

Lévinas, maternity and the therapy of abandonment and of dereliction

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I am going to speak about a very precise question: the therapy of abandonment, using Lévinas philosophy only in this purpose, knowing well, first that this kind of psychopathology encompass not all kinds of pathology, and secondly that Lévinas could not possibly be reduce at this very question.

In Lévinas' work, the theme of responsibility is major. But it evolved from 1945 to 1975, beginning with the encounter with death, then with femininity and paternity, and ending with maternity as source of psyche, then of responsibility and fraternity. Meanwhile, Lévinas discovered or emphasized the function of passivity in responsibility. I shall start with the "first" Lévinas and continue with the "second", always in the axis of "to be or not to be," existing and not existing, protection and abandonment, with a re-examination of the Freudian theory of obsessive neurosis.

I. From suffering and death to maternity

Firstly, I must remind that for Lévinas to "exist" is not merely to "be." "Being" is an attribute of things, of natural life. "Existing" belongs to humanity, as humanity is confronted to death, to femininity and to paternity, i.e. to the otherness. I will concentrate on the first step in the encounter of otherness: death. To do so, I start with *De l'existence à l'existant* (1945) and with *Le temps et l'autre* (1946), where Lévinas expresses clearly his theory of "otherwise than being" for the first time.

From "pure" being--quite an emptiness, timeless or an absence of consciousness--the "existing" appears out of the anonymous¹. Something is named and knows that it is named and becomes somebody, a "self". This self is present, without past or future. "Present" means that he must take care of himself. "The existent take care of himself. This manner to take care of oneself is the subject's materiality. Identity is not an innocent relation to

¹ The description of this phenomenon is very well done in the Jeffrey Bloechl conference (in the same seminar), "The Difficulty of Being"

oneself, but a chain to oneself... His liberty is immediately bounded by his responsibility. ...My being is also a having: I am cluttered with myself.”² This materiality is not a fall of a spirit in a body, but the reality of the spirit, the birth of the subject; a subject who must fight to feed. “The world is a set of nourishment”(p. 45). But this world does not put an end to the solitude of the subject. In the world the subject encounters itself, because the objects become him, are assimilated by him, even they are material or mental. The objects are not outsiders. “With the use and with the knowledge, I join myself”(p. 47). The external becomes internal (the air I breath), the unknown becomes known (the air I analyse). There is no duality between subject and object: both share the same light. Knowledge and understanding let the subject remains in is loneliness.

Now, it is very important to point out that Lévinas cuts off the possibility of relationship based on being in common in the world, or on a common knowledge. The encounter of existing one IS NOT based on the *cogito*, on intellectual exchanges. In terms of psychotherapy, this position excludes completely “cognitive therapies” or psychotherapies based on body treatments (pharmacy, dietetics, relaxation, etc.). In other terms, psychotherapy could never depend on the “self,” be a repair of somebody alone.

How the self shall grow out of loneliness? By work and by the suffering involved in that work. “Bodily suffering, at every level, is an incapacity to distance from suffering... In suffering there is a lack of any refuge” (p. 55). Suffering cannot be wide apart nor assimilated to oneself; it is a stranger in one’s body, not intimate but very intimate, because nobody else can share my suffering (on the contrary pleasure could be infectious). Suffering cannot be put into the light. It is the same with death: it cannot be known, shared, said. Death is otherness, mystery, total passivity. “Death is the impossibility to have projects” (p. 59). In this way loneliness is broken by death.

Note that Lévinas admits--contrary to Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger--the self as appetite, desire, *conatus*, sensibility and not intention, knowledge, *cogito*, intellection.

² *Le temps et l'autre*, pp. 36-37.

But, contrary to the first Lévinas, I dare say that the subject occurs by paternity and maternity, then by the encounter of femininity, and then by the meeting of death. It is only when paternity and maternity lack, that he (or her) meets death and can't perceive sexual differences. It is precisely the state of abandonment, and the feeling of loneliness and anxiety that go with it, which induce the feeling of not existing.

Besides, Lévinas changed his mind on this subject. In *Otherwise than being*³, he describes fraternity as the origin of the mankind unity and maternity as the origin of psyche. Effectively, fraternity could exist without a continuity of maternity, without the succession of generations. Fraternity is not the similarity or the identity of selves, but the descent of a same parenthood (even if it is attributed to the mythic couple of Adam and Eve or to an other primitive couple). Lévinas did not speak of maternity in the years 1945-1948. Thirty years after, it seems that maternity, which contains inspiration and expiration as first modality of existence, i.e. of constitution of the psyche, take the place of suffering and death as the first experience of otherness. In this new theory the first deprivation or suffering is not working but lack of maternity, abandonment, isolation of the self, not able to become a psyche. So, it makes clear why Lévinas speaks of obsession, establishing a very close link between responsibility and obsession: "responsibility in *obsession* is responsibility of the self for what the self did not want, i.e. for the others... It is not alienation, because the Other in the Same is my substitution for the other as responsibility, I must assume without possible replacement. By and for the other, but without alienation: inspiration. Inspiration is the psyche."⁴ Maternity is not a kind of force or activity. On the contrary, it is passivity, "pure susceptibility, so passive as to become inspiration, i.e. precisely otherness-in-the-sameness... psyche in the mood of the hand which gives bread taken out of its mouth; Psyche as maternal body."⁵ It thus does not act of an allegory of maternity, of a maternal attitude, but of a state, a maternal condition, which merges with the maternal body, which cannot challenge the responsibility to protect the child, initially in her womb, then by giving her

³ Martinus Nijhoff, 1974.

⁴ « La responsabilité dans l'*obsession* est une responsabilité du moi pour ce que le moi n'avait pas voulu c'est-à-dire pour les autres. [...] Non aliénation cependant – parce que l'Autre dans le Même est ma substitution à l'autre selon la *responsabilité*, pour laquelle, *irremplaçable*, je suis assigné. Par l'autre et pour l'autre, mais sans aliénation : inspiré. Inspiration qui est le psychisme. » (*Autrement qu'être...*, p. 181)

⁵ « susceptibilité pure, passive au point de se faire inspiration, c'est-à-dire précisément altérité-dans-le-même [...] psychisme sous les espèces d'une main qui donne jusqu'au pain arraché à sa bouche. Psychisme comme corps maternel. » (ibid., p. 109).

milk, then the bread which she removes of her mouth, before any morals, any thinking and which, on the contrary, melts moral and thinking. This is why when Lévinas affirms: "the psyche of the soul, it is the other in me" should it be taken literally: the other in my body, for the best and the worst, because I have him in me, and can remove from him the breath as much as giving to him. "The soul is the other in me. Psyche, one-for-the-other, can be possession and psychosis, the soul is already touch of madness "(p. 111 n1)⁶. In everyone, psyche is concern, insomnia, wrenching at rest, "the same one prevented from coinciding with itself, odd" (p. 111)⁷. This concern for the other is maternity, which is, literally, insomnia.

We thus hold, thanks to Lévinas, something that is fundamental: the psyche is constituted by maternity, which is obsession, responsibility, proximity, fraternity. We shall now see in what the deficiency or the absence of maternity prevents the soul from existing or leaves it a poor and skimmed existence.

II. Dereliction and abandonment, from Freud to Lévinas

If, like Lévinas says in *Otherwise than being*, maternity constitutes responsibility, and consequently the otherness and subjectivity, it is by the deprivation of maternity that the subject is likely little or badly or not founded. However the psychoanalytical clinic, when it does not concentrate exclusively on the Oedipus relations, is often confronted with a "lack of being" or rather with a "lack to becoming", an impossibility to exist, that one finds in the obsession neurosis and in schizophrenia. In obsession the subject believes that he does not exist or that its existence is unceasingly threatened of interruption, of disintegration; from where a whole of conduits aiming at preventing this disintegration, this dissolution. In schizophrenia, aggregation did not even take place: the subject does not feel like constituting a unit, then cling to a factitious, partial unit, being identified with objects, minerals, plants... in short of the infra-human things which do not threaten it; and however it suffers from this dehumanization.

⁶ « L'Âme est l'autre en moi. Le psychisme, l'un-pour-l'autre, peut être possession et psychose, l'âme est déjà grain de folie. » (p. 111 n1).

⁷ « le même empêché de coïncider avec lui-même, dépareillé » (p. 111).

I suppose that a good share of autism is of this kind: strong links with non-human and "strange" behavior - to preserve one's existence, despite the rejection (conscious or unconscious) of relative. The feelings of prisoners in extermination camps, of "boat people", of survivors of genocides or other tragedies provoked by other humans could be of complete dereliction, feelings of not belonging to anything, to no community. To a minor degree somebody could feel little, powerless, unable... but tries to exist. Because, unless choosing death - and it is what arrives when children die *intra utero* or with the birth or in infancy, without the least detectable organic cause - any human being finds itself with its existence.

The case of Ernst

Freud believed to be able to interpret two cases like specimens of the Oedipus complex: a case of obsession neurosis (*Ratman*, whose name was Ernst Lehrs); history of an infantile neurosis (*Wolfman*). I will try to show that the "case" of *Ratman* lights better if he is taken as story of abandonment and dereliction, if, while following Lévinas, I wonder about the absence of obsession (of responsibility, proximity, fraternity) of his parents in his connection.

The case of Ernst Lehrs was published in 1909. Freud, always scrupulous, recognizes there that it did not succeed in elucidating the structure of a serious case of obsession neurosis. A young man presents himself to him, saying he suffers from apprehensions: that serious things happen to his father, to a lady with whom he is in love, with himself; he is afraid of slicing his throat with a razor.

On the first meeting, Ernst says that whereas he was 14 years old, a 19 year old student had bound to him, telling him he was a genius; this one became his tutor and then treated him as an imbecile; he realized this student then had only sought to be greeted in his family to court one of his sisters; it was a very great shock. He connects on his early sexual life: at five years old his young and beautiful maid allowed him to touch her sex and her belly; at six years old, he observed an other maid, who pressed her buttocks' abscesses every evening; when he was seven or eight years old, this one talked with other servants, in front of him and his younger brother, whom they could "make that" with the younger, but not with the elder, who was too awkward. He was very humiliated. Thereafter, he tried to see naked women; at the same time, he was afraid that terrible things arrive, especially to his father.

On the 2^d meeting, he spoke about an episode of its military life: at the time of maneuvers, he lost an eyeglass ("although I had easily been able to find it, I preferred not to delay the departure") and ordered some in Vienna; on this occasion a captain, who admitted body sorrows, described a torment "used in the East": a pot containing rats is fixed on the buttocks of condemned, and those inserted in his anus. He thought at once that it had happened to a dear person. At once, he imagined that he must return the money for the eyeglass purchase, if not this torment would happen to his father or to the woman whom he loved. He made everything to return this money, but did not reach that point.

At the 3^d meeting, he detailed his attempts at refunding to the officer who would have paid for him and of the torments that that causes him not to arrive there, until he revealed that, as opposed to what he said until there, the postal worker has advanced the money.

At the time of the 4th meeting, he spoke of the death of his father, following emphysema, nine years earlier. At the precise time of his death, the doctor having ensured to him that his father would survive the crisis, he was not by his father and reproaches himself highly. Then, he imagined him living and initially find pleasant his ghostly presence; then it suddenly overpowers him--at the death time of an aunt by marriage--that subsequently prevented he from working.

With the 5th meeting, Freud explains to him what is displacement and the unconscious; he remains skeptic. He thinks that the remorse can arrive only if one transgress his personal moral principles "Such a phenomenon is, consequently, possible only if there exists before a personality disintegration. And I wonder whether I will recover the unit of the personality. If such is the case, I am certain to succeed many things, perhaps more than of other people."

During the 6th meeting, he declares that at 12 years he loved a young girl tenderly and was not equally loved by her; he then hoped the death of his father, so that she becomes more affectionate. Freud explaining that this wish of his father's death is deep and very old, he answers that his father was the person in the world, which he loved more, which he was more intimate than with his best friend.

With the 7th meeting, he speaks about his younger brother, on which he is very dependent, and of which he was very jealous of when still a child; at 8 years old, he shot his brother in the face with a rod rifle; that was without any effect, except himself feeling very bad, and thinking he was a coward, a behavior that he since always recognized in him.

Freud stops his report of the meetings there, recognizing, as always, that he censures partly. Let us go to his comments of the meetings and to his final interpretation. First of all, it is clear, says Freud, that the patient forces back certain very old affects, in particular hatred towards his father: "The unconscious is the infantile in us" (p. 214). What explains his wishes of the father's death (although he had died for years): it acts as an old wish, covered by declarations of intense love. From where does this hatred come? "The source which fed his hatred, says Freud, and had made it inalterable was obviously of the order of the sensual desires; in the satisfaction of those, his father had appeared awkward to him. Such a conflict between the sensuality and the subsidiary love is absolutely typical." This explains everything: his compulsions to suicide, which are only punishments (conscious) of guilty desires (unconscious); his tendency to protect his girl friend, whereas he wishes evil to her (in substitute with his father); his permanent doubts, which result from the doubts that he nourishes on its own feelings of love towards his close relatives. I put side all partial interpretations, which Freud adds, since they always result in confirming central interpretation: the conflict between sexuality and love of the father.

However, we can understand this story very differently, on the basis of the principle that the most important feeling which accompanies the patient during all these years, since his tender childhood, is *humiliation*. Freud tells us, out the description of the meetings, that being aged of only 3 or 4 years old, the patient had bitten somebody, undoubtedly his maid; his father had then punished him with blows, and the child, insane of rage, had insulted his father during the punishment. Since, his father had never beaten him again and, since he himself was very afraid of blows, had become a coward. However, Freud estimates that it was, actually, the punishment for the masturbation. We stop on this example. It is notorious that at the time of Freud, the medical environments regarded the masturbation as vermin with health and recommended repression. Freud is however the first with saying that the majority of people, including doctors, deny infantile sexuality and do not see it. It is here question of *infantile* masturbation. Freud is thus in full contradiction: this child would have been beaten for a misdeed, which does not exist! (except for a certain number of neuropsychiatrists and psychoanalysts).

Let us admit the testimony of the mother. She speaks to her son about his voraciously biting the maid. Why did he bite the maid? Let us suppose that this one - as the kitchen discussion between servants on the sexual capacities of the children possibly reveal, a few years later - encouraged the child with sexual games and that he could only withdraw from them by biting her. The father, not knowing the causes of the bite (or would he have been also devoted to sexual turpitudes with the servants?), would have punished what he had believed was just a child's whim. Thus the patient felt repudiated although he wanted to protect himself from the maid's sexual attacks, which involved: 1° cowardice (what good is it to defend oneself if the guardian power let us down?); 2° durable humiliation, since the innocent protecting itself appears as guilty; 3° taste of the sexual plays with the servants (it is inevitably good, since to resist it is punished); 4° a continual distress, doubts about his emotional choices and its feelings (since his spontaneous emotional reactions are fought).

This clinical picture appears much more consistent to me than that of "sensual little one" punished by his father. And it explains this feeling of "disintegration of the personality" which the patient tests, still conscious feeling and that he fights, by all the compulsive means which he finds, rather than to let himself give up, pouring then in schizophrenia. Freud, should it be recalled, was since 1897 far more interested by the processes of deformation and by the mechanisms of repression than by the ultimate cause of the neuroses, on which he changed his opinion continuously and tested only little satisfaction. For example, he wants to distinguish obsession from hysteria by the mechanism of repression: in the latter he find amnesia whereas in obsession it is a question of withdrawal of the affect.

Thus he escapes, for example, to wonder why his patient shows a very particular feature of behavior: its greed for funerals, whose Freud only notices a coincidence between the death of an elder sister when he was 3 or 4 years old, *and* "the small infantile crimes committed at this age" (p. 252). It is always the same amazement to see that Freud denies the importance of the death of this sister, just as he hardly worries about the noxious effect produced by the sexual offers of the servants. And yet Freud does not manage to dissimulate that he was struck by the feeling that his patient "was divided into three personalities": one driven back to early basic instincts, a good and loving personality, a superstitious and ascetic personality.

Let us return to Lévinas. In the case of *Ratman*, it is hardly a question of maternity: the mother only appears to correct the account of the patient for the scene of biting. She does not give the reason: didn't she seek to know? Or does she want to say anything? The account of the patient gives as much place to his girl friend than to his father, but the comments of Freud are centered on his father, as if the mother and her substitutive lady did not have the least importance. However, it is of an absence of proximity, responsibility, maternity... which this patient suffers. His mother is unable to protect him and his father does nothing but overpower it (maternity is not the exclusive fact of the mother, it is the attitude of protection until one can wait of the parents of the two sexes). His "obsession" (in Freud's sense) is born from the lack of obsession (in Lévinas' sense) of his parents towards him. He must over-protect, himself and others, against all possible misdeeds and accidents: to return the money not to injure the lender; mourn more than necessary whereas he hardly could mourn the untimely death of his elder sister; and, at the same time, to dedicate to death or horrible torments those who require of him such an effort of over-protection, because they do not endorse any responsibility and leave it all to him.

I take here the opportunity to say that the responsibility such as Lévinas conceives it - unlimited, inescapable, traumatic - is unbearable if it is not divided. To me, so much Freud seems to wander on the causes of the obsession neurosis, so much Lévinas seems to be unaware of the effects of it: the unlimited liability generates deviations, deformations due to the subject crushed by this too large responsibility. Perhaps this is because Lévinas, like Freud, share of a given subject and adds the relations of this subject to others. Even if I do not forget that Lévinas considers the otherness as constitutive of the subject, it does not prevent him from starting with an isolated subject, who discovers others in him and so becomes a plain human.

III. Maternity and protection

Now, I would like to show, by taking support on the responsibility such as Lévinas defines it, and on the mechanisms of neuroses and psychoses as Freud and his successors describe them, that the psychopathology of the absence or the deficit of protection (abandonment, dereliction, loneliness...) is at the mere beginning inter-subjective, and in other words, that psyche is, if it really starts by inspiring and expiring (first of the conditions of the subsistence,

of the protection of the life), immediately a bond between individuals, in a maternal relation. In this purpose, I take now three stories, apparently not related, which present each the problem of protection and abandonment in a different way: *Hamlet*, *King Lear* (Shakespeare), *Moby Dick* (Melville).

Hamlet is not an Oedipus, contrary to the interpretations of Freud and Jones. Hamlet wants to die because the world makes no sense for him after the discovery of his father's murder by his uncle with the complicity of his mother. Hamlet suffers from "abandonment" (at least!) of his father by his mother and uncle, and is afraid not to be able to protect his father, even after his death. Let see the case in detail.

Hamlet's uncle, Claudius, assassinated his brother – Hamlet, king of Denmark - with the complicity of Gertrude, wife of the king, who then marries his fatal brother-in-law. The spectrum of the king reveals this murder to his son, and to him only. He is then divided between the desire to die ("Oh, that this too solid flesh, would melt, thaw, and resolve itself into a dew" I, 2, 129), because his world collapses ("How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable seems to me all the uses of this world!" I, 2, 133-134), become abominable ("the funeral baked-meats did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables", I, 2, 179-180) *and* the wish to restore order, to put an end to the usurpation of the throne by the revelation of the crime and the setting with died of the new king. He thus will achieve his duty, not only towards his father, but towards the integrity of the kingdom – with a heavy heart: "The time is out of joint: O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right"(I, 5, 189-190). But as he knows the general corruption at the Court, he will pretend to be mad in order to thwart the monitoring of Claudius.

Pretence which is also pretended with respect to itself, because he would like to doubt the reality of this murder, and wonders whether the spectrum is not a demon. It is why he searches the proof of the murder and thinks of giving it while making some play on scene an exact reproduction of the murder and then seeing how the royal husband will react. He obtains this proof, but does not know how to cut down Claudius. He is let to move away by the latter, under the purpose of a mission to the king of England, whereas his death is programmed. He thwarts this trap and returns. There follows a series of criminal maneuvers

on behalf of Claudius, which leads to the death of Hamlet, of Gertrude and Claudius (without speaking about Laertes, son of Polonius, adviser of the king that Hamlet killed inadvertently).

Hamlet describes himself as a coward, says he is heavily incompetent, with an unhardened heart. However, how to have the heart to achieve a revenge, how to feel strong when it is only a question of punishing the evil without any hope of goodness, when the crime is such that all the bonds are broken or corrupted, when loyalty (political, marital, maternal, friendly, etc.) is lost? The tragedy of Hamlet is that of this despair facing treason, irremediably lost confidence. How to find an exit: to avenge the crime or to make justice, it is to perpetuate the memory of it, therefore - in some way - the effects; to erase, by forgetting it, in continuing one's way as if nothing occurred, it is to perpetuate the rupture, the corruption without ever putting an end to it. Hamlet would like to forget, once and for all: "to die to sleep; No more; and by a sleep, to say we end the heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to? 'tis a consummation devoutly to be wish'd." (III,1,62-66). But he cannot suffer the idea that the criminal continues to exert the crime, that the misfortunes remain for a long time: "For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, the pangs of despiz'd love, the Law's delay, the insolence of office, and the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes..." (III,1,72-78). His consciousness, which makes him timorous, because it represents all the incurred dangers to him, also obliges him to restore the disturbed order.

It is what means: "To be, or not to be." To be and endure, harm oneself and suffer, to put an end to treason. Not to be, forget, die, sleep, "to sleep, perchance to dream"... of what? To be is not only to remain in life, it is to respect the life, in fact the human life, the life of the human assembly - village, city, nation - to which one belongs and that one has the duty to maintain alive. Not to be is to withdraw oneself from this community, it is, consequently, to forget it and to forget oneself, to withdraw oneself not *in* the self but *out* of the self, because "oneself" is made of the unit to which one belongs. If Hamlet resembles Oedipus it is not surely under the ratio of the competition towards the father (or his substitute) and the desire to unite with the mother, but essentially because both are indebted towards their City, however expensive it is to achieve this duty, also desperate are they of the treason of their own mother (Jocaste which marries her son knowing that he is her son; Gertrude accomplice to the murder of her husband and to the attempt at murder towards her son).

In this case of Hamlet as in that of Oedipus, the core is not the incestuous feeling of a son towards his mother, but the absence of maternity, the absence of protection, the exposure to the death of a husband, a son or both. What is threatened by this absence is not only the fate of one or two individuals but that of all the City, not only because each one of them is son of king (and king himself in the case Oedipus), but because treason, the lack of protection spreads themselves unbounded, like a plague, because the bonds of confidence dissolve, every action becomes excessive. The suffering thus generated is never concentrated on only one individual: it extends on several, on many, because in fact the bonds are threatened, distorted, demolished.

When Ernst Lehrs speaks about disintegration of his person, he speaks at the same time about disintegration of all his bonds, therefore of a general disturbance which extends to his family and his close relations. Proximity, responsibility, fraternity, maternity... we find the terms of Lévinas, in the plural. If Hamlet puts out of balance "to be" and "not to be", it is because he seeks, even if it means to simulate the madness, to maintain the integrity of its own body, which is also a social body, both being inseparable. "Not to be" would be to accept or undergo the relaxation or the disappearance of this integrity. It would be to cause or undergo the dissolution of the family, of the City, of the Nation.

Hamlet is fully confronted with this dissolution, because he is completely insulated, except for his friend Horatio whom he, when dying, puts in charge of saying the truth on this murky story: "report me and my cause aright to the unsatisfied". (V, 2, 273-274) And like Horatio, at the summit of affliction, wants to follow Hamlet in death, he prays him: "O good Horatio, what a wounded name (things standing thus unknown) shall live behind me. If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart, absent thee from felicity awhile, and in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain, to tell my story."(278-282). Effectively, the worst is not the death but the corruption of the history, i.e. of the historical truth, the account of the real intentions and actions of the ones and others. Hamlet is not a tragedy of revenge, but a tragedy of loyalty due to the father, the king, and the kingdom.

As claims Rosencrantz--Claudius' man in duty to look after Hamlet--even he says this to reinforce Claudius: "The single and peculiar life is bound with all the strength and armor of the mind, to keep itself from annoyance; but much more, that spirit, upon whose weal depends and rests the lives of many; the cease of Majesty dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw what's near it, with it. It is a massive wheel fix'd on the summit of the highest mount, to whose huge spokes, ten thousand lesser things are mortis'd and adjoin'd: which when it falls, each small annexment, petty consequence attends the boisterous ruin. Never alone did the King sigh, but with a general groan." (III, 3, 11-23).

The tragic story of **King Lear**, betrayed by the two girls who swear loyalty to him and being useful by that which appeared to him the least sure is another certificate of the importance that Shakespeare gives to the integrity and, consequently, to maternity, to responsibility. Lear, a very old king of England, decides to divide his kingdom between the duke of Cornwall, husband of his daughter Regan, and the duke of Albany, husband of Goneril, and who should become the husband of his third daughter, Cordelia. He puts them in competition to know which one loves him more, i.e. is ready to help him, to even deal with it, becoming for this old man the substitute of a mother. Goneril answers: "Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter"; Regan raises: "And I find alone felicitate in your dear Highness love." Cordelia says simply: "I love your Majesty according to my bond, no more no less." Lear asks her to say some more. The answer is that if she become married: "half my love with him, half my care and duty" will go to her husband. Lear insists and Cordelia answers that she is sincere. Indeed, which best guaranteed of assumed responsibility could she give her father than to affirm his duties towards her husband as much as towards her father? Lear, furious, launches at her: "Let it be so, thy truth then be thy dower" and rejects her far from him. Kent, adviser of Lear, reproaches him this insanity and is banished. Cordelia marries the king of France, which accepts her banned and without any dowry.

Thus Lear is found to depend on his two daughters, whom quickly will render comprehensible to him that he is only a parasite that they should tolerate provided that he is satisfied with few. Its imprecations against them are worth to him to be driven out and "to hovel thee with swine and rogue forlorn, in short and musty straw?" (IV,7,39-40). Kent, disguised, remained to take care on him. Cordelia unloads France to protect him. But the

sequence of cheatings is such (other intrigues mix with the vexations intended for Lear) that both sisters kill each other, and that Cordelia is assassinated and that Lear dies broken-hearted. Like Kent tells Cordelia, which declares to be in debt with him: "To be acknowledged, madam, is o'erpaid. All my reports go with the modest truth; nor more nor clipped, but so"(IV,7,4-6). It is also what Cordelia said: the simple truth, not embellished, without anything to add or cut down.

Lesson of King Lear: the attack with fraternity - untrue heart, treason, abandonment - causes disorders that no one then can control. The unlimited request for love and protection of King Lear towards his daughters makes him credulous to an extreme point: his enemies are taken for friends, and his friends appear to him as the traitors. It is also why Kent says to us: " To be acknowledged, madam, is o'erpaid." All depends on what one makes to be recognized and, in fact, to be protected. If it is a question of pretending to the extreme, like Regan and Goneril, in the sight of a benefit, then the recognition is a trap, for who awaits it and whom offers it, because none of both will have, finally, satisfaction. The promises of the two elder girls of Lear cannot be held. In these excesses, everything is reversed or all is distorted, the relations are degraded, all becomes object of suspicion. There is no more average to disentangle the truth of the forgery. And the kingdom (the family, the village, etc.) finds itself in a disorder where the crimes abound. Integrity is fidelity reasoned and lit, it is the respect of engagements in all knowledge of cause; it is the responsibility assumed by all, the fraternity founded as higher principle.

How can one then affirm that the responsibility, that the respect of the integrity, that fidelity with engagements falls, as proposes Lévinas, within the competence of maternity and not of paternity? And consequently that the feeling of abandonment, of treason related to the defect of fidelity and responsibility is a defect of maternity?

We are accustomed to think that the respect of the duties, that the respect of commitments, that protection in its major aspects is the fact of the father, the prince, the government. However, in the case of Ernst Lehrs as well as in that of Oedipus, Hamlet or Lear, we can see that if the fathers are unjust, oppressors or even murderers, there are mothers, wives and girls on whom rely the protection which would prevent the murder or treason. Even if those

who carry out the murder or the serious wound are men (father, brother, wife), its true author is a woman, in the sense that only she could have avoided the fatal situation or have repaired the effects of them before they are indeed mortal. Ernst's mother knew not to protect him from injustice and violence from his father, Oedipus' mother knew not to protect her son from mortal hatred of his father (the first oracle, prior to Oedipus' birth, only said that he would kill his father and did not mention the incest with the mother), Hamlet must protect the honor of his father and of his descent against the criminal behavior of his mother. The protection of Lear by Kent is not enough to thwart the criminal conduct of his daughters. All live in very great suffering, involving compulsive acts, fits of rages, fatal anguishes, fears of being unable to act, etc.

Should one say that only the mothers are responsible? No, because the maternal role is not the exclusiveness of women, and men have also maternal tasks to achieve: to protect home against any external attacker, to hold upright to achieve its duties, to be faithful, etc. However women are appointed with protection, because of the simple, bodily fact, that they are the first protection of the unborn child, of the newborn baby and of the young children. An immemorial predisposition, before any freedom, before any choice, as Levinas says.

What occurs when protection is completely lacking? This is what fully illustrates the story of the whaler *Pequod* and its crew,⁸ dedicated to disintegration and death. Ahab, the captain, spent 40 years at sea, far from a "young girl-wife" whom he married at 50 years old, putting at the veil as of the following day "leaving her one dent in my marriage pillow--wife? wife?--rather a widow with her husband alive"(p. 507). Ahab, since, lost a leg while fighting against Moby Dick, a particularly astute and vindictive cachalot. He is obsessed by this animal, to which he lends, perhaps not without reason, of human or demonic qualities: the desire of avenging all of its species, decimated by the whalers; and, more deeply, the task to dedicate to Ahab's death and his similar. Ahab is fascinated by Moby Dick, alternatively believing that he will kill it in impunity or on the contrary that he runs to his own death. Ishmael, the narrator and simple sailor on board, compares the sea with freedom and the ground with slavery: "Glimpses do ye seem to see of that mortally intolerable truth; that all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea;

⁸ *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville, 1851, Penguin Popular Classics, 1994

while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous, slavish shore? But as in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God—so, better is it to perish in that howling infinite, than to be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety! For worm-like, then, oh! who would craven crawl to land!” (p. 116). And yet the sea is described as demonic: in it, all between-are devoured; it is cannibal, since it devours its own offspring. Why the ground is so hateful, even if it is "sure"? Perhaps because it is mother, the "ground-mother" (even if certain psychoanalysts, perhaps because of the amniotic liquid in which the fetus bathes, assimilate "sea" (mer) and "mother" (mère) - at least in French). A mother singularly absent of all the account, which only puts men in scene, Achab's wife being described as a "child". And when mothers are introduced, it is in a painful form, that of unmarried mothers let down by what had fertilized them. "Our souls are like those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them: the secret of our paternity lies in their grave, and we must there to learn it."(p. 464).

It seems that, for the narrator-author, the women have only a minor role in the human existence and that, in any case, they do not have any protective role. However, the novel itself does not indicate whether only men are guards. We are in a world deprived of protection, a world in which it is not surprising that the souls are orphan and abandoned to themselves. This absence or rather this depreciation of female and maternal is described to us by the praise of the force which the author delivers: "Real strength never impairs beauty or harmony, but it often bestows it; and in everything imposingly beautiful, strength has much to do with the magic. Take away the tied tendons that all over seem bursting from the marble in the carved Hercules, and its charm would be gone. As devout Eckerman lifted the linen sheet from the naked corpse of Goethe, he was overwhelmed with the massive chest of the man, that seemed as a Roman triumphal arch. When Angelo paints even God the Father in human form, mark what robustness is there. And whatever they may reveal of the divine love in the Son, the soft, curled, hermaphroditical Italian pictures, in which his idea has been most successfully embodied; these pictures, so destitute as they are of all brawniness, hint nothing of any power, but the mere negative, feminine one of submission and endurance, which on all hands it is conceded, form the peculiar practical virtues of his teachings." (pp. 360-361).

Whereas only Starbuck, the second officer, that Ahab finds at one time coward and effeminate, begs him to make U-turn, once they hold their full of oil and amber, instead of running to an unquestionable death, Ahab answers him: "I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him." (p. 167)

What is this force? For the narrator, Ahab caused it himself: "God help thee, old man, thy thoughts have created a creature in thee; and he whose intense thinking thus makes him a Prometheus; a vulture feeds upon that heart for ever; that vulture the very creature he creates."(p. 202). Isn't this force the virility delivered to itself, cannibal and auto-destructive for lack of moderation, obsession of death, that does not come to moderate any protection, any maternity?

Perhaps, it explains the reason why Ahab is followed by the whole crew, as orphan as him, and this mainly by the harpooners, ready to follow him to hell, which they make at the end, although perched in the masts and being able to avoid the shipwreck, they had preferred to run with the whale-boat. "But as ever, the pagan harpooners remained almost wholly unimpressed; or if impressed, it was only with a certain magnetism shot into their congenial hearts from the inflexible Ahab's" (p. 486). And in the end, no one does survive but Ishmael, fished out by *Rachel*, another whaler whose captain wanders in the search of his son lost at sea: "Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan" (p. 536). It is on the latter word that the story finishes: a story of perdition, in the absence of any maternal, protective and moderating element.

What to conclude from it?

If obsession, if the hesitation between existence and inexistence, if the desires of murder and revenge seize humans, one can read there the result of an absence or a deficiency of maternity, responsibility, proximity... at the times when the brittleness of the child, or even of the adult, subjected to the danger, would require to be reassured, comforted, protected. That does not mean to stay distant from any danger, but supported, reinforced in front of this danger, whatsoever. If Achab had been able to rely on his wife, a non-child woman (but it is him which chose her as such!), perhaps had he not to rely on his ivory leg, which,

irremediably, brought him back to the danger of death, to Moby Dick. Instead of scorning maternity or to be wary about it and glorifying the paternity (the royalty, papacy, virility...) in search of protection, should one be better off accepting that the maternal protection is the true force of protection? And to found it as principle of the care to bring to those who suffer from abandonment, fear of "not to be", and in consequence of obsession and disintegration of the personality? Saying this, I DON'T mean that all therapy has to be a maternal one; in other cases the therapist has to behave as a father or a brother or somebody else... I try, here, only to talk about only one dimension of psychotherapy, that seems to be neglected for the sake of therapy of "conflict" or other approaches which admit some kind of babying, that is not, of course, my perspective.