in his un-reasonable speculations, one can notice that Delano goes on accurately eluding the very question he *knows* (at the back of his head) he

²⁷ In what concerns the concept of gratitude/ingratitude considered within the phenomenon of envy, see p.124; footnote 118, cap.iv. The question will be however retaken and fully dealt with later on.

²⁸ "These Spaniards are all an old set; the very word Spaniard has a curious, conspirator, Guy-Fawkesish twang to it"; p.86. As to the figure of Guy Fawkes (quoted in almost every single text by Melville) and envy, it seems to us worth recalling a passage from *Billy Budd*: "The Pharisee is the Guy Fawkes prowling in the hid chambers underlying some natures like Claggart's. And they can really form no conception of an unreciprocated malice". Melville, Herman, *Billy Budd*, p.435.

ought to put to himself: “Why, why do I perceive-judge, judge-perceive Cereno with an evil eye?”. Yet, the more he is called into question the more he silences the call and this, to paraphrase Sartre, at the same moment of temporality.

Envy to be sure does not open up to knowledge but it rather rejects, necessarily so, any (critical: read unfavourable) understanding of “the world as it is”. In this sense and to a deeper plane, its work can be said to lead to chaos, that is to say, to the loss of the (pre)original sense of being *qua* being inherent to the Other. It leads to the loss of the sense of the human and the human *qua* sense. Of the human *qua* sense and destiny.

These difficulties recalled former ones. Lost in their mazes, Captain Delano, who had now regained the deck, was uneasily advancing along it, when he observed a new face, an aged sailor seated cross-legged near the main hatchway [...] his hands were full of ropes, which he was working into a large knot [...]

Captain Delano crossed over to him, and stood in silence surveying the knot; his mind, by a not uncongenial transition, passing from its own entanglements to those of the hemp. For intricacy such a knot he had never seen [...]

At last, puzzled to comprehend the meaning of such a knot, Captain Delano addressed the knoter:- “What are you knotting there, my man?”

“The knot,” was the brief reply, without looking up.

“So it seems; but what is it for?”

“For someone else to undo,” muttered back the old man...

While Captain Delano stood watching him, suddenly the old man threw the knot towards him, saying in broken English, the first heard in the ship, - something to this effect – “Undo it, cut it, quick” (p.83)

What’s going on here? What does the strange performance of the sailor mean? It seems that the seaman is not only trying to make Delano aware that on board of the San Dominick there really is a problem (*the* problem), but he is also attempting to tell him that the undoing of this very problem is his own (Delano’s) affair, his own business. The American is clearly *ordered* to answer to the question it poses: *undo it, cut it, quick*. That is, to say *yes*. ‘Yes’, we concluded, *qua* (expiatory and thus absolving) openness of the self towards the Other (“Here I am”), *qua* exorcism (indeed painful) of the *no*, behind which the I is always ready to close and firm itself up. To close and firm itself up around its responsibilities. We shall linger over the very first part of the scene and, in particular, over its symbolical relevancy.

In its overt ritualization, the performance of the Spaniard, looking just like an Egyptian priest, can be interpreted as the attempt of an exorcism. The sailor’s magic, certainly

white as opposed to Babo's black one²⁹, works simultaneously on two planes we say: outside-inside/visible-invisible. The Spaniard would, first and foremost, aim at disenchanting Delano precisely by operating the symbolical recreation of an interior state: *Captain Delano crossed over to him, and stood in silence surveying the knot; his mind...passing from his own entanglements to those of the hemp*, that this latter would presumably be called out for to live or relive. The relation with the Other (in this case the American), to paraphrase Lévi-Strauss, would be thus put directly to a conscious level and indirectly to an unconscious one³⁰, exactly by means of a language likely to express the otherwise chaotic and unspeakable: *for intricacy such a knot he had never seen [...] the knot seemed a combination of double-bowline-knot, treble-crown-knot, black-handed-well-knot, knot-in-and-out, and jamming knot*. Over and above, one can notice that whereas Delano but hypnotically observes and listens, that is, his role during the performance is merely a passive one, the seaman performs and speaks to and *through* him, figuratively re-enacting a story: namely, the American's *own* story (and, with it, that of the San Dominick).³¹ The knot does in fact come to draw a sort of an ontological-existential path which is certainly unique to the subject of the signification; suggesting moreover its sense (to be sure a negative one). Once completed, one might venture to say that the Spaniard-shaman has not only succeeded (however temporarily) in driving out the evil, the resistance internal to the being of the I, but he has rendered its intricacy finally *readable*, to use Barthes's terminology. In short, he would now be in the capacity of meaning its meaning to Delano (and with him to the reader): the *knot*. The relation between *knot* and *not* is unquestionable.³² Still further, and we now come to what can be read as the second and most important part of the exorcism, by *speaking* to him before even uttering a single

²⁹ As to the nexus between envy and suspected witchcraft, vide Schoeck, *Envy: a theory of social behaviour*, p.33 *et passim* and also pp.115-142 of our work.

³⁰ "This is the function of the incantation proper", argues the French anthropologist. Lévi-Strauss, Claude, *Structural Anthropology*, Vol.1, Penguin Books, reprinted 1993, p.199. See however pp.167-205 where Lévi-Strauss deals widely with the shamanistic culture of the native Americans.

³¹ "Actually the shamanistic cure seems to be the exact counterpart to the psychoanalytic cure, but with an inversion of all elements [...] the psychoanalyst listens, whereas the shaman speaks", says Lévi-Strauss, *ibid.*

³² Already Eric J. Sundquist, though failing in our opinion to grasp the profound connection of knot and not, points out that "like the shaving scene, the conversation about the knot is a tableau whose figurative message so closely approaches the literal that its unfolding takes the form of tautology. And like the naively unintentional satiric thrusts of Delano himself, *the knot in this case offers him no handle for retort*. We are prompted to speak of the handling of the knot as a scene of tautology because it indicates the way in which tautology defines a situation in which presented meanings or signals are both the 'same' and yet separated and suspended so as to act in a fashion one might call 'tense' or 'taut', and more peripherally because it calls out attention to the interest inherent in the archaic noun *taut*, which means 'mat' or 'tangle'. Sundquist, E.J., *Suspense and tautology in 'Benito Cereno'*, in *Herman Melville's 'Billy Budd', 'Benito Cereno', 'Bartleby the Scrivener' and other tales, Modern Critical Interpretations*, Chelsea House Publ., NY, p.97, my emphasis.

word (that is, making the *no* silently resound) and, at one and the same time, by providing the American with a language which precedes the codified system of words and the structure of discourse as such and exceeds, to say that with Lévinas, the semantic reason of the said (*le dit*, namely the ontological language of the ego), the Spaniard is most likely trying to pro-voke (from *pro* ‘forth’+ *vocare* ‘to call’) Delano to a performative-purgative reaction of opposed sign. A performative reaction susceptible of cutting off once and for all the I’s knot: that is, of putting an end to its abiding maintenance within the self-entangling vicious logic of this *not* and this *not* as logic, in sum within the being of the representation [texture<>thread<>knot<>logos (from Gr. *leghein* ‘to bind, to tie’)].³³ To say this in different and simpler terms, this *no* has to be *signed* by his owner-patient for it to be definitely exorcised, in the same way as one endorses a bill, a cheque or a contract: “Yes, this is really me, it’s me and nobody else’s, I sign this to testify to my identity, to my self, yes, I accept responsibility for this, yes, I am responsible”.

Had Delano ex-posed himself, had he asserted or even had he *confessed*, this would have certainly consented, as Lévinas phrases it “the coring out (dénucléation) of enjoyment, in which the nucleus of the ego is cored out”.³⁴ In other terms, this would have allowed the extradi(c)tion of the subject of responsibility in the truth’s infinite transcendence, beyond essence and its necessities.³⁵

³³ The ‘yes’ *qua* extreme exposition of the subject is absolutely diachronic precisely because it’s without secrets, without reservations, without retention or protention: in a word, sincere (Yes, I envy-Yes, yes, here I am). Derrida adds: “for its radically non-affirmative or non-descriptive dimension, even if one were saying *yes* to a description or a narration, *yes* is totally, and *par excellence*, a performative...to say that in a classical philosophical code, *yes* is the transcendental condition of every performative dimension”. Derrida, *Ulysse gramophone*, pp.125-126, my transl.

³⁴ Lévinas, *Otherwise than being or beyond essence*, p.64.

³⁵ “The subject of saying does not give signs, it becomes a sign, turns into an allegiance [...] saying is a denuding of denuding, a giving a sign of its very signifyingness, an expression of exposure [...] the passivity of the exposure responds to an assignation that identifies me as the unique one, not by reducing me to myself, but by stripping me of every identical quiddity [...] The saying signifies this passivity; in the saying this passivity signifies, becomes signifyingness, exposure in response to [...], being at the question before any interrogation, any problem, without clothing, without a shell to protect oneself, stripped to the core as in an inspiration of air, *an ab-solution to the one, the one without a complexion. It is a denuding beyond the skin, to the wounds one dies from, denuding to death, being as vulnerability [...]* In saying suffering signifies in the form of *giving*, even if the price of signification is that the subject run the risk of suffering without reason. If the subject did not run this risk, pain would lose its very painfulness. Signification, as the one-for-the-other in passivity, where the other is not assumed by the one, presupposes the possibility of pure non-sense invading and threatening signification. *Without this folly at the confines of reason, the one would take hold of itself, and in the heart of its passion, recommence essence [...]* the saying as a pure for-another, a pure giving of signs, *making oneself a sign, expression of self, sincerity, passivity [...]* from the bottom of my obscurity in the saying without the said of sincerity, in my ‘here I am’, from the first present in the accusative, I bear witness to the Infinite [...] ‘Here I am’, in the name of God,’ without referring myself directly to his presence. ‘Here I am,’ just that! The word God is still absent from the phrase in which God is for the first time involved in words. It does not at all state ‘I believe in God’. To bear witness to God is precisely not to state this extraordinary word, as though glory would be lodged in a theme and be

Yet, as we know, the exorcism fails and it fails even there where the message to convey goes beyond the purely metaphorical language and reaches the verbal in *stricto sensu*; better yet, it seems to us that it fails the moment when one accesses language as such, despite the fact that the Spaniard speaks in English to Delano. Whatever the reasons of this, the point is that the American remains speechless: wordless, without *the word*³⁶:

For a moment, knot in hand, and knot in head, Captain Delano stood mute; while without further heeding him, the old man was now intent upon other ropes [...]

An elderly negro, in a clout like an infant's, and with a pepper and salt head, and a kind of attorney air, now approached Captain Delano. In tolerable Spanish, and with a good-natured, knowing wink, he informed him the old knotter was simple-witted,

posited as a thesis, or become being's essence. As a sign given to the other of this very signification, the 'Here I am' signifies in the name of God, *at the service of men that look at me*, without having anything to identify myself with, but the sound of my voice or the figure of my gesture – the saying itself. This recurrence is quite the opposite of return upon oneself, self-consciousness. It is sincerity, effusion of oneself, 'extraditing' of the self to the neighbour. *Witness is humility and admission [...]* *kerigma* (Gr.: proclamation, promulgation, here in the sense of a signifying message) *and prayer, glorification and recognition.*" Lévinas, *Otherwise than being or beyond essence*, pp.48-50; 62; 149. To say *yes*, that is, to respond to the Other's commandment does not thus signify the humiliating submission or even prostration of an ego to this very Other that orders it but it rather means its liberation, its exodus from the ontological cares and necessities [its extradi(c)tion from ontology, from the time of being and being as time) in the sign of a pact of allegiance (and of Allegiance if one likes) with the Other. In a certain sense, one might say that the *yes* acts in a de-constructive way: while pronouncing the untying of the ontological intrigue, of the *knot* (<>logos) thanks to which the I can abide and firm itself up, it announces the forming of a new intrigue, an intrigue of responsibility: "united neither by a synthesis of the understanding nor by a relationship between subject and object, and yet where the one weighs or concerns or is meaningful to the other, where they are bound by a plot which knowing can neither exhaust or unravel". Lévinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p.116.

³⁶ Let's finally recall what Rosenweig has said in relation to the 'archetypal word': "It [Yea] is the arch-word of language, one of those which first make possible, not sentences, but any kind of sentence-forming words at all, words as parts of the sentence. Yea is not a part of a sentence, although it can be employed as such. *Rather it is the silent accompanist of all parts of a sentence, the confirmation, the 'sic!' the 'Amen' behind every word.* It gives every word in the sentence the right to exist, it supplies the seat on which it may take its place, it 'posits'. The first Yea in God establishes the divine essence for all infinity. *And this first Yea is 'in the beginning'.* Rosenweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p.27. In this sense, if one is to consider the 'Yes' as the arch-word, a word preceding and exceeding the apophantic (apophantics: in Husserl's terminology, the general theory of propositional meaning and truth) categories of the code or *langue*, the autonomous discourse of logic and ontology (with regard to which the 'Yes' would then determine itself as an absolutely heteronomous performative) and still further if one agrees to see in the (passive) act of saying 'Yes' (in this case: *yes*, I envy- *yes*, here I am), in *the impossibility of keeping silent – which is the whole scandal of sincerity* - (Lévinas, *God, Death and Time*, p.192) a moral essence, ethics *qua* saying and saying *qua* ethics would subsequently come 'in the beginning', that is, before the logic of the logos. Within the phenomenology we are following, it is also worth pointing out Delano's employment, linguistically recent within the textual economy, of the double negation (that Sundquist's paper prompts us to notice, though under a different perspective). The formulation of lexical compounds such as: *not unlikely; not unbewildered; not uncongenial; not unpleased; not without*, and of expressions like: *despairing of getting into unembarrassed talk* etc. are surely symptomatic of an *ontological* resistance. Investigating the utilization of the double negation by the lawyer in *Bartleby, the scrivener*, Paola Cabibbo claims that: "the function of a double negation is certainly that of reconstructing an affirmation but so as to express it in a 'dismantled' sort of way, so the concept to be formulated indirectly, *loosing referential precision and putting in evidence the two negative morphemes in particular [...]* we shall attest to the importance of this *covering* mechanism and its function at all levels of the analysis". Cabibbo, "Il sistema semantico della doppia negazione", in *Melvilliana*, pp.44-45, my emphasis and transl.

but harmless; often playing his old tricks. The negro concluded by begging the knot, for of course the stranger would not care to be troubled with it. Unconsciously, it was handed to him. With a sort of congé, the negro received it, and turning his back, ferreted into it like a detective Custom House officer after smuggled laces. Soon, with some African word, equivalent to pshaw, he tossed the knot overboard. (p.84)

By handing the knot to the black, in the explicit role of a devil's advocate, Delano does certainly affirm but only to autonomically (*autos* 'self' + *nomos* 'law') and automatically con-firm his *no*, only to cast it anew, and, with it, to cast the question it brings about back into the deeps: *he tossed the knot overboard*.

All this is very queer now, thought Captain Delano, with a qualmish sort of emotion; but as one feeling incipient seasickness, he strove, by ignoring the symptoms, to get rid of the malady. Once again he looked off for his boat. To his delight, it was now again in view, leaving the rocky spurn astern. (p.84)

(n) Homesickness:

The sensation here experienced, after at first relieving his uneasiness, with unforeseen efficacy, soon began to remove it. The less distant sight of that well-known boat – showing it, not as before, half blended with the haze, but with outline defined, so that its individuality, like a man's was manifest; that boat *Rover* by name, which though now in strange seas, had often pressed the beach of Captain's Delano home, and brought to its threshold for repairs, had familiarly lain there, as a Newfoundland dog; the sight of the household boat evoked thousand trustful associations, which, contrasted with previous suspicions, filled him not only with lightsome confidence, but somehow with half humorous self-reproaches at his former lack of it. (p.84)

Within the unitary act of vision one can clearly single out a double intentional scenography: the first one projected onwards, that is, into a near future, the second one backwards, into a past progressively more remote, as we shall see. This protentive and retentive game of the identifying intentionality does not surprise us: it aims at compressing and possibly closing up the temporal singularity to which Delano is being subjected. Starting from its relative proximity and definite manifestation, the sight of *Rover* has indeed an indisputable tranquillizing as well as revitalizing effect upon the American. The safe approaching of the boat not only comes to guarantee the retaking of the I to itself but carries with it the memory of a primeval retention: that is to say, the retention of an 'ontological ownmost'. The centripetal, involutive action of recollecting can in fact be said to be hypostatically fundamental in the sense that it brings the I back to the *terra firma* and, more particularly, to its homeland and still further to its own home:

to a universe wherein the I is itself absolutely. To go back to one's own home via recollection is certainly to return to a philosophy of rest, calmness, uninterrupted tranquillity but also and especially to a philosophy of that which is intimately and therefore undeniably proper to an ego. In this sense, one might say that the work of memory allows the subject the possibility of an escape into fullness, so reaching a sort of plenitude of being, however ephemeral. To a topological level, moreover, one's own home (meaning here the place where one is born, its *native* home) can be regarded as the shelter *par excellence*: ontologically speaking it would in fact bear "testimony to a protection most remote", as Bachelard puts it.³⁷ The sense of safety it gives is indeed immense. But the question is: protection against who or what? The reverie extends far down, better yet, for this is certainly the case, it regresses:

What, I, Amasa Delano – Jack of the Beach, as they called me when a lad – I, Amasa; the same that, duck-satchel in hand, used to paddle along the waterside to the school-house made from the old hulk; - I, little Jack of the Beach, that used to go berrying with cousin Nat and the rest; I to be murdered here at the ends of the earth, on board a haunted pirate-ship by a horrible Spaniard? – Too nonsensical to think of it! Who would murder Amasa Delano? His conscience is clean. There is some one above. Fie, fie, Jack of the Beach! You are a child indeed; a child of the second childhood, old boy; you are beginning to dote and drule, I'm afraid." (p.84)

The reverie toward childhood can be construed as the most profound and most pleasant of all reveries: indeed, it constitutes a real archetype: "the archetype of simple happiness".³⁸ This spontaneous recreation of the infantile cosmos, merging myth with poetry, memory with imagination, would not only then signify a return to a sort of primal life, to the eternal beginning of a thoughtless and gay existence, but it would express, first and foremost and to a more general extent, an attachment to life starting precisely from the presentiment (certainly *absurd*) of the possibility of death, of one's *own* death: What, I, *Amasa Delano*; I, *Amasa*, little Jack of the Beach, I to be murdered here at the ends of the earth...Indeed, life and death are the strongest senses within the reverie, in which, let's recall it, *one never dies*. Yet, for a religious soul like Delano's (*there is some one above*),

³⁷ Bachelard, *La terre et les rêveries du repos*, p.102, my transl.

³⁸ Bachelard, *The poetics of reverie*, p.123 *et passim*. The French phenomenologist goes on saying: "It is surely an image within us, a center for images which attract happy images and repulse the experiences of unhappiness. But this image, in its principle, is not completely ours; it has deeper roots than our simple memories. Our childhood bears witness to the childhood of man, of the being touched by the glory of living. From then on, personal memories, clear and often retold, will never completely explain why reveries which carry us back toward our childhood have such an attraction, such a soul quality. *The reason for this quality which resists the experiences of life is that childhood remains within us a principle of deep life, of life always in harmony with the possibilities of new beginnings.*" My emphasis.

childhood also and at the same time represents the embodied symbol of innocence: childhood is undoubtedly the *first* innocence, as Bachelard words it. The child does not know what sin is: he/she does not know how to realistically distinguish between good and bad. He/she is always *necessarily* innocent, always *innocently* irresponsible. The nexus between the semic couples innocence-life and sin-death and subsequently the easy formulation of an antithesis between these couples of terms is suggested to us even before Delano proposes it by way of implication: *Who would murder Amasa Delano? His conscience is clean.* The American can be said to absolve himself. Yet, let's be honest, this ab-solution (a meta-solution indeed!), the *effect* of this absolution does but proceed from the identification of Delano the man with Delano the child, so to speak. In other words, the binomial sin-death/death-sin is here thought uniquely on the basis of an ontological-existential context, that is to say, within the frame of the Eden-like³⁹ condition of childhood, wherein the presence of sin and death is, at least ideally, non-conceived and non-conceivable.

The American certainly lies to himself (and therefore to the reader): he is in bad faith. And he is in bad faith because he envies, that is, he is guilty. Further down, he diplomatically concludes:

Yes, this is a strange craft, a strange history, too, and strange folks on board. But – nothing more... Ah good! At last “Rover” has come. (pp.85-86, my ellipsis)

(o) How ungrateful!

He had not finished praying when Rebekah came out. She was the daughter of Bethuel, son of Milcah, wife of Abraham's brother, Nahor. She had a pitcher on her shoulder. The girl was very beautiful and a virgin, for no man had laid with her. She went down to the well, filled her pitcher and came up again. The servant ran to meet her and said, “Please let me drink a little water from your pitcher”. She said, “Drink, my Lord!” and at once lowering her pitcher to her hand she let him drink. When she had finished letting him drink, she said, “I am going to water your camels as well, until they have had enough.” She hurried to empty her pitcher into the trough, and then ran again to draw water for all his camels, while the man watched in silence [...]

Genesis,24, 15-21⁴⁰

Don Benito with his servant now appeared; his coming, perhaps, hastened by hearing the noise. Of him Captain Delano sought permission to serve out the water,

³⁹ Not to forget that the word *Eden* is etymologically related to Hebrew *eden* ‘delight’.

⁴⁰ I owe this epigraph to Simon Critchley; see his “‘BOIS’ – Derrida's final word on Levinas”, in *Re-reading Levinas*, p.162.

so that all might share alike, and none injure themselves by unfair excess. But sensible, and, on Don Benito's account, kind as this offer was, it was received with what seemed impatience; as if aware that he lacked energy as a commander, Don Benito, with the true jealousy of weakness, resented as an affront any interference. So, at least, Captain Delano inferred. (p.86)

The arrival of *Rover* to be sure closes a diachronic cycle or phase: the I can be said to have retaken possession of itself (at least temporarily). Reinvigorated in spirit, the American certainly feels now strong on his legs: “*maybe* not everything is lost...I still want/I still can”, the Captain seems to be saying to himself. Yet, his will to power meets again with the ‘ingratitude’ of Don Benito, who, having just reappeared on the ‘passional scene’, *with the true jealousy of weakness, resented as an affront any interference*. Indeed, envy's oblique work starts again. One would thus not be mistaken in reversing the semantics of the phrase, reattributing moreover to their original bearer the semes it denotes and connotes (impatience, resentment, envy and weakness): Delano does in fact resent the Spaniard, and he resents him starting precisely from the experience of his own impotence, which constantly refers to the scission between eye and look, between the eye that eyes with detachment, objectively, and the look that contemplates, widening up, proceeding from the *dis*-measure of the passion that moves it.⁴¹ Once need is satisfied (the need by the I to re-acquire ontological stability), the subject is again determined towards what he can do without, that is to say, the desirable (although, he is always already under desire's spell: the time of need is somehow subordinated to that of *personal* desire⁴²). But, what does here comprise the desirable? What does Delano *really* want? Driven by the desire of being able to reach and possess everything, Delano wants it all, namely, he wants to be in the stead of the one he envies (giving orders, commanding in his place etc.). Clearly then, the problem we are dealing with is not one of emulation but rather one of identification: the American ultimately wants to be Cereno.⁴³

⁴¹ See Petrosino, *Visione e Desiderio*, pp.186-187.

⁴² As opposed to interpersonal one.

⁴³ A few pages down, the substitution becomes effective, it temporarily accomplishes itself, for a fist of minutes the American acts as if he really were the captain of the San Dominick: “Briefly alluding to his weak condition, he urged his host to remain quietly where he was, since he (Captain Delano) would *with pleasure take upon himself the responsibility* of making the best use of the wind [...] snatching a trumpet which hung from the bulwarks, with a free step Captain Delano advanced to the forward edge of the poop, issuing his orders in his best Spanish. The few sailors and many negroes, all equally pleased, obediently set about heading the ship towards the harbor. While giving some directions about setting a lower stu'n'sail, suddenly Captain Delano heard a voice *faithfully repeating his orders*. Turning, he saw Babo, now for the time acting, under the pilot, his original part of captain of the slaves. *This assistance proved valuable* [...] Finding all right at the helm, the pilot went forward to the forecabin, to see how matters stood there [...] having done all that was needed for the present, Captain Delano, giving his last orders to the sailors, turned aft to report affairs to Don Benito in the cabin [...] pp.100-101, my emphasis.

But, let's now touch on the concept of gratitude/ingratitude within the phenomenon of envy, considered both in its scopical acceptance and in the sense of hostility, enmity. To a certain extent it may be said that envy occurs (bearing in mind that it *proceeds* from desire) whenever the I is prevented to return to itself; whereas the non-returning of the I to itself can be construed as a failure of the economy of being and of being as economy (literally: *oikos* 'house(hold)' + *nemein* management = *oikonomia*). Each time Cereno says *no* (and he can only, ir-responsibly, say *no* for if he were to say *yes* his own life as well as Delano's life would be subjected to an *explosive* death. The Spaniard cannot then return the American's kindness, better yet, he *does not have* to reciprocate it: it is his *duty* not to) to his guest, he is perceived by this latter as in the act of depriving him of his will-power and thus as in the act of undermining his self-esteem to his own (Cereno's) advantage. It is exactly on the basis of a complete imbalance in the value-power relation between host (master of the house) and guest that envy would be occasioned. Yet at the same time we shouldn't forget that one's ingratitude is determinant for the work of ethics to accomplish itself, precisely *because the movement of gratitude returns to the Same, as is the case in philanthropy*, as Critchley argues.⁴⁴ Only the ingratitude of the receiver can allow the giver to be radically generous in his offer, that is, to give absolutely, beyond any recognition or remuneration or convenience. By ir-responsibly operating in absolute ingratitude towards the American, Don Benito can thus be said to be (unwillingly) laying down the very conditions that are required for the *affirmation* of ethics, of ethical saying, just as in the biblical example we have mentioned, wherein Abraham's servant *ought* to be ungrateful to Rebekah (*while the man watched in silence*) for her exceptional kind-heartedness.⁴⁵ But instead

⁴⁴ Critchley, "'BOIS' Derrida's final word on Lévinas", in *Re-reading Lévinas*, p.164.

⁴⁵ Lévinas states: "The departure without return [...] would lose its absolute goodness if the work sought for its recompense in the immediacy of its triumph, if it *impatiently* awaited the triumph of its cause. The one-way movement would be inverted into a reciprocity. The work, confronting its departure and its end, would be absorbed again in calculations of deficits and compensations, in accountable operations. *It would be subordinated to thought. The one-way action is possible only in patience, which, pushed to the limit, means for the agent to renounce being the contemporary of its outcome, to act without entering the promised land.*" Lévinas, "The Trace of the Other", p.349, my emphasis. Commenting on this very passage, Jill Robbins sharply points out: "The allusion is covert, at least compared to Levinas's naming of Abraham. The paradigmatic figure for patience is Moses, who, in Deuteronomy 32, sees but does not pass over into the promised land. Moses is denied the reciprocity; the compensation implied in the law that he himself taught, namely, 'in the *same* [my emphasis here] day thou shalt give him his hire' (Deuteronomy 24:15), the principle of daily remuneration for labor. Moreover, this denial of recompense is necessary. For the radicality of the one-way movement risks – fault of language, fault of what Levinas here refers simply as 'thought' – being reappropriated in a calculation, a reciprocity. Moses' not getting into the promised land thus *affirms* the one-way movement. It makes him the very figure for the non-self-contemporaneity, the *non-self coincidence that is patience. To be patient means to be given over the future – absolutely toward the future, a future that always belong to the other.* Levinas will also call it 'liturgy', in the sense of a 'profitless investment' [...] Not to be confused with the time of personal immortality – *to be patient is*

of entering ethics one incessantly returns here to ontology, and, more precisely, to envy's negative ontology. Impatiently driven by his desire (and it is on the grounds of the value-power evaluation between himself and the Other that desire always already imposes itself), Delano cannot help resenting the Other's *no*: as we said just now, he resents it as an offence, an affront, in so much as a negation of his will-power here and now, and therefore as a negation of his own value with respect to Don Benito's one. The American can only conceive gift in the form of a reciprocal exchange or investment (the investiture in this particular case of Delano as Captain of the *San Dominick*), in the form of a silently agreed trade, that is economy or ontology proper.⁴⁶

As to the thematics of hospitality and its phenomenology, we shall come back to it later on in coincidence with Cereno's final *no* to his guest; a *no* which also preludes to the untying of the complications of the plot. The two following scenes, generally denominated as the 'play of the barber'⁴⁷ and 'the lunch'⁴⁸, take place under the battery deck, inside the womb-tomb of the San Dominick. Between the two scenes there is no temporal hiatus as if, by way of keeping the American fully entertained, Babo's intention were that of avoiding any pause for critical reflection.

to go beyond the horizon of my time, beyond the being unto death. It is 'passage to the time of the other' [...] But as Levinas renews the term, there is nothing psychological about it. 'I' cannot 'be patient' [...] To be patient then is not a pouvoir: not my possibility, it is not an ability, nor is it anything the subject could initiate. It is in a certain sense impossible. Yet the absolutely patient action is ethics itself." Robbins, J., "Tracing Responsibility", in *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature and Religion*, ed. by A.T. Peperzak, Routledge, New York and London, 1995, pp.174-175, my emphasis.

⁴⁶ In this regard, Benveniste notes that in Greek the word 'gift' can be translated in five different ways, although four of these connote precisely "notions which one might not think of associating with...the activity of *exchange*, of *trade*, is characterized in a specific way in relation to the idea which appears to us different, that of the disinterested *gift*. In this light exchange appears as a round of gifts rather than a genuine commercial operation." Benveniste, Emile, *Indo-European language and society*, Faber and Faber, London, 1973, pp.53-54, see however all chapter five 'Gift and Exchange'. In historical times, gift was thus mainly considered as a form of exchange, that is to say, it was understood as belonging to a socio-economic thought wherein the reciprocity between the parts was required. As to this, it is worth quoting the following extract taken from Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Vintage, New York, 1969, p.70): "Setting prices, determining values, contriving equivalences, exchanging – these preoccupied the earliest thinking of man to so great an extent *that in a certain sense they constitute thinking as such: here is that the oldest kind of astuteness developed*; here likewise, we may suppose, did human pride, the feeling of superiority in relations to other animals, *have its first beginnings*. Perhaps our word 'man' (*manas*) still expresses something of precisely *this* feeling of self-satisfaction: man designated himself as the creature that measures values, evaluates and measures, as the 'valuating animal' as such."; source: Petrosino, *Il sacrificio sospeso*, Jaca Book, Milano, 2000, p.47.

⁴⁷ See, Sundquist, E., "Suspense and tautology in Benito Cereno", in *Modern Critical Interpretations*, pp.91-100.

⁴⁸ Due to problems of space we won't take this scene into consideration.

(p) The play of the barber:

To say that the other has to sacrifice himself to others would be to preach human sacrifice!

E. Lévinas

“Miguel has gone strike the half-hour afternoon. It is *now*, master. Will master go into the cuddy?”

“Ah- yes,” answered the Spaniard.

As the three passed aft, the American could not think it another strange instance of his host’s capriciousness, this being shaved with such uncommon punctuality in the middle of the day [...] but in the cuddy, relieved from his former uneasiness, and, for various reasons, more sociably inclined than any previous period of the day, and seeing the colored servant, napkin on arm, so debonair about his master, in a business so familiar as that of shaving, too, all his old weakness for negroes returned. (pp.89-92)

Yet, the scopic empathy towards the black is in contrast with the malicious perception of Cereno:

Altogether the scene was somewhat peculiar, at least to Captain Delano, nor, as he saw the two thus postured, could he resist the vagary, that in the black he saw a headsman, and in the white, a man at the block. But this was one of those antic conceits, appearing and vanishing in a breath, from which, perhaps, the best regulated mind is not always free. (p.92)

The suggested metaphor of imminent murder is refused by Delano. It is refused the moment it is suggested to him. At a pinch, what is at stake here is, yet again, reality as such (reality, let’s recall it, always already exceeds the world of the I in so much as the effect of his *pre-comprehension* of the present): Delano denies in bad faith what-it-is, so unconditionally accepting what-it-is-not: the mask, Babo’s play. As we inferred earlier on, that everything remains in the mode of being-what-it-is-not is *now* necessary to the American’s ontological integrity. Indeed, this is a necessity which has to be comprehended within the perspective of envy. By *accepting* the play of the barber *as* the play of the barber, that is, tautologically, Delano *accepts* to believe he is *not* an envious man, namely, he persuades himself of his own innocence, of his not-being-responsible for the Other (Cereno: *a man at the block*). As a matter of fact, what the American experiences here is once again his own guilt, and, more profoundly yet, precisely by not *responding* to the telling conceits of his ‘good’ consciousness, he comes to experience it in the form of a complicity in the murder/sacrifice of the Other in his own stead: “Yes, I

envy – *yes*, here I am: send me”⁴⁹ (“It is a substitution for another, one in the place for another, expiation”⁵⁰). By suppressing the suggested metaphor⁵¹, the Captain certainly comes to reiterate his *no*, and, by doing so, he can be said to implicitly consent (in that one may read the extreme perversion of the *yes*) to the metaempirical immolation of Don Benito, upon whom his own (the American’s) fault is always and necessarily being laid.

⁴⁹ Isaiah, 6,8.

⁵⁰ Lévinas, *Otherwise than being or beyond essence*, p.15. Substitution constitutes for Lévinas the very last step of the process of defection from being of the subject: it is to take upon oneself the Other’s destiny in an absolute way, that is, despite the possibility of one’s own death for this very Other, “which signifies a suffering for another in the form of *expiation*” (Lévinas, E., *God, Time, and Death*, p.181; Lévinas’ emphasis). Still further, the expiation of the subject would not only and so much regard its own responsibilities for the Other but as, and “it is necessary to go all the way to that point”, says Lévinas (*ibid.*), the responsibilities of the Other itself for the subject: “To be me (and not I [*Moi*]) is not perseverance in one’s being, but the substitution of the hostage expiating to the limit for the persecution it suffered” (*ibid.*). If we accept the concept of substitution as formulated by the French philosopher, one could quite legitimately claim that in the text we are considering its sense has been radically transvalued: as a matter of fact, the substitution Delano is thinking of (to be in Cereno’s stead, to totally identify with him) would be realized only with death (whether virtual or not) of the Other. Substitution’s positive eschatology would be here completely overturned or even perverted.

⁵¹ Despite abandoning the analysis too early, E. Sundquist intuitively points out that: “the scene of imminent decapitation that occurs to Delano as an ‘antic conceit’ is hardly the first instance in the tale in which a metaphor, springing to mind almost inexplicably, contains a relevant significance *immediately dismissed not so much by Delano himself as by the peculiar voice that speaks through him*”; p.92. Would we be mistaken then in identifying the enunciating voice that “speaks through Delano” with the voice of his consciousness and, more precisely, with the voice of his bad consciousness? And does not this voice always already *speak* the language of an *I*? Does it not speak *as if it were* in the nominative case? And does not the inexplicably inspired Delano (inspired or animated by the Other, as Lévinas would put it) sound like the pro-nominal *me* of this same I as in the biblical verse ‘Here I am: send *me*’? Yes, we say. In effect, that what answers to the ethical call of the Other is never the ‘I’ but always and already the pro-nominal *me* (in the same way as “the other addresses *me* and not the universal concept of the ego”, says Ciaramelli. Ciaramelli, Fabio, *Lévinas’ ethical discourse between individuation and universality*, in *Re-reading Lévinas*, p.88): my *me* responds to the Other before I know it does, we said in our introduction; and it is precisely “thanks to this anteriority that love is love” (Lévinas, *Otherwise than being or beyond essence*, p.15). The *me* under assignation, from the start present in the accusative, precedes and exceeds the ontology or economy of an ‘I’: its interests, its efforts to be. This passage from the ‘I’ unto the ‘me’ (‘me’ that defines the *other-in-the-same* of the I) thus constitutes or is susceptible of constituting, as is here the case, a determinant moment in the (passive) genesis of the subject of responsibility: the French philosopher describes this *mortal* jump (it is mortal for, let’s repeat it once more, it pertains to the humanity of man as such) from the ‘I’ unto the ‘me’ with the expression “fission of the ego unto me”. These considerations would also refer to the distinction we made between ontological knowledge and critical knowing or more simply between comprehension and critique (>justice). In the movement from the ‘I’ unto ‘me’, in the diachronic effecting of this very movement, the ‘I’ in so much as understanding or comprehension (whereas the comprehending and still further the interpreting of whatever things are always already pre-determined on the basis of a passion: here, for instance, on the basis of the envious desire) is put into question by the ‘me’ as critique, so to speak. In relation to this, Keenan affirms that “the moment when comprehension is called into question by critique is what Lévinas calls ‘ethics’ or ‘morality’. This suggests, as Robert Bernasconi has noted, ‘that the ambition of epistemology are only fulfilled when it recognizes itself as morality’.” A few paragraphs up, Keenan quotes a line from Lévinas’ *Totality and Infinity*, a line which may suggest (the complexity of the topic can not be discussed here) to the reader in which sense the ‘me’ of the ‘(Yes,) Here I am’ *signifies* ‘in the beginning’, as Rosenweig phrases it: “knowledge as a critique, as a tracing back to what precedes freedom, can arise only in a being that has *an origin prior to its origin – that is created*”. Keenan, K.Dennis, *Death and responsibility: the ‘Work’ of Lévinas*, State Univ. of New York Press, Albany, 1999, pp.6-7 (the quotation from *Totality and Infinity* is at page 85, the emphasis is mine).

In short, Delano is here making a scapegoat of the Spaniard or at any rate he is, more or less consciously (let's recall in passing that to live in bad faith is always to live in a state of *quasi*-consciousness), advocating a human holocaust! Within the phenomenology we are exploring, it is ultimately clear the indisputable primacy of an economy of blood, of a sacrificial kind of economy as opposed to the repeatedly urged sacrifice of economy or ontology.

Still further, what the American sees and maliciously comprehends in this very seeing is unquestionably far more entertaining than any macabre *fancy*:

Meantime the agitation of the Spaniard had a little loosened the bunting from around him, so that one broad fold swept curtain-like over the chair-arm to the floor, revealing, amid a profusion of armorial bars and ground-colors – black, blue, and yellow – a closed castle in a blood-red field diagonal with a lion rampant in a white. “The castle and the lion,” exclaimed Captain Delano – “Why, Don Benito, this is the flag of Spain you use here. It's well it's only I, and not the king, *that sees this*,” he added with a smile [...] (p.93, Melville's emphasis)

It is difficult not to catch a glimpse of the grin's malignant shadow behind the American's sarcastic smile: one can hardly imagine a spectacle more exciting than this one for the eyes of the envious man, for he who turns his eyes into a perverse instrument of destruction of the Other's image. And it is therefore just as difficult not to prefer this *friendly* suicide of the Other's value to the obscure gravity of some antic conceits. To Delano's envious eyes, the Spanish flag used as a mere apron to be sure expresses the degradation of a man and of a whole world this latter pretends (so badly though) to embody. Wrapped up as he is in his *royal* napkin, Cereno is nothing less than the parody of himself, the laughable mime of a power which is always already resented in its ostentation. The Spaniard is a comedian, a fool and ultimately an impostor; independently here of whether or not such an imposture proceeds from calculation. Delano's main concern is to attest to his envy: the envious man, and we have said this more than once, does in fact have eyes only for that which is in the capacity of lowering, reducing or even alienating the other value. Over and above this, there is the clear intention of humiliating Don Benito, of making him ashamed of himself, in a word, of having him at one's feet, as the saying goes. Indeed, Delano is looking to take his own (moral) revenge over the Spaniard's showy attitudes. Yet, the American's thirst for revenge is anything but satisfied: (Cereno consents to his guest to continue with the conversation they previously began about the hard gales that the San Dominick had presumably encountered in its long voyage)

[...] the more I think of your voyage, Don Benito, the more I wonder, not at the gales, terrible as they must have been, but at the disastrous interval following them. For here, by your account, have you been these two months and more getting from Cape Horn to St. Maria, a distance which I myself, with a good wind, have sailed in a few days. True, you had calms, and long ones, but to be becalmed for two months, that is, at least, unusual. Why, Don Benito, had almost any other gentleman told me such a story, I should have been half disposed to a little incredulity. (p.93)

Delano's interestedness is certainly not sincere: envy, to say that with Hawthorne, is nothing but knowledge deprived of love. Indeed, the American does not aim at critically investigating the San Dominick's stormy past. What he really wants is rather to substantiate his (tranquillizing) prejudices towards Cereno, and here, more particularly, to expose this latter's ineptitude as a captain: *a distance which I myself, with a good wind, have sailed in a few days*. That which sustains Delano's curiosity is the question: "Is this man really a man of worth, is he truly a man of power?, "In sum, *can* he or *can* he *not*?", in which would already resound the answer he (the American) prefers: "No, he is not. As a matter of fact, this man is worth nothing". The truth Delano maniacally looks for is and will always be determined by the wicked law of the passion that governs him.

(q) Revelation:

After lunch:

Captain Delano had again repaired to the deck, remaining there some time. Having at last altered the ship's course, so as to give the reef a wide berth, he returned for a few moments below [...] "We are getting on famously, Don Benito. My ship is in sight. Look through this side-light here; there she is; all a-taunt-o! The Bachelor's Delight, my good friend. Ah, how this wind braces one up. Come you must take a cup of coffee with me this evening. My old steward will give you as fine a cup as ever any sultan tasted. What say you, Don Benito, will you?" [...]

"You do not answer. Come, *all day you have been my host, would you have hospitality all on one side?*"

"I cannot go," was the response.

"What?" it will not fatigue you [...] Come, come, *you must not refuse me*"

"I cannot go," decisively and repulsively repeated Don Benito. (p.102, my emphasis)

As we suggested earlier on, the thematics of hospitality and its phenomenology needs to be explored further. Once more, Cereno casts his ir-responsible *no*: "I cannot go," decisively and repulsively repeated Don Benito. Yet the question is: what does this *no* negate? The Other (Delano), of course, but more in particular the Other as will-power: "all day you have been my host, would you have hospitality only on one side?". That

which produces the American's envy and ingratitude⁵², meaning this latter's resentment for the impossibility of reciprocating the Spaniard's welcome, is precisely an absolute lack of reciprocity, an irreducible asymmetry of powers (respectively enforced and suffered). Hospitality is here comprehended and interpreted (and it cannot be otherwise) strictly in economical and *political* terms, to say that with Derrida. Hospitality is uniquely perceived in so much as a political economy: "a politics of power towards the host [...] power of the host *over* the host".⁵³ From the very start, Delano can be said to undergo his host's appropriating-expropriating power, so inevitably suffering its violent ostentation. He invariably experiences the Spaniard's ungrateful, irresponsible but above all sovereign *no*, namely, he always already experiences his own impotence within the envious comparison (>affront, offence) between himself and this latter; whereas the need for comparison or evaluation is born out of the irreducible and frustrated desire of *being able* to reach and possess *everything*.

Together with the verbal expression 'being able' we have once more emphasized the moneme 'everything' and, this, for a very simple reason. As a matter of fact, one could here easily, although rather naively, take the American's side. One could accept his arguments as weak as they may be, legitimate the dark irritation that animates him, his rancour not to say hate towards the eternally unappreciative Cereno and could, as well, ultimately admit that perhaps he is not completely in the wrong. As to this, Alberoni affirms: "behind the obsessive begrudging of the envious man, behind the constant presence of the Other, there is this longing for contact, response, this mute, non-

⁵² "There was something in the man so far beyond any mere unsociality or sourness previously evinced, that even the forbearing good-nature of his guest could no longer endure it. Wholly at a loss to account for such demeanor, and deeming sickness with eccentricity, however extreme, no adequate excuse, well satisfied too, that nothing in his own conduct could justify it, *Captain Delano's pride began to be roused. Himself became reserved.* But all seemed one to the Spaniard. Quitting him, therefore, Captain Delano once more went to the deck"; p.103, my emphasis.

⁵³ Derrida, Jacques, *Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas*, Galiléé, Paris, 1997, p.79 (see however all the second part of this essay). Working on the etymology of Latin *hostis* ('host', 'guest'), Derrida points out the complex semantics of this term, where the semes of identity (or ipseity), mastery, possession, power and ultimately hostility are deeply connected one to another. The French philosopher explicitly recalls Benveniste's analysis in *Indo-European language and society*, especially p.71 *et passim*. In this context and echoing Lévinas's thesis, Derrida also asserts: "'Good friendship' supposes disproportion. It demands a certain rupture in reciprocity or equality, as well as the interruption of all fusion or confusion between you and me. By the same token it signifies a divorce with love, albeit self-love [...]. A logic of the gift thus withholds friendship from its philosophical interpretation. Imparting to it a new twist, at once both gentle and violent, this logic reorientates friendship, deflecting it towards what it should have been – what immemorially will have been. This logic calls friendship back to non-reciprocity, to dissymmetry or to disproportion, to the impossibility of a return to offered or received hospitality; *in short, it calls friendship back to the irreducible presence of the other.*" Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, transl. by George Collins, Verso, London/New York, 1997, pp.62-63, emphasis added. This logic certainly does not appeal to Delano, whose principle is the principle of equivalence, proportion. Envy itself operates according to this principle: "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth", as the saying goes.

formulated request for friendship [...] the envious man is then often moved for the other, he aspires to the friendship of whom he envies and he is happy if he is held out a hand, if he is given a recognition".⁵⁴ Yet would the recognition of the envied man suffice to the *invidiosus*? Would the act of gratitude, intended here *qua* an operation of economic politics aimed at re-establishing, at least to an ideal plane, a symmetry, a reciprocity, a *proximity* of powers and values between two beings that are in fact different and far from each other, suffice to domesticate envy's passion? And if so, would it pave the way for a sincere friendship? Absolutely not, we answer. In effect, a recognition of the envied host towards the envious guest not only would not eliminate the distance between them but it would somehow come to exacerbate it, namely, it would render envy more violent and malignant than ever before: the recognition would in fact but fuel up the malignant fire of desire, from which envy precisely proceeds. In sum, the envious man would not content himself with a simple *yes* nor would he be happy with the infinite reiteration of it: he simply does not content himself, nothing can fulfil him exactly because he wants it all, namely, let's repeat it for the last time, he wants to take the place of the Other: to be him.⁵⁵

[...] the two vessels, thanks to the pilot's skill, ere long in neighborly style lay anchored together. Before returning to his own vessel, Captain Delano had intended communicating to Don Benito the smaller details of the proposed services to be rendered. But, as it was, *unwilling anew to subject himself to rebuffs*, he resolved, now that he had seen the San Dominick safely moored, immediately to quit her, without further allusion to hospitality or business [...] His boat was ready to receive him; but his host still tarried below. Well, thought Captain Delano, if he has little breeding, the more need to show mine. He descended to the cabin to bid a ceremonious, and, it may be, tacitly rebukeful adieu. But to his great satisfaction, Don Benito, *as if he began to feel the weight of that treatment with which he slighted guest had, not undecorously, retaliated upon him*, now supported by his servant, rose to his feet, and grasping Captain Delano's hand, stood tremulous, too much agitated to speak. But the good augury hence drawn was suddenly dashed [...] he silently reseated himself on his cushions. *With a corresponding return of his chilled feelings*, Captain Delano bowed and withdrew.

He was hardly midway in the narrow corridor, dim as a tunnel, leading from the cabin to the stairs, when a sound, as of the tolling for execution in some jail-ward, fell on his ears. It was the echo of the ship's flawed bell, striking the hour, drearily reverberated in this subterranean vault...in images far swifter than these sentences, the minutest details of all his former distrusts swept through him. (p.104)

⁵⁴ Alberoni, *L'invidia*, pp.106-107. The Italian sociologist is here in stark contrast with Schoeck: see p.130, footnote 141 of our work.

⁵⁵ Let's note that envy and avidity are always close to each other. In most cases, the envious man is or becomes greedy, and this precisely because envy proceeds from desire, which is always and already a desire of being able to reach and possess everything.

The un-accountable suspension of the *yes* which seems almost to coincide with the macabre resonating of the ship's fore-castle bell, has the power of maliciously re-evoking in the American unresolved suspicions and fears. A series of occurrences in which is evident the transfiguration of Delano's revengeful (yet impotent) hate towards the Spaniard follows:

A1- Why was the Spaniard, so superfluously punctilious at times, now heedless of common propriety in not accompanying to the side his departing guest? Did indisposition forbid? Indisposition had not forbidden more irksome exertion that day. His last equivocal demeanor recurred.

A2- Did this imply one brief, repentent relenting at the final moment, from some iniquitous plot, followed by remorseless return to it? His last glance seemed to express a calamitous, yet acquiescent farewell to Captain Delano forever.

A3- Why decline the invitation to visit the sealer this evening? Or was the Spaniard less hardened than the Jew, who refrained not from supping at the board of him whom the same night he meant to betray?

A4- What imported all those day-long enigmas and contradictions, except that they were intended to mistify, preliminary to some stealthy blow?

A5- Atufal, the pretended rebel, but punctual shadow, that moment lurked by the threshold without. He seemed a sentry, and no more. Who, by his own confession, had stationed him there? Was the negro now lying in wait? The Spaniard behind, his creature before: to rush from darkness to light was the involuntary choice. (ibid.)

All inferences proceed from the identification of Cereno as villain, conspirator, assassin, that is, originally, as the subject of the American's powerless resentment. However, what one should note here is, yet again, the fact that this identification remains substantially unquestioned. For if one is ready to interpret the obscure suspension of the other *yes* as a sign of a return to some horrible design and if, starting precisely from this very last contradiction (read provocation, humiliation), one is propense to finally perceive the Other's 'equivocal demeanor' throughout the day as evil, there must be indeed a reason for that. Then the question is why? Namely, what on earth would move Cereno to hating his guest so much to the point of wanting to command his murder? Why would Don Benito order to murder the American? Why would he kill him? After all, Delano's conscience is spotless, free of sin, he is innocent: in short, *Who would murder Amasa Delano? His conscience is clean.* The question 'Who' may as well be replaced by the question 'Why' or at any rate in it resounds a rhetorical 'Why?': Why would anybody murder Amasa Delano?, to which would always and already follow the reassuring yet fundamentally weak answer of one's (bad) con-science. In this sense, we can perhaps ultimately infer that precisely when the idea of his own (Delano's) assassination by order of whom he would like to see dead comes to his mind, the American necessarily finds

himself, yet despite himself, before a dangerous dialectical *impasse* which more or less says: “if someone does hate me so much to the point of wanting me dead, it means or it should mean that maybe I, in my turn, have done him some wrong, that I am guilty of something...” In other words, by positing the Other’s homicidal hate the moral integrity itself of the American (that is, his same hate towards Cereno) is implicitly being called into question [a *mortal* question indeed as it questions, let’s recall it, and thus threatens his (well-)being]:

The next moment, with clenched jaw and hand, he passed Atufal, and stood unharmed in the light. As he saw his trim ship lying *peacefully* at her anchor, and almost within *ordinary* call; as he saw his household boat, with familiar faces in it, *patiently* rising and falling on the short waves by the San Dominick’s side; and then, glancing about the decks where he stood, saw the oakum-pickers *still* gravely plying their fingers; and heard the low, buzzing whistle and industrious hum of the hatchet-polishers, *still* bestirring themselves over their endless occupation; *and more than all, as he saw the benign aspect of nature, taking her innocent repose in the evening*; the screened sun in the *quiet* camp of the west shining out like the mild light from Abraham’s tent; *as charmed eye and ear took in all these*, with the chained figure of the black, *clenched jam and hand relaxed*. Once again he smiled at the phantoms which had mocked him, and felt something like a tinge of remorse, that, by harboring them even for a moment, he should, by implication, have betrayed an almost atheist doubt of the ever-watchful Providence above. (pp.104-105, my emphasis)

The semes of sameness, familiarity and tranquillity in connection with the main signified of innocence can be identified within this lexia, whose ‘moral’ could be summed up as follows: “Nobody (read Cereno) wants or ever wanted to kill me, my conscience is clean: I am innocent; there is certainly someone above, though I doubted it for a moment...”. Delano’s question is thus always the same one: that is, a question of faith, or, more exactly, of bad faith, starting from which is decided everytime the nature of truth. Here, for instance, the (normalizing) truth one returns to runs: “Cereno is neither a conspirator nor an assassin but just a presumptuous and ill-mannered idiot, an hypochondriac, an incompetent, the spoiled brat of some rich Spanish lineage. Ultimately, a man of no worth.” The normalization of the real can therefore be said to bring back to the original order of the representation, an order which gets its constitution, in Heidegger’s words, from a *fore-having*, a *fore-sight* and a *fore-conception*. That is, an order always and already structured to the measure, to the calculation (which is a calculation of transvaluable values and transfigurable powers, whereas calculation or measurement, the act of calculating or measuring are nothing less, according to the Nietzsche of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, than the original modes of thinking, reasoning) of envy, albeit purged (at least for

the time being) of the spirit of vengeance, of the presence of hate; so allowing within it the reappearing of that which could be considered its most constituent and contingent trait, the most *sincere* one, namely, that of regret, sorrow, sadness⁵⁶:

There was a few minutes' delay, while, in obedience to his orders, the boat was being hooked to the gangway. During this interval, a sort of *saddened satisfaction stole over Captain Delano, at thinking of the kindly offices he had that day discharged for a stranger*. Ah, thought he, after good actions one's conscience is never ungrateful, however much so the benefited party may be. (p.105, my emphasis)

The material we have put in italics would moreover, by negation or absence, attest to the *fundamental* presence of a thought or a thinking, necessarily ethical in structure, which has been radically transvalued within the story and of which we have tried to bring out the thesis and articulate its profound meaning, that is to say, the thought of the Other and the for-the-Other: a thought of disinterested, non-reciprocal, non-correlative responsibility (and finally of substitution) for the stranger, for the foreigner, for he who unexpectedly appears at one's door and commands to answer. Thought of a pre-original (that is, anterior to representation, to memory in so much as the work of retention of one's past) saying-giving, of the *yes* of confession and sincerity. Thought of the offering, service and welcoming of the Other beyond logic, ontology or economy, which always already evoke the eternal and irreducible return of an ego to itself; a movement that is definable, to borrow a term from classical psychology, as narcissism or selfishness. A thought which is absolutely extraordinary, exceptional and therefore (this may sound like an aporia yet it is not) *unthinkable*; whose prophetic eschatology would ultimately point to the sense of the human and the human as one's sense and destiny.

What follows can be briefly recapitulated into five scenes: in the first one, we are described the surprising yet pleasant decision of the Spanish captain to accompany his departing guest, *as if intent upon making amends for his recent discourtesy*; in the second one, the inexplicable jump of the former onto the boat of the latter: "the dismayed officer of the boat eagerly asked what this meant. To which, Captain Delano, turning a disdainful smile upon the unaccountable Spaniard, answered that, for his part, *he neither knew nor cared*; in the third one, Babo's attempt *in extremis* to stab to death Don Benito, an attempt Delano maliciously misunderstands thinking that the dagger of the black were directed against him; in the fourth one, the flash of revelation that illuminates Delano as to the real situation of the San Dominick and its crew, captain included; finally in the fifth one, on

⁵⁶ See Petrosino, *Visione e desiderio*, p.143.

which we shall concentrate, we are told of the assault of the Spanish boat by the Americans, suddenly turned (out of persuasion) from peaceful sailors into ferocious pirates and slave-traders ready to slay for a fist of doubloons⁵⁷:

The more to encourage the sailors, they were told, that the Spanish captain considered his ship as good as lost, that she and her cargo, including some gold and silver, were worth more than a thousand doubloons. Take her, and no small part should be theirs. The sailors replied with a shout. (p.109)⁵⁸

Delano's decision to attack the *San Dominick* has to be questioned: what does in fact move the American to such an irrational act? What does drive him to such a folly? Could he not leave the negroes to their fate, so responsibly sparing other lives to a certain death? Cereno himself tries to convince Delano of the unconsciousness of his decision:

Don Benito entreated the American not to give chase, either with ship or boat; for the negroes proved themselves such desperadoes, that, in case of a present assault, nothing but a total massacre of the whites could be looked for. But, regarding this warning as coming from one whose spirit had been crushed by misery, the American did not give up his design. (p.108)

Despite the *interdiction* of the Spaniard (commanding the *Thou Shall not Kill*), Delano remains firm in his determination⁵⁹: *the American did not give up his design*; his evil design we say. As a matter of fact, his decision *does* make sense only when considered proceeding from and within the perspective of envy; wherein the spirit of vengeance and homicidal hate can be said to have now fully re-emerged. On top of the questions raised above, others come out: first and foremost, what does generate the occurrence of envy and, more profoundly, how can its degeneration into hate be explained? And, still further, assuming that the decision to attack the blacks still answers to Delano's vicious desire of retaliating against Cereno (for the wrongs this latter is believed to have inflicted upon the former), that is, it is intended to harm and possibly to virtually destroy him, on which grounds can we ultimately validate our assumption? That which occasions envy and ulteriorly that which declines it into hate is yet again the inevitability of a comparison between the two Captains (a comparison, let's recall it in passing, that only the envious

⁵⁷ See Materassi, Mario, *L'idolo nell'occhio*, p.102.

⁵⁸ However, "to kill or maim the negroes was not the main object. To take them, with the ship, was the object." As a matter of fact, before being considered as enemies, the negroes are perceived as slaves, that is, as capital. Over and above this, what it is interesting here is the complete overturning of the roles at play, whereby the Americans not only become the pirates but end up adopting and somehow perverting Babo's motto: "Follow your leader!".

⁵⁹ That is, he says *no* to Don Benito's appeal.

man in so far as he is driven by his desire always and already establishes), but wherein would come to be exceeded and thus in a way surprised the very consuetudes of envy, whose calculative work has always and *necessarily* as its primary scope the systematic and radical overturning of the value-power relations between he who envies and he who is envied. A question necessarily follows: on which basis can we establish the excess of such a comparison? In other words, what does make this comparison so extraordinary and therefore so menacing to Delano? The exceptionality of this comparison can be understood as proceeding from the cession of the representation itself, that is to say, proceeding from the unfolding (*dénouement*) of a *no longer* transvaluable knowledge regarding the Other and even better regarding the Other's *innermost*. A knowledge now liberated from the reassuring and protective prejudices of the subject of the signification, which used to draw their precarious consistency, credibility and somehow legitimacy only and precisely within the mask and on the grounds of the work of negative suggestion performed by Babo upon Delano.

What does this knowledge regarding the Other come to say then? It says: "Cereno is neither a conspirator nor an assassin nor a thief nor an impostor nor an inept, in fact he is just the opposite of all that, namely, a powerful and worthy captain, possessor of immense fortunes, a man who, though relatively young, has had an adventurous life, a life made of success and glory. Ultimately, he is a man that has arrived where I, Amasa Delano, have failed". The knowledge regarding the Other does in fact always and already recall a knowledge (also irreducible) regarding the innermost of the Same; a knowledge which functions, we say, as self-esteem. As a result of this, the unfolding of the truth concerning the Other would inevitably come to inflict the most profound and painful wound to the ego's being: "Cereno is *really* everything, I am nothing." It is therefore exactly starting from the unaccountability of the comparison between these two no longer transvaluable truths that envy necessarily degenerates into the fury of hate. In short, Delano would not accept the idea of being, in the end, the loser, whereas the loss regards fundamentally the dyad value-power, that is, it refers to the thematics of the economy of being and being as eco-nomy. From whence the American's most violent and destructive reaction against the Other, who would be thus not just perceived (it cannot be otherway) as the sign of his own failure (the plenitude of the Other recalls the emptiness of the same) but also and necessarily then as the absolute cause of his terrible suffering: that is to say, in so much as the culprit. In *this* sense and to a deeper plane, we might quite legitimately venture to conclude that that which Delano does not accept (and

how could he?) and, thereby, that which he diabolically rebels against is perhaps precisely the very innocence of the Spaniard, namely, the fact that this latter comes out as the innocent victim, beyond or before any guilt/responsibility: “How can he be innocent?”, seems to wonder, surprised and full of fury, the envious man from the depths of his solitude.⁶⁰ What the American hates, what he hates the most is certainly Don Benito’s innocence, which the re-vealing knowledge regarding this latter (neither conspirator, nor assassin, nor thief...) would already *originally* recall, but that only the horribly painful experience of the comparison *ultimately* permits to grasp, that is, to grasp it (the Spaniard’s innocence) precisely as unacceptable.

It is here, in the end, that one should read the true evil, the malignancy, the deadly sin of envy of the Captain: exactly because his proceeding is now placed *outside* of the mask and beyond the work of negative suggestion acted upon him by Babo, starting from and within which his (Delano’s) scopic obliquity and every damaging actions that he might have been carrying out against the Spaniard found and/or could have found a *certain* justification.

But let’s now concentrate on the second and final question: how can the decision to attack the Spanish vessel be construed as an act directed to damage Don Benito, and in which way would it come to harm him? We know that the aim of the assault is the taking of the *San Dominick*, its cargo and the rebel slaves, that is to say, the conquest of goods that belong to Cereno, who, despite considering his ship *as good as lost* as Delano himself puts it, would still remain (namely, in the event that the vessel sets sail) the nominal owner of it and its contents.⁶¹ As a matter of fact, the interest of the envious man would not lie in the appropriation of whatever goods but originally, and according to many also ultimately, in the expropriation of them. It can be said that the appropriative act does matter, count or signify only in so much as expropriation of the envied man’s ownmost. To Contri and with him others (for example Lacan), the goal of the *invidiosus* is “the liquidation of the Other in its relation with that ‘thing’ (thus also in the case where such relation exists and/or remains to a nominal plane only). That which he hates, for this is now the word, *is the freedom of the Other in its relation with that thing.*”⁶² However, independently of whether one considers the expropriation as an end in itself, the nexus

⁶⁰ The nexus innocence-guilt within the problematic of envy dealt with in *Billy Budd* is here anticipated.

⁶¹ We may suppose that with the death of Don Aranda, it is Don Benito to have become the owner (or at any rate the responsible) of the main company of the blacks.

⁶² G.Contri, *Spassionati di tutto il mondo...Elogio della monarchia*, in AA.VV, *L'invidia. Aspetti sociali e culturali*, Libri Scheiwiller, Milano, 1990, p.136, my emphasis and my transl..

expropriation-appropriation can, nay, has to be thought further: as a matter of fact, it would not only and so much regard the plane of the possession but as, originally, that of the possible, of that possible that the Other has realized in the place of the envious man, and more precisely yet it would concern the value inherent to this very realization. In sum, there is here the determination to put an end (forever then) to the *present* of this realization, which is to say to definitely render this present a *past*. By taking away the Other's ownmost, meant as a material good, is in fact effected the dismemberment, the dissolution, the destruction of a whole world (perceived as the realization of the possible) and, more exactly, of a whole world in its symbolic and ideal bond with Cereno; whereas the destruction, if we are (as we have done till now) to conceive the ultimate purpose of the envious man as an act of appropriation, is but the mode, if not the supreme mode, in which this latter (appropriation) can be said to accomplish itself.⁶³ Through the appropriative destruction, the American has thus not only succeeded in revenging himself on the Spaniard, but at the same time he has realized, albeit symbolically, that desire of being able to possess and reach everything, which we have in the end comprehended and interpreted in so much as a desire of total identification with the being-in-itself of the Other.

The circle (of being; of a being always already in view of its having to be, always and necessarily in view of its enjoyment, that is, acting according to the order, to the measure of 'mineness' as Heidegger words it) can now be closed:

Nearly a score of negroes were killed. Exclusive of those by the balls, many were mangled; their wounds – mostly inflicted by the long-edged sealing-spears – resembling those shaven ones of the English at Preston Pans, made by the poled scythes of the Highlanders. On the other side, none were killed, though several were wounded; some severely, including the mate. The surviving negroes were temporarily secured, and the ship, towed back into the harbor at midnight, *once more lay anchored*. (p.111)

⁶³ As Sartre points out: "To destroy is to reabsorb into myself: it is to enter along with the being-in-itself of the destroyed object into a relation as profound as that of creation. The flames which burn the farm which I myself have set on fire, gradually effect the fusion of the farm with myself. In annihilating it I am changing it into *myself*. Suddenly I rediscover the relation of being found in creation, but in reverse. I *am* the foundation of the barn which is burning; I *am* this barn since I am destroying its being. Destruction realizes – in a way perhaps more subtle than creation – appropriation [...] Destruction is then to be given a place among appropriative behaviours". Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.593, Sartre's emphasis.

(r) Face-to-face:

The essence of language is friendship and
hospitality.

E. Lévinas

At this point our research may be considered concluded. We say ‘may be’ however, for there is still a sequence that is worth touching on. A sequence which shall allow us to ultimately grasp both the position of Delano in relation to Cereno and the position of this latter in connection with the drama lived on board the *San Dominick* and all that within that thought of the Other (thought of the saying-giving...) to which this text is so sensible. On the way to Lima, the two captains are finally face-to-face. What follows is an extract taken from one of the many conversations they had:

[...] “Wide, indeed,” said Don Benito, sadly, “you were with me all day; stood with me, sat with me, talked with me, looked at me, ate with me, drank with me; and yet, your last act was to clutch for a monster, *not only an innocent man, but the most pitiable of all men*. To such degree may malign machinations and deceptions impose. So far may even the best man err, in judging the conduct of one with the recesses of whose condition he is not acquainted. But you were forced to it; and you were in time undeceived. Would that, in both respects, it was so ever, and with all men.”

“You generalize, Don Benito; and mournfully enough. *But the past is passed; why moralize upon it? Forget it. See, yon bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky; these have turned over new leaves.*”

“*Because they have no memory,*” he dejectedly replied; “*because they are not human.*” (p.125)

What does Cereno mean by memory? And, still further, how can the nexus, granted but not given that it is about a nexus, between memory and the fact of being human be interpreted? And, finally, what does it mean to be human? The text goes on:

“But the mild trades that now fan your cheek, do they not come with a human-like healing to you? Warm friends, steadfast friends are the trades.”

“With their steadfastness they but waft me to my tomb, señor,” was the foreboding response.

“You are saved,” cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; “you are saved; what has cast such a shadow upon you?”

“The negro.”

There was silence, while the moody man sat, slowly and unconsciously gathering his mantle about him, as if it were a pall.

There was no more conversation that day. (p.126)

On this basis we could perhaps infer that memory in the way Cereno conceives it does not so much determine itself in the mode of a re-presentation or more simply a

reaffirmation of a certain spatio-temporal given but as a *question*: a question brought inevitably and irreducibly about the moment when this or that given comes back to one's mind. A question to which the subject would be *already* responding, that is to say, to which it always already responds in so far as it remembers, in so far as it is unable to forget, namely, unable to subtract itself: responsible, despite itself, for the Other (the negro: not only and so much Babo but as a multiplicity, a chorus of voices that speak through his eyes demanding justice, with whose call the former is charged to deliver⁶⁴) in a passivity or uncondition of hostage (<>welcoming host)⁶⁵ which means substitution and which also would announce the happening itself of the sense of the human and the human as one's sense and destiny, beyond being and its economy. In this regard, Lévinas makes clear: "knowledge appears here [...] The birth of consciousness, of knowledge, and of justice is likewise the birth of philosophy as the wisdom of love. The initial unlimited responsibility that justifies that concern for justice can be forgotten. *In this forgetting, consciousness is born as a pure possession of self by self*, yet this egoism, or egotism, is neither primordial nor ultimate. *A memory lies at the bottom of this forgetting*. A passivity, which is not only the possibility of the death of the being-there (the possibility of its impossibility), but an impossibility prior to that ultimate possibility of the 'me' [*moi*]: the impossibility of hiding, an absolute susceptibility, *a gravity without frivolity that is, in reality, meaning within the dullness of being, which is constituted within that forgetting*⁶⁶ [...] Simply, the

⁶⁴ "The negro Babo asked him [Cereno] whether there were in those seas any negro countries where they might be carried, *and he answered them, No [...]*"; p.114, my parenthesis and emphasis.

⁶⁵ "The notion of *subjectivity as hostage*, studied in its formal schema, is a reversal of the notion of a subject that is characterized by position, and that one may call I [*Moi*] The I posits itself in, or facing, the world, and this position is presence of the I to itself. The subject as I is what abides with itself and possesses itself; it is the master of itself as of the universe. This subject is, consequently, a *beginning*, as if it were before all things [...] But, as beginning, it is also fulfillment: the end of history is the full possession of self by self, a full presence to self [...] In the relation with the Other [*Autrui*] [...] the subject – the famous subject resting upon itself – is unseated by the other [*autrui*], by a wordless exigency or accusation, and one to which I cannot respond with words, *but for which I cannot deny my responsibility. The position of the subject is its deposition*. To be me (and not I [*Moi*]) is not perseverance in one's being, but the substitution of the hostage expiating to the limit for the persecution it suffered. It is necessary to go all the way to that point. *For it is only then that we witness [assistons] a dereification of the subject, and the desubstantialization of the condition, or uncondition, which qualifies the subjection of the subject.*" Lévinas, *God, Death, and Time*, p.181; the first two emphasis are Lévinas'.

⁶⁶ The text goes on saying: "In this initial passivity, in this accusative preceding every nominative, the self [*soi*] abrogates the imperialism of the Same and introduces *meaning* into being. In being as such, there cannot be meaning. Mortality renders meaningless the care that the me [*moi*] takes of its destiny. To posit oneself as 'me' persevering in its being, when death awaits, resembles an evasion within a world without exits. Nothing is more comical than the care that a being takes of its being when destruction is certain [...] Yet the comical is also tragic, and it belongs to man to be a character at once tragic and comical. On the other hand, the approach in the nearness without limits confers a meaning upon death. In this approach, the absolute singularity of the responsible one encompasses the generality of death. Life is not measured by being, death cannot introduce the absurd into it. To pleasure, death brings a denial [...] Just as Kantianism finds a meaning to the human without measuring it against

other affects us despite ourselves, and this passivity is the subjectivity of the subject.”⁶⁷

The subjectivity of the subject or, we say, its humanity.

Some months after, dragged to the gibbet at the tail of a mule, the black met his voiceless end. The body was burned to ashes; but for many days, the head, that hive of subtlety, fixed on a pole in the Plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of the whites; and across the Plaza looked towards St. Bartholomew’s church, in whose vaults slept then, as now, the recovered bones of Aranda; and across the Rimac bridge looked towards the monastery, on Mount Agonia without; where three months after being dismissed by the court, Benito Cereno, borne on the bier, did, indeed, follow his leader. (p.126)

ontology, and outside of the question “How is it with?” which is the ontological question itself, here, we seek a meaning outside the problem of immortality and death. The fact that immortality and theology do not belong to what determines the categorical imperative signifies the novelty of the Copernican revolution. *Meaning is not determined through the to-be or the not-to-be. It is being, on the contrary, that is determined on the basis of meaning.*” Lévinas, *God, Death, and Time*, p.184 (the first emphasis is Lévinas).

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp.183-184.

Chapter 6

Travels in Fairy-Land:

With fairest flowers, while summer lasts, and
I live here, Fidele -

Melville¹

The world in which reason becomes the more
and more self-conscious is uninhabitable.

Lévinas

(a) A malo libera nos, Domine:

...Fairies there, thought I, once more; the queen of fairies at her fairy-window;
at any rate some glad mountain-girl; it will do me good, it will cure this weariness,
to look on her. No more; I'll launch my yawl – ho, cheerly, heart! and push away for
fairy-land – for rainbow's end, in fairy land. (p.10)

Let us start again from the analysis of the following phrase: *it will do me good, it will cure this weariness, to look on her*. First, the weariness of the narrator. The term 'weariness', if we are to take it literally, indicates a physical and/or a mental tiredness, generally caused by exhaustion or lack of sleep. In this particular case, however, one may reasonably attribute the nature of that fatigue to the sickness the subject has recently been through. Bearing this in mind, the reference to rest and, more particularly here, to the active (conscious) oneirism of the reverie is more than pertinent: it is, in fact, fundamental. To be sure, not only does the illness interrupt the narrator's happy slumber, but it wakes him up to the unescapable reality of evil (*mal*): *I had to keep my chamber for some time after – which chamber did not face those hills*; where death's proximity is almost *palpable*. The excess of presence (or reality, as one prefers) to which the subject has been brutally exposed within *malady*² would, then, certainly explain the unbearableness to sight of *a Chinese creeper* (truly acting as a *memento mori*), and, it would, as well, be responsible for the I's impossibility of going back to the tranquil oneirism of the reverie: *in this ingrate peevishness of my weary convalescence, was I sitting there*; which signifies the accomplishment of the ego's eco-nomic work of

¹ Epigraph to *The Piazza* (my emphasis).

² Pain, let's not forget, is always excessive as its presence cannot be mastered, represented: phenomenologically speaking, it is not the noesis of a noema. The passivity of the subject in sufferance goes beyond passivity itself, in the sense that passivity as such always entails retention, assimilation.

assimilation of the present. That is, the turning of the ecstatic representation into enjoyment.

The subject's ever-present anxiety or even vigilance about death, its own death, could thus be identified as the determinant of its restlessness and, therefore, of its weariness. Yet, are we really sure of this? In effect, it seems that the problem we are facing does not as much concern a certain disquietude over one's own (ever-future) death as the inability of being able to overcome (read temporalize) this very alterological disquietude (read diachrony) by way of enjoyment in daydreaming; whereas said inability or impotence or impossibility is only *secondly* to be ascribed to the essential insuperability that constitutes the event (*événement*) of death and death *qua* event. Originally, and it is precisely the origin that we have to question here, this inability has to do with the foundation: the *Da*, 'there', of *Dasein* ('Being-there'), as Heidegger would put it. Let us explain: one rests, one daydreams...: all these modes of being affirming the well-being of an I in its identity of Same, that is, in its adherence or presence or stance to itself, presuppose and thus necessitate the physical as well as metaphysical stability of a dwelling, a house or even, for that matter, a part of it (as it is the case here), starting from which the recollection of the panoramic cogito is concretized and the "latent birth" of a world (of enjoyment) is produced.³ It follows that exactly when this stability gets shaky, that is, exactly when one's own abode or a part of it fail to be recognized as welcoming, hospitable, familiar (again, let us think of the image of the *Chinese creeper* [...] *climbing a post of the piazza*), then one would mathematically find itself in the impossibility of updating its own enjoyment. As a result of this, (to)morrow's imminence is certain to constitute an ever-present menace to the subject.⁴

Now, before carrying on with the text, it is necessary to recall once again the phrasal segment from which we have restarted our analysis: *it will do me good* [...] *to look on her*; how should this be interpreted? How should we understand this 'to look on her'? Is it

³"The privilege role of the home", says Lévinas, "does not consist in being the end of human activity but in being its condition, and in this sense its commencement. The recollection necessary for nature to be able to be represented and worked over, for it to first take form as a world, is accomplished as the home [...] Hence the subject contemplating a world presupposes the event of dwelling, the withdrawal from the elements (*that is, from immediate enjoyment, already uneasy about the morrow*), recollection in the intimacy of the home. [...] With the dwelling the separated being breaks with natural existence, steeped in a medium where its enjoyment, without security, on edge, was being inverted into care. [...] This primordial grasp, this emprise of labor, which *arouses* things and transforms nature into a world, presupposes, just as does the contemplation of the gaze, the recollection of the I in its dwelling. The movement by which a being builds its home, opens and ensures interiority to itself, is constituted in a movement by which the separated being recollects itself. With the dwelling the latent birth of the world is produced." Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp.152-157, the first emphasis is mine.

⁴As Lévinas puts it: "The dwelling, overcoming the insecurity of life, is a perpetual postponement of the expiration in which life risks foundering". *Ibid.*, p.165.

perhaps the contemplation of a face able to magically produce what is clear, what is certain, what is immortal, to paraphrase Derrida, thus curing from all evil? Which mysterious potion, which remedy, which tranquillizer, which *pharmakon* is the Other supposed to possess? Despite having said this before, we would want to insist on the fact that the Other in question, provided that it exists and it exists in the very same (ideal) way one has imagined it (namely, in its beauty, strength...⁵), or, in other words, one has chosen it, and to which the I was bound before even having started the search, is a girl (a maiden): *some glad mountain-girl*.⁶ We are then moving towards a feminine alterity and, more specifically yet, towards an idea of familiarity (>intimacy, affection, kindness, comfort) that would take form proceeding from a human welcome: a face: a word: “Yes, here I am: enter”. We might venture to say that the feminine face is the expression (face-speech) *par excellence* of hospitality: it is this very *yes* always already inscribed on her *visage*, this very *yes* that precedes and exceeds the essential solidarity bonding language and thought. It is this silent *yes responding* without reserve (that is, sincerely) to a coming and therefore, originally, to a *quest-ion*: “Would *you* let me in? Would you help me?”; to the question of the stranger (guest/host), the foreigner unexpectedly announcing himself to her door, and of whom, precisely by welcoming him inside, she would already *bear* the destiny.⁷

Before even signifying the mere contemplation of the Other *qua* ‘object of love’, that is, before even defining itself in so much as comprehension, possession, enjoyment and, ultimately, satisfaction⁸, the above-mentioned phrasal sample must refer, firstly, to the

⁵ In this regard, Adriaan T. Peperzak is clear: “(The ipseity of the I) appropriates *all* other (...) and transforms the world in the name of the multiple needs which compose the *ego* as a natural or – in the Aristotelian sense of the word – ‘physical’ being. Everything that exists appears as an element of the self-constitution of an ego dominating the world, *in such a way that the Other can emerge only as a beautiful and intelligent animal, an animated tool, a slave or a cherished object.*” Peperzak, *Beyond, The Philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas*, Northwestern University Press, Illinois, 1997, p.122, my emphasis.

⁶ Therefore, not a woman *yet*.

⁷ Let’s think of the biblical figure of Rebekah in Genesis 24. Lévinas claims: “And the other whose presence is discreetly an absence, with which is accomplished the primary hospitable welcome which describes the field of intimacy, is the Woman. The woman is the condition for recollection, the interiority of the Home, and inhabitation.” Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p.155. Elsewhere, the French philosopher writes: “The return to oneself, this introversion, *this appearance of place in space*, does not result, as in Heidegger, from a builder’s labour, from an architecture which shapes the countryside, but from the interiority of the Home – the reverse of which would be ‘any place’, without the essential moderation of feminine existence living there, which is habitation itself [...] The wife, the betrothed, is not the coming together in a human being of all the perfections of tenderness and goodness which could have subsisted without her; everything indicates that woman is the original manifestation of these perfections, kindness itself, the origin of all kindness on earth”. Lévinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, Athlone Press, London, p.33.

⁸ In this regard, it seems to us more than pertinent what Lévinas has said in his critic to the Eleatic notion of the woman to which Plato (and, starting with him, most of the western culture) refers: “Plato

hearing (perception) of a word of welcome as it is the one expressed by the face of the feminine other (we shall come back to this).

At this point, it is more than legitimate to ask ourselves whether or not this drive or push towards the other, bearing in mind its originating itself as a necessity and its not conceiving itself other than an intention of satisfying said necessity, is still capable of transcending itself, 'engendering Desire', and if it is still capable of doing so also regardless of the exteriority in which one finds the other. In other words, is the motion towards the other able to turn itself into emotion, thus proceeding beyond any finality/finitude? Or, will it come to exhaust its sense exclusively within an economic horizon, that is, attaining itself to a way of thinking in which everything is to be subordinated to the establishment and/or the maintenance of a house (meaning here the simple architecture: 'any place': hence not a home yet) and therefore, ultimately, to the sole respect of the law (*nomos*) of one's own enjoyment that to it (the house: *oikos*), fundamentally, inheres?

did not grasp the feminine in its specifically erotic notion. In his philosophy of love he left to the feminine no other role than that of furnishing an example of the Idea, which alone can be the object of love. The whole particularity of the relationship of one to another goes unnoticed. Plato constructs a Republic that must imitate the world of Ideas; he makes a philosophy of a world of light, a world without time. Beginning with Plato, *the social ideal will be sought for in an ideal of fusion.*" Lévinas, *Time and the Other*, p.53, my emphasis. It's precisely this 'ideal of fusion' that the French philosopher (and, before him, Melville himself) strongly rejects: to think and thus to reduce eros to the resolving of the Other into an 'idea of mine', to a total synthesis between two beings, separate and different one from the other (a difference which surpasses the category of gender), it means to return on this very side of immanence, that is to say, to an original unity that annihilates *in nuce* the essential multiplicity characterizing, in a particular way, the feminine alterity; thus ultimately precluding the possibility of grasping the absolutely transcendent *sense* of ethical notions such as those of fecundity, filiality and paternity, whose 'comprehension' would already constitute a 'victory over death': "The return to the ego to itself that begins with hypostasis is thus not without remission, thanks to the perspective of the future opened by eros. Instead of obtaining this remission through the impossible dissolution of hypostasis, one accomplishes it through the son. It is thus not according to the category of cause, but according to the category of the father that freedom comes about and *time is accomplished.*" Ibid., p.52, my emphasis. In *Totality and Infinity*, Lévinas casts further light on this: "By a total transcendence, the transcendence of trans-substantiation, the I is, in the child, an other. Paternity remains a self-identification, but also a distinction within identification – a structure unforeseeable in formal logic [...] Possession of the child by the father does not exhaust the meaning of the relationship that is accomplished in paternity [...] My child is a stranger (Isaiah 49), but a stranger who is not only mine, for he *is* me. He is me a stranger to myself. He is not only my work, my creature, even if like Pygmalion I should see my work restored to life. The son coveted in voluptuousness is not given to action, *remains unequal to powers.* No anticipation represents him nor, as is said today, projects him [...] The relation with such a future, irreducible to the power over possibles, we shall call fecundity [...] The relation with the child – that is, the relation with the other that is not a power, but fecundity – *establishes relationship with the absolute future, or infinite time* [...] Fecundity engendering fecundity accomplishes goodness: above and beyond the sacrifice that imposes a gift, the gift of the power of giving, the conception of the child. Here the Desire which in the first pages of this work we contrasted with need, the Desire that is not a lack, the Desire that is the independence of the separated being and its transcendence, is accomplished – *not in being satisfied and in thus acknowledging that is was a need, but in transcending itself, in engendering Desire.*" Lévinas, *Totality and Infinite*, pp.267-269, my emphasis.

(b) The quest:

How to get to fairy-land, by what road, I did not know; nor could any one inform me; not even one Edmund Spenser, who had been there – so he wrote me – further than that to reach fairy-land, it must be voyaged to, and with faith. (p.10)

So, by what path should one advance, how is one to get to fairy-land? The narrator seems to be quite confident about this: to reach it, one must travel to it, *and with faith*. You must believe and you must keep your faith all the way: only the one whose belief is sincere, solid, consistent will be able to make sense of its proceeding, step by step recognizing the signs leading to the end of the rainbow, to Una and her lambs. Yet, faith in what? In an idea, we may simply answer; whereas the idea is nothing but the result of an act of vision/contemplation. It is born of the privilege given to sight above all the other senses. Although he affirms he knows nothing, the faith the narrator speaks of does still refer to a knowledge (*sa-voir*) and to the word of this knowledge; whereas for word we mean here the figurative sign (sign+sign as Petrosino would put it; letter>litterature<>representation...), thereby rhetorical, thereby persuasive, thereby always already piloting the subject of the signification somewhere (else):

Some miles brought me nigh the hills; but out of present sight of them. *I was not lost*; for road-side golden-rods, as guide-posts, pointed, *I doubted not*, the way to the golden window. Following them, I came to a lone and languid region, where the grass-grown ways were travelled by drowsy cattle, that, less waked than stirred by day, seemed to walk in sleep. Browse, they did not – the enchanted never eat. At least, so says Don Quixote, the sagest sage that ever lived. (p.10)

In this *sense*, one wouldn't be mistaken in construing the quest in terms of question: that is, not only as a potential put-into-question of the epistemological centrality of the ego, but also and more in general, of a whole culture (namely a Western one) advocating the attainment and thus the possession of Truth beginning with the ontological intrigue that ties together thought and language and that defines the logos itself.

Also in consideration of a *certain* descriptive loquacity, we shall proceed by occurrences:

A1- On I went, and gained at last the fairy mountain's base, *but* saw yet no fairy ring. [...] Letting down five mouldering bars – so moistly green, they seemed fished up from some sunken wreck – a wiggled old Aries [...] came snuffing up; and then, retreating, decorously led on along a milky-way of white-weed, past dim-clustering Pleiades and Hyades, of small forget-me-nots; and would have led me further still his astral path, but for golden flights of yellow-birds, pilots, *surely*, to the golden window, to one side flying before me, from bush to bush, towards deep woods – which woods themselves were luring – and, somehow, lured, too, by their fence, banning a dark road, which, however dark, led up.

A2- A winter wood road, matted all along with winter-green. By the side of pebbly waters – waters the cheerier for their solitude [...] on I journeyed – my horse and I; on, by an old saw-mill, bound down and hushed with vines, that his grating voice no more was heard; on, by a deep flume clove through snowy marble, vernal-tinted, where freshet eddies had, on each side, spun out empty chapels in the living rock; on, where Jack-in-the-pulpit, like their Baptist namesake, preached out to the wilderness; on, where a huge, cross-grain block, fern-bedded, showed where, in forgotten times, man after man had tried to split it, but lost his wedges for his pains – which wedges rusted in their holes; on, where ages past, in step-like ledges of a cascade, skull-hollow pots had been churned out by ceaseless whirling of a flint-stone – [...] on to less broken ground, and by a little ring, where, *truly*, fairies must have danced, *or else* some wheel-tire been heated – for all was bare [...]

A3- My horse hitched low his head. Red apples rolled before him; Eve's apples; *seek-no-further*s. He tasted one, I another; *it tasted of the ground*. Fairy-land not yet, thought I, flinging my bridle to a humped old tree [...] For the way now lay where path was none, and none might go but by myself, and only go by daring. Through blackberry brakes that tried to pluck me back, though I but strained towards fruitless growths of mountain-laurel; up slippery steps to barren heights, where stood none to welcome. (pp.10-11)

We thought we could cut down the two and a half paragraphs that we have reproduced almost in full to a few significant occurrences. Have we been naïve or simply incompetent? Maybe both things. Yet, there is still another (reassuring!) possibility: that is, that the economy of the text and the text as economy did not permit, all things considered, this kind of (certainly critical) operation. This resistance of the narrative texture, so to speak, should not be ascribed so much and in the first place to a certain rhetorical use of the word (presence of periphrases, metaphors, metonymies, metalepsis, anaphora, poetic diction...), but as, in our regard, to the intricate organization of the discourse in multiple sentences and to the *andantino* rhythm of the punctuation, which indeed insure the temporal tenor of the diegesis (its *durée*, its stance) against unwanted interruptions or corruptions coming from the outside (from outside the *fabula*, the representation...). To be sure, the story of the narrator does hold (in suspense, as one may reasonably claim): it has, or it appears it has a strong hold, as is said for a glue. And, it is certainly not for nothing that we speak of a *récit* (recount or account): in opening its way through, in casting light before itself, the subject of the signification constantly gives account (of the essential unaccountability of the real!): it reorganizes, it puts in order, in one way or another it tries to make its accounts always right. Its discourse, its narrative is certainly meant to hold and hold together strong a total, a totality of different, disparate signs which, truth to tell, always risk, at any time, to reveal their own fundamental fragility⁹; as is the case, for instance, with the compound words one uses and abuses

⁹ Let's recall here what Heidegger has said: "Calculative thinking compels itself into a compulsion to master everything on the basis of the consequential correctness of its procedure. It is unable to foresee

(twenty-seven of them are in the very first five paragraphs of this second part). Their writing (*écriture*: *-*), their certainly attractive *signature* (Italian *firma*) takes the eye by surprise, so deceiving it. In a certain sense, we may venture to say that they don't show but are 'on show', they show themselves off (in their made-up frame!): staging/enunciating their own literature (from Lat. *littera*, 'letter'). They attract attention to themselves with the view of persuading as to their tightness, as to the strong bond (let's recall in passing the series: bond, thread, knot <> logos, from Greek *legbein* 'to bind, to tie') that holds them together (think of the compound word *par excellence* here: namely 'fairy-land'). In this regard but also more in general, it could be said that if, on the one hand, the textual word seems to acquire thickness and concretion starting precisely from the fact that it rests within a certain figurativeness, on the other, this figurativeness and, more specifically, the too-much of it that marks it, ends up, at the same time, in confessing the substantial appearance and thus semantic groundlessness of the word itself; ultimately pointing out the evidence of the irreducible distance that separates it from the immediacy of reality. From Truth.

On the thymic plane of the narrative, this gap, this distance is suggested by the alternation of contrasting emotional states (euphoria<>dysphoria; satisfaction<>dissatisfaction: A1;A2;A3) in connection with the object of 'desire': as the search goes on, the expectations and thus the certainties of the narrator are progressively being put into question: "Fairy-land not yet, thought I, flinging my bridle to a humped old tree [...] For the way now lay where path was none, and none might go but by myself, and only go by daring." A difficulty of *sense* emerges: from here on, we may infer, it is necessary to progress with a certain audacity, in a non-conventional way (instinctive?), that is, by always avoiding reference to one's own *sa-voir* and to the word of this *savoir*. One should ultimately suspend, at least for the present, every (pre)comprehension it has of the real.

We shall conclude this analytical section by identifying the dominating *semes*. They are (in no particular order): bleakness, silence, absence, mystery, sterility (notice that the water only appears here as a negative element: its presence either rots or corrodes, wears away), hostility/resistance (of matter to the work of man: A2;A3), death (evidently in A3 with the image of the skull-hollow pots) in correlation with the main signified of otherness. Finally, the movement of the narrator can be subdivided in two phases: the

that everything calculable by calculation [...] is already a whole, a whole whose unity indeed belongs to the incalculable that withdraws itself and its uncanniness from the claws of calculation". Heidegger, "Postscript to 'What is Metaphysics?'", in *Pathmarks*, p.235.

crossing over (A1) and the ascent (A2+). His proceeding is certainly a going towards the most High. Towards the Other.¹⁰

Foot-sore enough and weary, I gained not then my journey's end, but came ere long to a craggy pass, dipping towards growing regions still beyond. A zigzag road, half overgrown with blueberry bushes, here turned among the cliffs. A rent was in their ragged sides; through it a little track branched off, which, upwards threading that short defile, came breezily out above [...] and here, among fantastic rocks, reposing in a herd, the foot-track wound, half beaten, up to a little, low-storied, grayish cottage, capped, nun-like, with a peaked roof. (pp.11-12)

(c) *A* cottage:

On one slope, the roof was deeply weather-stained, and, nigh the turfy eaves-trough, all velvet-napped; no doubt the snail-monks founded mossy priories there. The other slope was newly shingled [...] ¹¹ The whole base, like those of the neighboring rocks, was rimmed about with shaded streaks of richest sod; for, with hearth-stones in fairy land, the natural rock, though housed, preserves to the last, just as in open fields, its fertilizing charm; only by necessity, working now at a remove, to the sward without. So, at least, says Oberon, grave authority in fairy lore. Though setting Oberon aside, certain it is, that, even in the common world, the soil, close up to farm-houses, as close up to pasture rocks, is, even though untended, ever richer that it is a few rods off – such gentle, nurturing heat is radiated there. (p.12)

“Yes, I can't be wrong, my accounts are right, everything comes together finally: simply observe the sod here, in the proximity of the threshold...within...the white magic of a chimney...Yes, this must be fairy-land...yes, this certainly is the (economic) paradise I have been looking for”; so seems to reason the narrator. Yet, are we really sure we have reached fairy-land? Should we, skeptical readers of the logical and syllogical thematizations of the subject of the signification, change our mind? Of course not.¹² And, truth to say, we have the impression that not even the narrator honestly believes he is in dream-land. As a matter of fact, the excess of calculation confesses here, in particular, a determination (which is not entirely reflexive) to *reinforce* (it would be

¹⁰ As Pierre Hayat argues: “Lévinas insists that etymologically ‘transcendence indicates a movement of crossing over (*trans*), but also of ascent (*scando*)’. In its etymological sense, transcendence leads us to the notion of going beyond, of upward movement [...] Transcendence would appear to be the marker of the paradox of a relation with what is separate. ‘It is the way for the distant to give itself’”. Hayat, “Philosophy between Totality and Transcendence”; in Lévinas’s *Alterity & Transcendence*, p.ix.

¹¹ In this particular case, the narrator did intuit well: “Again, one noon, in the same direction, I marked, over dimmed tops of terraced foliage, a broader gleam, as of a silver buckler, held sunwards over some croucher’s head; which gleam, experience in like cases taught, *must come from a roof newly shingled*. This, to me, made pretty sure the recent occupancy of that far cot in fairy land.” p. 9.

¹² In relation to the narrator’s above-mentioned speculations, Marianna, the lonely occupant of the cot, will later reveal to him that: “An old house. They went West, and are long dead, they say, who built it. A mountain house. In winter no fox could den it. *That chimney-place has been blocked up with snow, just like a hollow stump.*” p.14, my emphasis.

precisely the act of ‘forcing’ as such to constitute the non-thetical nucleus of said determination) one’s own adherence (read faithfulness) to a (certainly) dubious truth. Quite reasonably, it seems appropriate to us to speak of a situation of bad faith; which to be sure would ultimately cast light on the nature of the narrator’s faith.¹³ At any rate, if there is one thing one can be completely confident about here, this is the fact that somewhere (no matter where) we have, so far, come, and, that to advance further on, further beyond the end of one’s (own) world, would be non-sensical, it wouldn’t have any *sense*, it would thus be risky as one may easily lose its way around:

No fence was seen, no inclosure. Near by – ferns, ferns, ferns; further – woods, woods, woods; beyond – mountains, mountains, mountains; then – sky, sky, sky.
(p.12)

The structural poverty of the language catches one’s eye: we are far from the rich, colourful and dynamic language that has marked, right up to this point, the enunciated. In this regard, we shall speak of a disfiguration of the sign: namely the emptying-out of the sign as sign (as the equi-valent) of something. At these heights, at these altitudes, it is as if the subject of the signification experienced or better underwent a sort of representative impossibility: “Nature, and but nature, house and all [...]”. The scene before it withdraws itself from all possible mathematics or semiosis. The surrounding Being does in fact but signal itself and, more particularly still, it does but signal its own (infinite) re-iterability (*iter* ‘again’ from Sanskrit *itara* ‘other’¹⁴) as the absolute determinant of its existence: *ferns, ferns, ferns [...] woods, woods, woods [...] mountains, mountains, mountains*

¹³ Let us recall what Sartre says concerning bad faith: “The true problem of bad faith stems evidently from the fact that bad faith is *faith* [...] But if we take belief as meaning the adherence of being to its object when the object is not given or is given indistinctly [as is the case here], then bad faith is belief; and the essential problem of bad faith is a problem of belief. How can we believe by bad faith in the concepts which we forge expressly to persuade ourselves? We must note in fact that the project of bad faith must be itself in bad faith. I am not only in bad faith at the end of my effort when I have constructed my two-faced concepts and when I have persuaded myself. In truth, I have not persuaded myself, to the extent that I could be so persuaded, *I have always been so*. And at the very moment when I was disposed to put myself in bad faith, I of necessity was in bad faith with respect to this same disposition. [...] What it [bad faith] decides first, in fact, is the nature of truth. With bad faith a truth appears, a method of thinking, a type of being, which is like that of objects; the ontological characteristic of the world of bad faith with which the subject suddenly surrounds himself is this: that here being is what it is not, and is not what it is [...] Thus bad faith in its primitive project and in its coming into the world decides on the exact nature of its requirements. It stands forth in the firm resolution not to demand too much, to count itself satisfied when it is barely persuaded [...] *The original project of bad faith is a decision in bad faith on the nature of faith*. Let us understand clearly that there is no question of a reflective, voluntary decision, but of a spontaneous determination of our being. *One puts itself in bad faith as one goes to sleep and one is in bad faith as one dreams.*” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp.67-68, the first emphasis is Sartre’s.

¹⁴ Petrosino, “Del Segno (Disseminario)”, in J. Derrida’s *La Disseminazione* (preface to), Jaca Book, Milano, 1989, p.25.

[...] *skey, skey, skey*. Its strangeness (unaccountability) is to be sure the number of its facticity. A number, moreover, from which the calculability of the subject (that is to say, its own *savoir* and thus experience) gets its structure.¹⁵

The cottage, “set down on the summit, in a pass between two worlds, participant of neither”, marks, it is the mark of a sort of metaphorical frontier to an ‘undiscovered country’, to borrow Shakespeare’s expression. A *limen* whose passing is but pure madness: from here on, we suggested it just now, it is impossible to make sense of the way ahead. To proceed further, ultimately means not to be able to come back (to pass away). In sum, we have reached a real dead-line.¹⁶

(d) The (g)host: Marianna:

Never a bride, never a mother, unfriended,
condemned alive to a solitary death.

Sophocles’ *Antigone*

Enter quickly, as I afraid of my happiness.

P. Klossowsky’s *Roberte ce soir*

Let us say yes to who or what turns up,
before any determination, before any
anticipation, before any identification.

J. Derrida

Pausing at the threshold, or rather where threshold once had been, I saw, through the *open* door-way, a lonely girl, sewing at a lonely window. A pale-cheeked girl, and fly-specked window, with wasps about the mended upper panes. I spoke. She *shyly* started, like some Tahiti girl, *secreted for a sacrifice, first catching sight, through palms of Captain Cook*. Recovering, *she bade me enter*, with her apron brushed off a stool; then *silently* resumed her own. With thanks I took the stool; but now, for a space, I, too, was mute. This, *then*, is the fairy-mountain house, and here, the fairy queen sitting at her fairy window. (p.13, my emphasis)

Let’s retake the question of hospitality by interrogating, once more, its consistence. That is, in what does hospitality consist? What does it mean to give/offer hospitality? What does it mean to be welcoming? And, first and foremost, where does hospitality start? To this latter question, we may answer with Lévinas: it begins with language (*saying*). Language, he says, *is* hospitality (*giving*). Marianna says *yes* and she says *yes* before even

¹⁵ See Petrosino, *L’esperienza della Parola: Testo, Moralità e Scrittura*, p.94.

¹⁶ As Marianna to the narrator’s question seems to suggest: “But, do you not go walk at times? These woods are wide.” “And lonesome; lonesome, because so wide. Sometimes, ‘tis true, of afternoons, I go a little way; but soon come back again. Better feel lone by hearth, than rock. The shadows hereabouts I know – those in the woods are strangers.” p.16.

saying it, literally. Not only: she says *yes* despite the exteriority in which the stranger appears to her. Even better, it could be said that her *yes* is a *yes* before any *sa-voir*: it is as if her door were always and already open for the other, whoever it may have been (man, woman, human or divine creature, animal...¹⁷) and whatever the motif of its coming.¹⁸ She offers hospitality, that is to say, she offers herself unconditionally: her answer to the *question* of the foreigner is, in this sense, an absolute one.

Now, if hospitality, as we believe correct, is born of the *yes*, a word this one that preceds and exceeds, namely transcends, let's recall it, the semantic reason of the 'said' (*le dit*), where does it proceed? To put this in other terms, how can the (non-intentional) act of giving hospitality preserve itself from becoming conditional [i.e., imposing (*economic*) conditions onto the guest] or even, for that matter, contractual¹⁹? How can it maintain or conserve itself unlimited in its purity, that is, without there being a return for the giver, without it turning into the vicious economy of a circle, so ultimately revealing a need rather than a desire for the other? The text must now come into our support: "recovering, she bade me enter, with her apron brushed off a stool; then, *silently* resumed her own." Is it not perhaps in the very suspension of language as such, in remaining by oneself in silence, as if waiting for the other, the guest, to break it (this silence), to break it by demanding again, by demanding one's host to respond (to respond: *yes*, here I am), to be responsible once more for him/her; that one should grasp the sense, beyond any finality, of hospitality/sociality as such? Notice in fact that Marianna does not question her guest: she doesn't even ask him what, more than anything else, would be spontaneous to ask a stranger suddenly in our home: that is, "What is your name?"; to which should immediately follow the other question: "Where do you *come from*?", and,

¹⁷ See Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, p.77.

¹⁸ Commenting on the very passage from Klossowsky's work that we have quoted above and recalling Lévinas's difficult formulations: "The subject is a host" (*Totality and Infinity*, p.299) and, a few years later, "The subject is hostage" (*Otherwise than Being...*, p.118), Derrida suggests to us one of the possible pass-words to hack the deep-down meaning of Melville's text: "[the stranger] is not only someone to whom you say 'come', but 'enter', enter without waiting, make a pause in our home without waiting, hurry up and come in, 'come inside', 'come within me', not only toward me, but within me: *occupy me, take place in me, which means, by the same token, also take my place*, don't content yourself with coming to meet me or 'into my home' [...] Strange logic, but so enlightening for us, that of an impatient master awaiting his guest as a liberator, his emancipator. It is *as if* the stranger or foreigner held the keys [...] *as if*, then, the stranger could save the master and liberate the power of his host; it's *as if* the master, *qua* master, were prisoner of his place and his power, of his ipseity, of his subjectivity (his subjectivity is hostage). So it is indeed the master, the one who invites, the inviting host, who becomes the hostage – and who really always has been" Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, pp.123-125, the first emphasis is mine.

¹⁹ "When Benveniste wants to define the *xenos*, there is nothing fortuitous in his beginning from the *xenia*. He inscribes the *xenos* in the *xenia*, which is to say in the pact, in the contract or collective alliance of that name. Basically, there is no *xenos*, there is no foreigner before or outside the *xenia* [...]", argues Derrida. *Ibid.*, p.29.

still further, “What do you want *here*? Why are you here? What are you getting at?”, and so on. She doesn’t question her guest: that is, she is not demanding him to respond, to be ultimately responsible for her own destiny (*qua* human being and *qua* woman)²⁰:

With thanks I took the stool; but now, for a space, I, too, was mute [...]

“You must find this view very pleasant,” said I, *at last*.

“Oh, sir,” tears starting in her eyes, “the first time I looked out of this window, I said ‘never, never shall I weary of this.’”

“And what *wearies* you of it now?”

“I don’t know,” while a *tear* fell; “but it is not the view, it is Marianna.” [...]

Silent I stood by the fairy window, while these things were being told.

“Do you know,” said she at last, as stealing from her story, “do you know who lives yonder? – I have never been down into that country – away off there, I mean; that house, that marble one [...].”

I looked; and after a time, to my surprise, recognized, more by its position than its aspect, or Marianna’s description, my own abode, glimmering much like this mountain one from the piazza. The mirage haze made it appear less a farm-house than King Charming’s place [...]

“Oh, if I could but once get to yonder house, and but look upon whoever the happy being is that lives there! A foolish thought: why do I think it? Is it that I live so lonesome, and know nothing?” (pp.13-16, the first emphasis is mine)

We find ourselves before a perfect chiasmus. Let’s proceed with caution. First, it may be said that starting precisely from the revelation of a *certain* knowledge about the other, the narrator becomes the recipient of a *secret*, whose exposition would *ipso facto* produce the radical change-over or even substitution of the roles (guest/host) played up to now by the two actants. In other words, by revealing its secret, that is, by saying “*Yes*, I am the person you dream of, Marianna”, the guest would come to surprise, in its turn, its host with the gift of hospitality: thus becoming the *hostage* of the *hostage*.²¹ He would be able to respond *yes* to a former *yes*, without these two *yes*, and this is the point, being immediately reciprocal or equal or symmetrical one to the other, without them having ever entered into the vicious circle of an economy (etymologically), without them having ever been subjected to its law (namely, the law of one’s own enjoyment).

²⁰ In this concern, Derrida affirms: “In telling me what your name is, in responding to this request, you are responding on your own behalf, you are responsible before the law and before your hosts, you are a subject in law.” Let’s also recall the *distinguo* he makes between “on the one hand, *The* law of unlimited hospitality (to give the new arrival all of one’s home and oneself, to give him or her one’s own, our own, without asking a name, or compensation, or the fulfilment of even the smallest condition), and on the other hand, the laws (in the plural), those rights and duties that are always conditioned and conditional, as they are defined by the Greco-Roman tradition and even Judeo-Christian one, by all of law and all philosophy of law up to Kant and Hegel in particular, across the family, civil society, and the State.” Ibid. p.27 and 77; Derrida’s emphasis.

²¹ “The guest becomes the host’s host. The guest (*hôte*) becomes the host (*hôte*) of the host (*hôte*). These substitutions make everyone into everyone else’s hostage”. Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, p.125.

“I, too, know nothing; and therefore, cannot answer; but, for your sake, Marianna, well could wish that I were that happy one of the happy house you dream you see; for then you would behold him now, and, as you say, this weariness might leave you”. (pp.16-17)

The narrator decides not to expose himself, that is, not to respond for the other. He firmly maintains his position *qua* spectator/guest. Why? Maybe because he fears to disenchant his host with what he has to say : (“The house you dream of is not King Charming’s place and I am not the happy being you may think I am: what do you see is nothing but a mere play of light and shadows, Marianna.”)? Yet, does not lie in the fact of saying *yes*, regardless of what this *yes* will then say or expose, regardless of the communication (the act of putting something in common: order of the having, possession) of a *savoir*, the *pharmakon* able to set the other (and by the some token oneself) free from its self, from its isolation within anxiety, from its condemnation to a solitary death? Does not rest the secret of sociality in the going-beyond and thus breaking up of this *yes* with the intentional categories of the object? Certainly. Then, why one does choose not to *speak*, why one does decide not to enter into relation, why, ultimately, one does lie? Is it perhaps the decision to lie, a decision made in bad faith (“I truly believe I am not the person she dreams of”)? No. And, we say ‘no’ for the simple reason that in this very case it is no longer a question of bad faith but indifference, cynical falsehood: the subject’s *no* (knot, texture, representation, literature<> logos) does in fact respond to the will to defend or protect, *at all costs*, the economic identity of a whole world, knowing well that it is nothing but the product of its own imagination.

As elsewhere, it is here affirmed the primacy of an economy of blood, of a sacrificial sort of economy as apposed to the summoned sacrifice of economy or ontology *tout court*: we don’t *speak*, we don’t respond and, by doing so, we abandon the other to its own destiny. We sentence it to its secreted death (*secreted for a sacrifice*). We kill her²²; and we kill her in the name of our own enjoyment. In the name of a non-sacrificiable secret.

Enough. Launching my yawl no more for fairy-land, I stick to the piazza. It is my box-royal; and this amphitheatre, my theatre of San Carlo. Yes, the scenery is magical – the illusion so complete. And Madame Meadow Lark, my prima donna, plays her grand engagement here; and; drinking in her sunrise note, which, Memnon-like, seems struck from her golden window, how far from me the weary face behind it. (p.17)

²² And, by the some token, though theoretically, we kill the other of the other: the son. By killing Marianna, the narrator would also come to murder his own future son/daughter. Death prevails over life.

We go back home, within a world from which, truth to tell, we have never stepped out. In a certain sense, it could be said that the voyage of the narrator, a true one indeed, “but, take it all in all, interesting as if invented”, never *really* started. The adventure *par excellence* can in fact only be thought as an *extradi(c)tion*: it begins with the *yes* and goes (departs) *beyond*. Yet,

...every night, when the curtain falls, truth comes with darkness. No light shows from the mountain. To and fro I walk the piazza deck, haunted by Marianna’s face, and many as real a story. (ibid.)

The excipit finally thematizes the production of a real ‘hauntology’, suggesting the possibility of the impossibility of the death of the other²³; here and now but at the same *time* never here and never now *hostilely* visiting and visiting again (rather than inhabiting) the I in its identity of same (in its inside, in its *oikos*, in its *chez soi*²⁴). The economic circuit of ipseity cannot close: its law being forever outLAWed. The (always imminent or going-to-come) specter(s) of Marianna (*and many as real a story*)²⁵ certainly breaks, beyond

²³ “A question of repetition”, says Derrida [a question of re-presentation (*outside*, let’s note, of the representation: *every night, when the curtain falls*) of re-iterability, hence, ultimately, of otherness]: “a specter is always a *revenant* [coming back]. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*.” Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, Routledge, New York and London, p.11. The term ‘hauntology’ is also Derrida’s: see (ibid.) p.10 *et passim*. Still further, note that the condition or better uncondition of the above-mentioned aporia (that is, the possibility of the impossibility of the death of the other) is, *basically*, what opposes Lévinas to Heidegger’s thinking (over) death. Heidegger’s *Sein-zum-Tode* ontological philosophy is (ethically) reversed by the French philosopher who, let’s recall it, conceives death from the perspective of time: ‘first death’ is always the death of the other.

²⁴ Says Derrida: “The specter, as its name indicates, is the *frequency* of a certain visibility. *But the visibility of the invisible* [my emphasis here]. And visibility, by its essence, is not seen, which is why it remains *epekeina tes ousias*, beyond the phenomenon or beyond being. [...] ghost or *revenant*, sensuo-non-sensuous, visible-invisible, the specter first of all sees *us*. From the other side of the eye, *visor effect*, it looks at us even before we see *it* or even before we see period. We feel ourselves observed, sometimes under surveillance by it even before any apparition. Especially – and this is the event, for the specter is *of* the event – it sees us during a *visit*. It (re)pays us a visit [*il nous rend visit*]. Visit upon visit, since it returns to see us and since *visitare*, frequentative of *visere* (to see, examine, contemplate) translates well the recurrence or returning, the frequency of a visitation.” Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, pp.100-101. As to the ‘temporality’ of the specter, Derrida appends this conclusive footnote to his *Specters of Marx* (p.196): “Given that a *revenant* is always called upon to come and to come back, the thinking of the specter, contrary to what good sense leads us to believe, signals toward the future. It is a thinking of the past, a legacy that can come only from that which has not yet arrived – from the *arrivant* itself.”

²⁵ *And many...*: Marianna’s unaccountable (always the unaccountable, always the other...) filiation, as *ghostly* as it may be, would count, amongst many others, the always going-to-come specters of Bartleby, Babo, Aranda....beside, of course, to stick to *The Piazza*, the haunting phantoms of all her unborn sons and daughters. Melville’s choice to put *The Piazza* before all the other tales ultimately makes sense: indeed, this is a *hosting* text, the hosting text of the *ghostly* tales to come [though more real than any literature in so much as the ghosts unleashed by them (unleashed by them through us as we own or should own the key-words to unearth the ethical sense of these stories) are in the capacity of crossing the textual borders and thus, *when the curtain falls*, of reaching and reaching us again in so far as we are, whether we want it or not, part of the *economy* of the text. In so far as we are its (witnessing) readers, namely, its guests/hosts]. The (g)hosts of the texts we have so far encountered certainly put us into question and, by the same token, before a question. These (g)hosts have the power (for they *really*

repair, with the immanence of the subject. It cores out its enjoyment within the ethical experience of an evil (*mal*) which is the revelation and testimony of its (the subject's) connection to the truth of Goodness and to Goodness as Truth.

In other words, the subject would be predestined (from eternity, as Melville puts it) to the other, that is, it would be *hostage* to its responsibility for it (let us note in passing that the other re-appears as face, as speech: that is questioning the I visit upon visit: putting it in *question* and in front of a question: the question of the other's untimely death)²⁶, before even having had the time, namely the distance (*how far from me the weary face behind it*), necessary to choose *to be* or *not to be* responsible, to paraphrase Lévinas²⁷ [to choose or not to choose to ex-pose itself, to extradi(c)te *beyond*].

Indeed, let's repeat it for the last time, ethics precedes and exceeds the confrontation with the logos (light>delight). It is, ultimately, anterior to ontology or *economy*.

have it) to awaken the ghosts, the specters, the revenants within us. Indeed, they demand us, here and now, to *adjust* (as it is always a question of justice) our off-hinges time, our world, as Derrida would put it.

²⁶ In a footnote to his "Of ghostwriting and possession", Dave Boothroyd draws attention to the fact that in *Aporias*, Derrida "explicitly proposes the nature of the connection between the Lévinasian trope of the 'hostage' and the 'ghost' (as members of the same series: 'This is the series constituted by hostage, host, guest, ghost, holy ghost and *Geist*). Boothroyd, "Of ghostwriting and possession", in *The Limits of Death, between philosophy and psychoanalysis*, ed. by J. Morra, Manchester University Press, 2000, p.218 (the quote from Derrida's *Aporias: Dying – Awaiting (One Another at) the 'Limits of Truth'*, Stanford Univ. Press, 1993, is at p.60).

²⁷ See Lévinas, *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, Montpellier, Fata Morgana, 1972, p.119.

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