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**“LITERATURE
IN LONELY” AN
ANNOTATED
TRANSLATION OF
“LA LITTÉRATURE AU
SECRET” BY JACQUES
DERRIDA**

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INTRODUCTION

Before presenting the comments and the translation, it is worth noting that Derrida, in his text “La littérature au secret: une filiation impossible”, second part of the book *Donner la mort* (1999), works, above all — from a reading of the episode of Isaac’s sacrifice, having as a starting point Søren Kierkegaard’s interpretation of this episode in *Fear and trembling* (*Crainte et tremblement*) and *Letter to the Father* (*Lettre au Père*), by Franz Kafka —, two concepts: the concept of secret and forgiveness concept. To deal with these questions, Derrida constructs an essay that at first seems like a theological analysis, but which takes a turn becoming a kind of theory of literature. Thus, the secret is shown to be open and closed, readable and abandoned at the same time, and forgiveness as an impossible task, as one only forgives what is unforgivable. In this sense, the inaugural act of the literature that is writing would be, above all, asking for forgiveness (“pardon de ne pas vouloir dire”).

It is not difficult to imagine the potentialities of these concepts for the study of literature — Derrida “finds” them in their own literary aspects. There is also no accessible translation of the text into Portuguese. There seems, therefore, no need to ask the question “why?” in this context: it is an untranslated text by Jacques Derrida, an author already enshrined in the Western canon. The big question then becomes “how?": how to translate this text by Derrida?

There are those who say that, in the totality of Jacques Derrida’s work, what one finds, in a certain way, is a work that discusses translation, both in its practical aspect — how to translate — and in its theoretical aspect — what is the meaning of translation? Translation. This statement, although at first it seems exaggerated or false, it may be true: Derrida’s work generally deals, indirectly or

directly, with the question of translation if we see it, first of all, with the eyes of a translator.

With the eyes of a translator... How to understand this sentence? How to see the work of Jacques Derrida through the eyes of a translator? What are the eyes of a translator like, by the way? Do the aforementioned eyes belong to each and every translator?

We see, in the work of Jacques Derrida, direct references to translation. The best known examples are *Towers of Babel* (Translated by Junia Barreto in 2002), in which Derrida discusses the text “The Task of the Translator”, by Walter Benjamin, relating it to his interpretation of the myth of Babel, and his conference “What is a ‘relevant’ translation?” (1998), in which he discusses the translation of some recurrent phrases or words in his work; and which we will take as the basis of our brief reflection.

In it, Derrida (1998, p. 23) comments that “There is no word in nature”, pointing out the collective character of this matter separated by man, just as the atoms of a molecule are separated: “this word, *relevant*, it carries in its body a translation operation”. The word thus qualifies the translation: it is not just any translation, but a relevant translation.

A relevant translation would then simply be a “good” translation, a translation that does what is expected of it, in short, a version that fulfills its mission, honors its debt and does its job or its duty by inscribing the equivalent in the target language. most relevant of an original, *the fairest* language, appropriate, pertinent, adequate, timely, acute, unambiguous, idiomatic, etc. The *most* possible. (DERRIDA, 1998, p. 24. Our translations, unless otherwise indicated).

Translation thus implies an *economy*:

Economy” here would mean two things, *ownership and quantity*: of one part what concerns the law of *property* (oikonomia, the law, nomos, of oikos, of what is one’s own, appropriated to oneself, in one’s home [chez

soi] – and translation is always an attempt at appropriation that aims to transport one's home [chez soi], in one's home language, as properly as possible, in the most relevant way possible, the most proper sense of the original, even if it is the proper sense of a figure, a metaphor, a metonymy, a catachresis or an undecidable impropriety –), and, on the other hand, a law of quantity: when one speaks of economics, one always speaks of calculable quantity. [...] A relevant translation is a translation whose economy, in these two senses, is the best possible, the most appropriate and the most appropriate possible. (DERRIDA, 1998, pp. 25-26).

Derrida (1998, p. 28) even adds that “ruin is perhaps its vocation and a destiny that it [the translation] accepts right from the start”. It is from this ruin, in a way created and found by Derrida, that he points out the subject of *The Merchant of Venice* as the task of the translator. In order to make this impossible filiation possible, Derrida makes four points: first, as with translation, there is an oath, an unbearable commitment with the risk of perjury, which is part, including the intrigue, the plot of the text. Every translation, for Derrida, would imply this insolvent debt and this oath of fidelity towards the given original – with all the paradoxes, of course, of that impossible contract without symmetry, condemned to treason and perjury. Secondly, Derrida lists the theme of economy, present in the unpayable debt to Shylock, as the economy that, according to the author, is employed in the translation understood as such (in its literal aspect, as above all the pertinent translations, today, are made; economy in the account of the number of lexical units, that is, in the translation). Thirdly, the incalculable equivalence, the impossible but constantly alleged correspondence, the required but impracticable translation between the singularity of a proper body and the arbitrary nature of a general, monetary sign. Fourthly,

the relationship between the letter and the spirit [esprit], from the body of literariness to the ideal interiority of meaning, the idea, in the conversion, then, of translation.

Translation: economy, passage, conversion, aporia. The impossible possible that language makes, but is incapable of undoing or dominating.

SECRECY AND FORGIVENESS IN THE EXERCISE OF TRANSLATION

Now, let's put our translator's eyes on: let's work, therefore, on economy in translation; let us thus make the impossible possible, the divine present in man, as well as forgive. Let us think, therefore, of secrecy and forgiveness as translation elements (as I hope to demonstrate further on).

As with Derrida's comparison to Shylock, I could give at least three or four reasons for thus associating translation not only with movements occurring in Shakespeare's work, but with movements occurring in Derrida's own work: the movements involving, therefore, secrecy and forgiveness in “Literature in solitary confinement: an impossible filiation”:

As with Shylock, there is an oath in secrecy, an oath that becomes concrete the moment one accepts the words shared by the other, as Abraham does when he responds, in the impossible request that God makes of him tête-à-tête, to speech of God “me voici”: here I am, Lord, at your disposal, here I am, guarding, in body and spirit, in the duality of this Abrahamic being, the terrible divine secret.

As for Shylock, there is economy in the imponderable of forgiveness, in the impossible possible of forgiveness which is its very existence as such before man. *When mercy seasons justice...*

As with Shylock, there is the impracticable that is forgiveness and secrecy: the secret,

always open and closed, public and private, visible and hidden, clear and dark; forgiveness, the impossible possible of the divine, *must the jew be merciful*, the king would say: the absolute singularity (the act of forgiving) and the need for a calculation (its opposite, its negation).

As for Shylock, there is the letter's relationship with the spirit: the secret of the secret, the most absolute secret, visible and inaccessible. Sorry for not wanting to say, I could say any text, not just a translation.

Sorry for not wanting to say, a translator might say: sorry for not wanting to say what the original text means, sorry for not wanting to say like the original text means, sorry for breaking our contract – that of translation – not for breaking it, but for fulfilling it. lo: sorry, in need of translation, for the inevitable result of our contract: the translation itself, done.

Sorry for being too faithful and thus doing the terrible part of my work as such: translating.

THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE: SOME TRANSLATION EXAMPLES

I will take, as an example of this translating exercise, some excerpts from the text “La littérature en secret: une filiation impossible”, which, in turn, compares the available translations of the text into English, Spanish and Portuguese. I imagine that the excerpts commented below are capable, in one way or another, of demonstrating what was exposed above.

I. Let us take, as a start, the title of the text: “literature in secret: an impossible filiation”. “Literature in secret”, there are many agreements and some disagreements between the translators: the translations both into English and into Spanish point to the multiplicity of meanings of the

construction *au secret* used in the original French text by Derrida. Adam Kotsko, in his English translation, comments that the expression *au secret*, in addition to the more obvious meaning “in secret”, can also mean “in solitary confinement”, or “in solitary confinement”, the way a prisoner is “in solitary confinement”; he says that David Wood also translated the expression as “locked away”; he also talks about the reference that *le secret* can make to a royal seal used as a counter-seal to the public seal. Kotsko and Wills translate *au secret* into English as “in secret”. A very similar movement is employed by Fernanda Bernardo, who translates “*au secret*” as “in secret”, implying a place to which literature belongs: the secret. The Spanish translation by Cristina de Peretti and Paco Vidarte, unlike the English translations, uses the word “*segregada*” [segregada] to translate the expression *au secret*. The authors, by means of a footnote, comment as a possibility of meaning for *au secret* the word “*incomunicado*” [incomunicado], in addition to other meanings such as “*apartado*” [apartado], “*isolated*” [isolated], “*segregated*” [segregated], “no possibility of any communication” [sin posibilidad de comunicación alguna]; they say opt for “*uncommunicated*” [incomunicado], in the first part of the text, as it is a more accurate translation of the expression; because “*segregado*” [segregado] has a connotation almost exclusively related to racial segregation, they say it does not seem appropriate to use it as a translation, although they translate the title of the second part of the text as “*La literatura segregada*”. In my view, however, the four translations have inaccuracies. Kotsko and Wills both translated *au secret* as “in secret”. In French, the expression *au secret*

works like a closed expression: it means, in addition to its synonyms, “in solitary cell”. So that the translation of the title could, with complete accuracy, be “in secret” (or “in secret”, in Portuguese), the expression would need to be, in French, *en secret*. Bernardo’s translation seems more adequate than “in secret”, but does not mention, through footnotes, the prison code present in the original text, just as he does not find an expression, in Portuguese, capable of assimilating the secret and the code prison at the same time, as it happens in French. In the case of the translation of Peretti and Vidarte into Spanish, the authors contradict each other: they say that the word “secreted” does not seem to be adequate for the translation of the expression *au secret*, due to the relationship that the word establishes with the racial issue, a meaning that does not exist in the French expression; however, they use it anyway — the word “segregated” may have been chosen by the translators for an etymological justification, but by trying to use such justification, it is also possible to avoid the racial relationship that the translators deem “inaccurate”. , using a synonym with a similar etymological load. “Uncommunicated”, another suggestion by the translators, the most “precise”, would be more appropriate. There seem to be, then, two (at least) “inevitable” to translating *La littérature au secret*: keeping the translation of the *au secret* structure “intact”, that is, accurate, adequate, seen as a closed expression, thus maintaining its prison code ; associate, in some way, the title with the word “secret”, in its semantic and conceptual multiplicity. I would prefer to translate *La littérature au secret*, because, as “Literature in solitary confinement”, keeping the prison semantic

field and specifying the type of prison, associating, through a note, the semantic field of the secret present in the title of the original, inverse movement, therefore, from Kotsko, whose translation seems to be too anchored to the word secret, either because of its conceptual importance or because of its constant repetition in the original (the word appears about 131 times in the text)

II. Kotsko and Wills mention difficulties in translating the phrase *pardon* from *ne pas vouloir dire* into English: Wills suggests that Derrida’s attention to “gift” [*don*] and “forgiveness” [*le pardon*] recommends translating from the French *pardon* by “forgiveness” in English rather than “pardon”, although the etymology, i.e. the *don* in *pardon*, suggests otherwise. The problem, however, with translating *pardon* as “forgiveness” would be that, in English, the verb would require personal pronoun (as in the example “forgive me for not saying”), a fact that anchors the sentence in English more than French phrase; Wills suggests that the reader of his text read *pardon* with the meaning of “forgive”; Wills also comments that *vouloir dire*, in French, in addition to meaning “to want to say”, also means “to mean”; to take these two meanings into account in the form of the text, Wills ends up translating *pardon de ne pas vouloir dire* by “pardon for not meaning (to say)”, using parentheses. Kotsko mentions the same difficulties as Wills, without, however, working them beyond the footnote — as Wills did with the parentheses —, translating *pardon* from *ne pas vouloir dire* as “pardon for not meaning”. Translations into Spanish and Portuguese do not carry the same difficulties as translations into English: “*perdón*” and “*perdão*” have the same

meanings, in this context, that “pardon” and “forgive” together have in English; the expressions “querer decir” and “querer diz” are also very close to the French vouloir dire, with no need for parentheses or explanatory footnotes. The expression was therefore translated into Spanish, in the text by Peretti and Vidarte, as “perdón por no wanting to decir” and, into Portuguese, in this text and in the text by Bernardo, as “perdão por não estar decir”.

III. In addition to the more obvious meaning of “prayer phrase”, that is, literally a phrase of a prayer, a prayer, etc. – sense used by all the translations of the text: by Bernardo (“a phrase from prayer”), by Vidarte and Peretti (“un ruego”), by Kotsko (“a sentence from a prayer”) and by Wills (“a phrase from a prayer”) from a prayer”) –, “phrase de prière”, in French, can also refer to any phrase that, after being repeated so much, begins to lose its meaning and that becomes, in a certain way, empty beyond its signifier.

IV. The four translations for the phrase “il y a là du secret” differ from each other: Kotsko translated it by the phrase “there is some secrecy”, while Wills translated it by the phrase “there there is secrecy”, quoting the French phrase right next to it., between square brackets; Peretti and Vidarte translated it with the phrase “ahí hay secreta”; Bernardo translated it by the phrase “there is a secret there”. Kotsko, in his translation, chooses to leave the adverb “là” out of the translation, translating, however, the partitive article “du” by “some”. On the other hand, both Wills, Peretti and Vidarte do the opposite, translating the adverb “là” and leaving the partitive article “du” out of the translation. There are two, it seems, the questions for

the translation of this sentence: whether or not to translate the adverb “là” and whether or not to translate the partitive “du”. With regard to the adverb “là”, translating it seems inevitable: in the phrase “il y a là du secret”, the function of the adverb is precisely to restrict the place of the secret; to remove it from the sentence would be to remove all of its distinctive character from it: il y là du secret (“there is secret there”, in Portuguese; “there there is secrecy”, in Wills’s translation; “ahí hay secreta”, in Wills’s translation). Peretti e Vidarte, that is, secret in the phrase “pardon de ne pas vouloir dire” [“sorry for not wanting to say”] to which she refers), would become the generic statement il y a du secret (“there is/there is a secret”, in Portuguese; in Kotsko’s translation, “there is some secret”), losing its established link to the noun pardon (“forgiveness”). With regard to the partitive article du, its translation is by no means, from the morphosyntactic point of view of the language, necessary: in Portuguese, English and Spanish, the idea of indefinable quantity does not need to be made explicit by an article (and, usually, it is not evidenced by any of them: on the contrary, it is “evidenced” by its absence, by the fact that it is occult; “there is a secret there”, “there there is secret”, “ahí hay secreta”), while that, in French, this possibility does not exist, requiring the use of some kind of article before a noun (“il y a là du secret”). Derrida’s use of the partitive article, therefore, seems to be a morphosyntactic necessity, an “obligation”, and not a formal choice. I therefore chose to translate the phrase “il y a là du secret” as “there is a secret there”. Bernardo’s translation, “há there secret”, is syntactically close to the original text (“il y a là du secret”), but is virtually identical to the translation suggested by me. I preferred

to translate the phrase as “there is a secret there” because it is, syntactically, more natural to Brazilian Portuguese

V. In the translation of the phrase *en nombre infini dans l'histoire*, both Wills and Kotsko and Peretti and Vidarte decided to translate the preposition *dans*, evidencing its temporal sense: in English, Kotsko translated it as “in infinite number **throughout** history”, maintaining the syntactic order of the French original, while Wills translated it as “infinite in number **throughout** history”, doing a syntactic inversion; both use, however, the preposition “throughout”; in Spanish, Peretti and Vidarte translated it as “en número infinito **a lo largo de** la historia”, making use of “**a lo largo de**”, prepositional phrase that, like “throughout”, points to the temporal aspect of the preposition *dans* in French. There is, however, another aspect present in *dans* that both “throughout” and “a lo largo de” are not able to highlight: the notion of place, especially interiority, present in *dans*, in French. As in English, as in Spanish, there are other possibilities capable of approaching the French preposition, options that, despite seeming more appropriate to me, face the “problem” of repetition (which is why, perhaps, translators into English and for Spanish made their choices): in English, we have the preposition “**in**” (Kotsko’s translation reads “**in** infinite number in history”; Wills’s, by comparison, reads “infinite **in** number in history”); in Spanish we have “**en**” (the translation by Peretti and Vidarte would read “in infinite number in history”). In Portuguese, we do not find this “problem” (is, in fact, repetition, a problem? And if so, is it more important to avoid it than to properly translate a term?), for different reasons than in the French

text: in Portuguese, the preposition “*dans*” is translated as “**em**”, which is contracted, when together with an article, in this case the feminine one, to “*na*” (“infinite number in history”, translated Bernardo, as I did), while in French, the preposition “*en*” is opposed, in the original sentence, to the preposition “*dans*”, avoiding repetition: “*en nombre infini dans l'histoire*”. I believe that the translation closest to “*dans*” is more appropriate, since, in the original, the meaning emphasized by “*dans*” is that of place, while the temporal notion is indirect (it is something belonging to history). For this reason, I did not dedicate myself to finding another preposition, as the English and Spanish translations did, capable of giving the same temporal meaning to the sentence, since any preposition found, however appropriate it might be, would be less appropriate, in my view, than the preposition “*in*”.

VI. Derrida’s expression “*avant la lettre*” can also mean “before the event”, in addition to the more obvious meaning “before the letter”, that is, Kafka’s letter.

VII Kotsko mentions that in the phrase “*Is’hac aux liens*”, “*lien*”, in addition to referring to the ropes with which Abraham tied Isaac, can also refer to “relationships [*relationships*] between concepts or emotional ties (such as friendship, family, etc.)” (KOTSKO, Adam, note 13).

VIII. In the original text, Derrida uses the following phrase: “*ou de ne pas vouloir dire du tout, [ne] point [vouloir dire]*”. In addition to the translation made in this text (“or not wanting to say anything, period”), translations such as those by Bernardo (“or not wanting to say anything at all, period”) and by Vidarte and Peretti (“o

de not wanting to decir en absolute, punto”) are also possible – I would need to add in a construction, to give the same meaning as the Spanish “en absolute”, the adverb “nada” in the same way (“or of not meaning anything at all [...]”); I would like to avoid using either the adverb or the adjectival phrase, as the use of both, at the same time, seems unnecessary and exaggerated to me, since the negation would seem, in my view, much stronger than that used by Derrida; I would like to give the phrase the meaning of “en absolute” without using the adverb “nada”, therefore, something that, unfortunately, does not seem possible in Portuguese. The “du tout” construction must be understood, therefore, as the English “at all” construction, used by Kotsko (“not meaning **at all**”) and by Wills (“not meaning **at all**, no way”), while “ne... point” must be understood as a negation closer to “du tout”, that is, stronger or more emphatic than the common negation “ne... pas”.

IX. In French, the word “meteorite” actually has two genders (or two “sexes”, as Derrida puts it): *un ou une météorite*. The translators’ solutions regarding this linguistic problem of “sex” were twofold: either they worked the question inside a parenthesis after the word “meteorite”, as Bernardo, Wills and Peretti and Vidarte did – “[...] a meteorite (word that, in French, has two genders)” (BERNARDO, Fernanda, p. 162); “[...] a meteorite (the word is both male and female [a deux sexes] in French)” (WILLS, David, p. 133); “[...] un meteorito (this word, in French, has two sexes: male and female)” (VIDARTE, Paco; PERETTI, Cristina, p. 125) – or the original French phrase was maintained, as Kotsko did – “[...] un météorite or une météorite (this word has

two sexes)” (KOTSKO, Adam, P. 8). The big difference, therefore, between these solutions is seen in the presence or not of the written mention of the feminine “une météorite”, that is, for the solution that works between parentheses, the visible contrast between the two “sexes” of the words disappears, being cited only in the mention of its possibility, while, in the solution that maintains the original construction, this contrast is more apparent, even repetitive: one sees the word meteorite in the feminine and the mention of the fact that this word has, in French, “two sexes”. Why did Derrida choose, in the original, to be repetitive? To mix the notions of gender (genre, in French) and sex (sexe, in French)? To ensure that the male gender does not override the female gender? Perhaps. In any case, what exists in the original is this repetition mechanism (Derrida could certainly have avoided it): a way of keeping it, it seems to me (since, neither in Portuguese, nor in English, nor in Spanish, it was possible to find a word synonymous with “meteorite” that, at the same time, was masculine and feminine, that is, able to play the same game that, in the French language, is played) to conserve the phrase in French and to make, from it, an explanatory note (such as Kotsko’s, “The word météorite can take either grammatical gender without a change in meaning”, KOTSKO, Adam, note 14) mentioning the double possibility of “sexes” of the word météorite “without change of meaning” sense”. Another possibility would be to intervene directly in the translated text and mechanically modify the feminine and masculine genders of the word “meteorito” in Portuguese. Both the suffixes -ito and -ita are used in geological vocabulary to express the idea of a rock-

like material and could therefore be used to transform the morphology of the word “meteorite”: a meteorite, for example, or something similar. Something that, however, happens in the original text and that, in the Portuguese language, does not seem to be possible, is the fact that the word *météorite*, in French, has a neutral face, that is, there is nothing in its morphology capable of pointing their belonging to the class of masculine or feminine nouns. Therefore, we can only know whether the word *météorite* is feminine or masculine through the masculine or feminine article used to introduce it, a fact that is opposed to the morphology of Portuguese (word with suffix “-ito” = masculine noun; word with suffix “-ita” = feminine noun). What to do, then, in Portuguese, faced with this face, at the same time neutral and double of the word *météorite*, given that Portuguese does not seem to be able to maintain it without a major change in the morphological mechanisms of the language? And if made, how to justify such a change? By means of another suffix not yet mentioned, the suffix *-ite*, little used outside the medicinal context and which is, however, also capable of indicating a mineral or rocky species, in addition to not coincide with any gender marking in the Portuguese language, we could make a morpho-lexical invention: the creation of the word “meteorite” in the Portuguese language. In addition to satisfying the critical conditions mentioned above, that is, the capacity of the word *météorite* to be neutral and, at the same time, double, we would now have an etymological justification to found the translation of the word *météorite*: a/a meteorite – a reader could, despite the justifications mentioned here, being uneasy with such morpho-lexical changes. I ask this reader, starting

from Derrida: which translation would be able to be, in its entirety, faithful? What would be the value of this fidelity, finally, in the face of the most evident result of the exercise of its totality? That is: what would be the value of a copy of the original text (the most intense, most accurate fidelity) in the field of translation? –; this choice, however, raises another problem: how to translate the masculine version of the noun *météorite*? Must it be translated by the already accepted and spontaneous noun “meteorite” or by the invented noun “meteorite”, introduced by a masculine article? Thinking about the duality of the word *météorite* in French and Derrida’s use of it, thus exposing this duality, it seems to me quite sensible to choose the word “meteorite” for both genders, maintaining the duality in Portuguese as well. The word “meteorite”, then, will be used in this text to translate the word *météorite*, both for masculine and feminine.

X. The use of the construction “*tenir de*” is quite varied and so are its translations. Like me, Bernardo translated it as “seeming like”, a meaning that seems more appropriate to me, from a critical interpretation, in the context used. In opposition, Vidarte and Peretti translated it as “*deber algo a*” and Wills translated it as “to derive”. Another valuable translation for “*tenir de*” is the English “to take after”, used by Kotsko. It is, therefore, the possibility of continuing something started (“to take after something”), meaning. I would say that “to take after” would be the most suitable translation for “*tenir de*” in this context, as it seems to me to be able to encompass all the other meanings of the other translations, adding another one that is quite useful; it does not seem to me, however, possible to find a translation

into Portuguese that comes close to “to take after”. For this reason, I mention this possibility in a note.

XI. In addition to the translation “culpa”, there is yet another possible translation (“falta”), used by all other translators of the text (Bernardo uses “falta”, Vidarte and Peretti use “falta”, Kotsko and Wills use “fault”). I preferred to use “guilt” because it seems more appropriate to the moral/ethical context underlined throughout the entire text – especially related to the “feelings” of God. The fault is also capable of demonstrating a moral/ethical error, but the fault makes it more evident, something that seems necessary, in general, in the text; “guilt” also highlights the moral/ethical capacity of the being to make the “correct choice”, that is, it is not something that is “missing”, but rather a regret (for example, the guilt that God feels for creating men, who “have [from the beginning] evil in their hearts”). I tend, therefore, to translate, in this text, “faute” as “guilt”, when, naturally, it is not something that is missing, that is, that is not there or that does not (yet) exist.

XII. When translating “Il est au travail” into Portuguese, we have a problem: Portuguese cannot, as French and English (used by Wills and Kotsko [“he’s at work”]) do, handle the two exposed meanings in these sentences: the meaning of working and being in the workplace. Both Bernardo and Vidarte and Peretti, like me, follow the path of “being at work” (Bernardo uses “He is working” and Vidarte and Peretti use “he is working”). Faced with the impossibility of, in the same sentence, accounting for both meanings, I mention the second, which seems secondary to me, in this note.

XIII. Much could be said about the concept of “trace”, used by Derrida. What is up to us here, however, is its translational aspect. There are many ways to translate “trace” into Portuguese: rastro, footprint, track, sign, mark or vestige. All, in a way, are part of the same semantic field and seem to me, according to the context, justifiable as a translation of the term. In general, in Portuguese, the term has been translated as “trace” (by Joaquim Torres Costa Antônio M. Magalhães in *Margens da philosophy*, by Miriam Schnaiderman, Renato Janini Ribeiro in *Grammatology*, by Tomaz Tadeu da Silva in *Positions*), which is why which is why I decided to translate it this way – since little or no justification for translating it differently came to me. More important seems to me to show the different possibilities of translation and mention the term, in French, when used by Derrida.

XIV. The noun used by Derrida in French, in this context, is “glébeux”, that is, the first man, the universal man, Adam. However, the word has no correspondence in Spanish, English or Portuguese. The translations, therefore, were quite varied: Bernardo uses “homem da gleba”, Vidarte and Peretti use “del que pertenece a ella”, Kotsko uses “earthling” and Wills uses simply “man”. I preferred to translate “glébeux” as the first man for two reasons: first, because it is a very clear semantic translation and, second, because the mention of the first man, in the original, is repeated: it is in “glébeux” and it is in “Adam”. I preferred, therefore, to keep this repetition and mention, through this note, the lack, in Portuguese, of a vocabulary corresponding to this word.

XV. Of all the translations made for the title of the third part “Plus qu’Un”, only Bernardo’s translation (“More than One/There is no more One”) takes into account the possibility of having an erased no (“ne”) – very often, in the informal French language, the first part (“ne”) of the negation is deleted, keeping only the second part (pas; plus; rien; Nunca; que...), a factor that would allow the interpretation of a negation in an affirmative sentence (“(ne) plus qu’Un”). All other translations followed the affirmative route: Peretti and Vidarte translated it into Spanish as “Más que Uno”, Kotsko translated it into English, as did Wills as “More than One”. It seems to me little justifiable to ignore the possibility of a denial, given that contrary interpretations of the text may arise from it. Therefore, just as Bernardo did, I decided to keep this duality in the title itself. Our methods, however, differ: Bernardo preferred to maintain the duality through two sentences: an affirmative and a negative. I preferred, however, to do it by means of parentheses, in just one sentence – because it seems to me a less assertive interpretative note than that of Bernardo, a more uncertain path –, pointing out the possibility of a “no” to the reader; thus pointing to the possibility of a choice. The objectives and results of the two translations into Portuguese (mine and Bernardo’s), therefore, seem the same to me. Quoting Bernardo’s note: “[...] it is the deconstruction of the One or the One that Derrida here gives us to read and think about. Our quasi-translation is just one of the possible ones depending on the context” (BERNARDO, Fernanda, p. 191).

XVI. The choice for the translation of the adjective “destinal” used by Derrida followed two lines: the first, the use of the

adjective “destinal” (by Bernardo, Kotsko and me), and the second, the use of a phrase (“toward a destination” by Wills and “de Destino” by Peretti and Vidarte). What led me, however, towards the adjective “destinal” and not a substantive phrase like that used by Wills or Peretti and Vidarte, was the fact that, in the French language itself, the adjective “destinal”, although little used, exists: this is also the case for Portuguese, Spanish and English. If Derrida uses “destinal” instead of a phrase like “vers un destin”, why not use it too? Since the noun phrase does not seem to grant any translational advantage and, moreover – even if the creation of a word “destination” for these languages were necessary (which is not the case) –, since the etymology and morphology of the Portuguese, English and Spanish languages allow such use. I use, in this translation, therefore, the adjective “destinal”, identical to “destinal” in the French language.

XVII. The formulation used by Derrida “au tout autre”, in French, leads to different translations due to its diversity of meanings. This diversity comes precisely from the use of the adverb “tout”: “tout autre”, in French, can either mean “every other” (adjectival usage) or mean “completely different” (adverbial usage: “c’est tout autre chose”, for example; in Portuguese “é algo completamente diferente”). However, these two meanings seem to support each other, in Derrida’s text, to found the idea that this other of which he speaks is another in which specularity is impossible. There are several ways to make such a note: Wills does it through repetition (“other other”); Kotsko does it, as well as Bernardo (“to the absolutely other”) and I (“to the absolute other”), through exaggeration (“the wholly other”); Vidarte and Peretti do this

through distancing (“al radically otro”). All these formulations, in one way or another, point to the impossibility of specularity, and all, in their own way, are justifiable. The use of “absolute”, however, seems to me to be better punctuating, maintaining a certain morphological proximity – that is, in the use of the adjective–, this lack in Portuguese, which is why I preferred to avoid the unusual repetition “other other”, as he did Wills.

XVIII. Much can be said about the passage “le double re-venir, le re-venir sur soi...”, written by Derrida. It seems to me, without a doubt, that the most visible aspect of this phrase is its repetition – and the game that is played based on it. Everything, here, works through repetition: not only the Alliance between the father and the son, but the very morphosyntax of the construction: “re-venir”, literally re- “come back”, re-“come” (it can also mean to retract, or maybe even re-betray), double repetition; “re-venir sur soi”, that is, re-“return” “to oneself”, return to oneself, return to oneself, triple repetition. It is very difficult, perhaps impossible, due to the morphology of the French language, to translate with absolute precision what is at stake in French: “a double coming-back”, the coming back on oneself”, by Wills; “the double re-turning, the re-turning on oneself”, by Kotsko; “el doble volver-sobre, el volver-sobre sí”, by Peretti and Vidarte; Bernardo’s “double turning back, the examination of conscience” are some attempts. The problem lies in the fact that, in French, “re-venir” can both be used to formulate “re-trait” and to formulate the “examination of conscience” that Bernardo and I use in Portuguese, a movement that in other languages (Spanish and English) is also difficult to build; in short, the end/

beginning of the two formulations (“...re-venir, re-venir...”) are identical, something that does not seem possible in Portuguese and that, in other languages, is constructed with some interpretative effort – Kotsko’s “re-turning on oneself”, which does not sound as linguistically natural in English as “re-venir sur soi” in French does. It was for this reason that I decided, in Portuguese, to maintain the formulation “re-trait” for the first formulation, keeping only part of the repetition, and to follow a more semantic route for the second, given the already given impossibility of re-using the same “re-trait”, mentioning, between square brackets and through this note, the repetition in the original text.

XIX. There is, in “s’affecter de”, a very strong sense linked to the feeling of penury, and the reader must never forget that. “Affecting”, therefore, must be understood, above all, in a negative way, although the sense of affecting is also present there – the feeling of a shortage is also part of the semantic field of “affecting”, that is, being affected in a negative way for something.

XX. Kotsko mentions, through a note (KOTSKO, Adam, note 35), that the word used by Derrida in the original text “travers” can, in addition to meaning “[small] error” or “[small] inaccuracy”, mean “ ribs [spare rib]”, evidently referring to Adam’s rib, used to “form” the woman.

We are aware of the great question of translation (perhaps even the first great question of translation in history, on which a good part of translation studies are based) which are the biblical accounts, which were translated freely, in this text, from of the French original. This issue, as it is outside the final objectives of this text, was not addressed

with due (and necessary) calm and attention; an issue that would deserve, by itself, a new and another work. We leave it for a future work, mentioning, when they occur, the passage in the original French.

One last clarification: the notes in Arabic numerals (1,2,3...) are Derrida's – except for the biblical passages, in French, cited by Derrida, which will be mentioned as a translator's note (N.T) –, while the passages at to which our translation notes refer are indicated in the text by Roman numerals (I,II,III...).

LITERATURE IN SOLITARY^I

An impossible filiation

Jacques Derrida

[translation by Alan Ometto Lima]

“God”, allow me the expression...

Sorry for not wanting to say^{II}.

Imagine that we left this statement to your fate.

At least accept that, for a while, I leave him like this, alone, also helpless, endless, wandering, even erratic: “Sorry for not wanting to say...”. Is this utterance a sentence? A sentence of prayer^{III}? A request for which it is still too early or already too late to know if it was just interrupted, deserving or excluding the reticence? “Sorry for not wanting to say [...]”:

Unless I haven't found it one day, that unlikely sentence, unless it finds itself alone, visible and abandoned, exposed to every passer-by, inscribed in a painting, readable on a wall, even on a stone, on the surface of a sheet of paper or stored on a computer floppy disk.

Here, then, is the secret of a sentence: “Sorry for not wanting to say...”, she says.

“I'm sorry I didn't mean...” is now a quote.

The interpreter then leans over her.

An archaeologist might also wonder if this sentence is complete: “I'm sorry I don't mean...”, but what exactly? and to whom? Who to whom?

There is secrecy there^{IV}, and we feel that literature is taking hold of these words without,

however, appropriating them to make them its thing.

Such a hermeneutic ignores whether this request meant anything in a real context. Was it once addressed by someone to someone, by a real signatory to a specific addressee?

THE ORDEAL OF THE SECRET: FOR THE ONE AS FOR THE OTHER

Among all those who, in infinite number in history^v, they kept an absolute secret, a terrible secret, an infinite secret, I think of Abraham, the origin of all Abrahamic religions. But also at the origin of that background without which what we call literature could undoubtedly never emerge as such and under that name. Would the secret of some electing affinity thus combine the secret of the electing Covenant between God and Abraham and the secret of what we call literature, the secret of literature and the secret in literature?

Abraham could have said, but so could God: "I'm sorry I didn't mean to say." I think of Abraham who kept the secret, not telling him or Sarah or even Isaac about the command given to him, in tête-à-tête, by God. In this order, meaning itself remains secret. All that is known is that it is an ordeal. What ordeal? I will propose a reading of it. I will distinguish it, in this case, from an interpretation. At the same time active and passive, this reading would be presupposed by all interpretation, by exegesis, commentaries, glosses, decipherments that have accumulated in infinite number for millennia; therefore, it would no longer be a simple interpretation among others. In the form, at once fictional and non-fictional that I am going to give you, it would belong to the element of a very strange kind of evidence or certainty. It would have the clarity and distinction of a secret experience about a secret. Which secret? The

following: unilaterally appointed by God, the trial imposed on Mount Moriah would consist in proving, precisely, whether Abraham is capable of keeping a secret: "of not wanting to say..."; in short. Even hyperbole: there where not wanting to say is so radical that it is almost confused with "not being able to say".

What would this mean?

It is indeed, then, an ordeal, undoubtedly, and the word is agreed upon by all translators:

"After these events, it came to pass that Elohim tested Abraham. He told you Abraham!

He said 'Here I am.'"¹

(The request for secrecy would begin at that moment: I pronounce your name, you feel called by me, you say "Here I am" and you commit by that answer not to speak of us, of that exchanged speech, of this delivered speech, the to no other person, answerable only to me alone, answerable to me only, only me, in tête-à-tête, without third parties; you have already sworn, you have already pledged to keep the secret of our alliance between us, of this appeal and this co-responsibility. The first perjury would consist in betraying this secret.

But let us wait to see how this ordeal of the secret passes through the sacrifice of what is dearest, the greatest love in the world, the only one of love itself, the only one against the only one, the only one for the only one. Because the secret of the secret that we are going to talk about does not consist in hiding something, in not revealing its truth, but in respecting the absolute uniqueness, the infinite separation of what connects me or exposes me to the unique, both to one and to the other., both the One and the Other):

"So take your son, your only one, the one you love, Isaac, go to the country of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will tell you." Abraham

1. In the original: Il advint que l'Élohim éprouva Abraham. Il lui dit Abraham! Il dit 'Me voici.' (Translator's Note).

got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, took his two servants with him, and his son Isaac, he split the wood for the burnt offering, got up and went towards the place that Elohim had told him”²

Other translation: “And it’s after these words: ‘Elohim tests Abraham. / He says to him: Abraham! He says: Here I am. /He says: take then your son, your only one, the one you love, Isaac, /go for yourself to the land of Moriah, there, take him up on high /on one of the mountains that I will tell you about.’ / Abraham himself gets up early in the morning and saddles his ass. / He takes his two teenagers with him and Isaac, his son. /He splits logs of ascension. He gets up and goes towards the place that Elohim tells him”³.

Kierkegaard was relentless in talking about Abraham’s silence. the insistence of *fear and trembling* it therefore responds to a strategy that would deserve, in itself, a long and detailed study. Notably with regard to the powerful conceptual and lexical inventions of the “poetic” and the “philosophical”, the “aesthetic”, the “ethical”, the “teleological” and the “religious”. Around this silence, what I would call movements, in the musical sense,

2. Genesis, XX, 1-3, trans. E. Dhormes, Gallimard. “Bibliothèque de la Pléiade”, 1972. (Grifos meus) [no original: “Take your son, your only one, the one you love, Isaac, go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about. Abraham got up early in the morning, strapped his donkey, took his two servants with him, as well as his son Isaac, split the wood of the burnt offering, got up and went to the place that the Elohim had told him ” (N.T)].

3. Ibid. Ibid., trans. A. Chouraqui. (Grifos meus) [no original: “And it is after these words: ‘The Elohim tries Abraham./He said to him: Abraham! He said: Here am I. / He said: Take therefore your son, your only one, the one you love, Is’hac, / go for you to the land of Moryah, there, mount him uphill / on one of the mountains what I will tell you.’/ Abraham gets up early in the morning and bridles his donkey./ He takes his two teenagers with him and Is’hac his son./ He splits wood. He gets up and goes to the place that the Elohim tells him.(N.T)].

4. KIERKEGAARD, Søren. Œuvres Complètes, t. V, trad. P.H Tisseau e E. M. Jacquet-Tisseau. Éditions de l’Orante, 1972, pp. 106-107. Idem, *ibid.*, pp. 108-110. Elsewhere, Kierkegaard also speaks of a “vow of silence”, p. 117. And all that what he calls the teleological suspension of ethics will be determined by Abraham’s silence, by his refusal of mediation, of generality, of public law (*juris publici*), of the political or the state, of the divine; the divine is only the “ghost” of God (p. 159), as the generality of ethics is only the bloodless specter of faith; while Abraham is not, must not, cannot be a “ghost, a character on a parade in the square” (p. 144). “Abraham cannot speak”, Kierkegaard repeats frequently, insisting on this impossibility or this im-power, on “he cannot” before all “he will not”; for it is as if he were passive in his decision not to speak (pp. 198, 199, 201 and *passim*), in a silence that is no longer aesthetic silence. Because all the difference that counts here is the difference between the paradoxical secret of Abraham and the secret of what must be hidden in the aesthetic order and which must, on the contrary, be revealed in the ethical order. Aesthetics demands the secrecy of what remains hidden, it rewards it; ethics requires manifestation, on the contrary; aesthetics cultivates secrecy, ethics punishes it. Therefore, the paradox of faith is neither aesthetic (the desire to hide) nor ethical (the interdiction to hide) (cf. P. 217 square). This paradox of faith will propel Abraham into the equally paradoxical scene of forgiveness. Kierkegaard gives us both its fiction and its truth, the true fiction that remains, perhaps, every scene of forgiveness.

to the world, and Isaac never tells anyone anything of what he had seen, and Abraham did not suspect that anyone had seen.” The same secret, the same secret, therefore, separates Abraham and Isaac. Because what Abraham did not see, he would have needed the fable, is that Isaac saw him draw his knife, his face creased with despair. Abraham does not therefore know that he has been seen. He sees without being seen. He is, from this perspective, in not-knowing. He does not know that his son will have been his witness, but a witness from now on bound to the same secret, to the secret that links him to God.

Is it fortuitous that it is in one of these movements, in one of these four silent orchestrations of the secret that Kierkegaard imagines a great tragedy of forgiveness? How to reconcile, together, these themes of silence, secrecy and forgiveness? In *the third movement*, after an enigmatic paragraph that sees the silhouettes of Hagar and Ishmael sneak past in Abraham’s pensive daydream, he implores God. Throwing himself to the ground, he asks God for forgiveness: not for having disobeyed him, but for having obeyed him instead. And for having obeyed him at the moment when he was giving him an impossible order, doubly impossible: impossible at the same time because he asked him for the worst and because God, according to a movement to which we ourselves will have to go back, will renounce his order, he will interrupt and retract it, in a way—as if he had been seized with grief, remorse, and regret. For the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, unlike the God of philosophers and onto-theology, is a God who portrays himself. But there is no need to rush to give later names to the re-drawing of this retraction prior to repentance, regret, remorse.

Continuing in this third movement, at the beginning of Fear and Trembling, Abraham thus asks forgiveness for having been willing to the worst sacrifice in order to perform his duty to God. He asks God for forgiveness for having agreed to do what God himself had ordered him to do. Forgive me, my God, for having listened to you, he tells you in short. There is a paradox there that we must not stop reflecting on. In particular, he reveals a secret double law, a double obligation inherent in the vocation of forgiveness. It never shows itself as such, but it always lets you hear: I don’t ask you to forgive me for betraying you, hurting you, for hurting you, for lying to you, for perjuring me, I don’t ask for your forgiveness for a bad deed, I ask you, on the contrary, forgiveness for having listened to you, too faithfully, for too much fidelity to the sworn faith, and for having loved you, for having preferred you, for having elected you or for having let me be elected for you, for having responded to you, for having said “here I am” — and, since then, having sacrificed to you the other, my other other, my other other as another absolute preference, mine, mine, my best of mine, best of mine, Isaac here. Isaac not only represents the one Abraham loves most among his people, he is also the promise itself, the child of the promise.⁵ It is this same promise that he was about to sacrifice, and that is why he still asks God for forgiveness, forgiveness for the worst: for having accepted at last the future, and therefore everything that gives breath to faith, sworn faith, to the faithfulness of every covenant. As if Abraham, speaking in his innermost being, were saying to God: I am sorry for having preferred the secret that binds me to you to that which binds me to the other, to every other, because a secret love binds me to both the one and the other, like mine.

This law reinscribes the unforgivable, and the fault itself, at the heart of the forgiveness

5. KIERKEGAARD, Søren. *Œuvres Complètes*, op. cit., pp. 116-117.

requested or granted, as if one always had to forgive forgiveness itself, on both sides of its address; and as if perjury were always older and more resistant than what needs to be forgiven as a fault, as this or that perjury, but what already, ventriloquizing it, lends its voice and gives its movement to the fidelity of faith sworn. Far from putting an end to it, dissolving it or absolving it, forgiveness can only prolong the lack, it can only, by giving it the survival of an interminable agony, import into it this self-contradiction, this unlivable contestation of self, himself, and of the selfhood of the self.

Here is *this third movement*: “The night was still when Abraham, on his ass, went alone to Moriah; he threw himself on his face; he asked God for forgiveness for his sin [put another way, Abraham does not ask forgiveness from Isaac, but from God; a bit like the French Episcopate does not ask forgiveness from the Jews, but from God, taking the Jewish community as a witness, according to its own terms, of the forgiveness asked of God. Here, Abraham does not even take Isaac as a witness to the forgiveness that he, Abraham, asks God for having wanted to put Isaac to death], forgiveness for wanting to sacrifice Isaac, forgiveness for having forgotten his fatherly duty towards his son. He resumed his solitary path more often, but found no rest. He could not conceive that it was a sin to have wanted to sacrifice to God his dearest possession, for which he himself had so often given his life; and if it was a sin, if he had not loved Isaac to this extent, then he could not understand that this sin could be forgiven; for is there a more terrible sin?”

In this literary-type fiction, Abraham himself judges his unforgivable sin. And it's because he asks for forgiveness. You never ask for forgiveness except for the unforgivable. One never has to forgive what is forgivable, that is the *aporia* of impossible forgiveness

on which we reflect. Judging, himself, his unforgivable sin, a condition for asking for forgiveness, Abraham does not know if God has forgiven him or will have forgiven him. In any case, forgiven or not, your sin will have remained what it was, unforgivable. That's why God's answer, deep down, doesn't matter as much as you might think; it does not in essence affect Abraham's infinitely guilty conscience or abysmal repentance. Even if God grants him his forgiveness at present, even if it were still supposed, in the past conditional, that he would have granted it, or in the previous future, that he would have granted it by suspending his arm, sending him an angel and allowing him this substitution of the ram, it changes nothing to the unforgivable essence of sin. Abraham feels it himself, in the inaccessible secret of his innermost being. Whatever the forgiveness may be, Abraham remains in solitary confinement, and so does God, who, in this movement, does not appear and says nothing.⁶

This Kierkegaardian approach I will take into account, but my reading will not rely on it for essentials. What seems just to be remembered here is a kind of absolute axiom. Which? Johannes de Silentio's resolute insistence on Abraham's silence responds to the very original logic, aim and writing of *Fear and Trembling, Dialectical Lyrics*. Evidently, I already allude, for reasons that will be explained later, to the immense engagement scene with Regina and the relationship with her father; as for *The Repetition of Constantin Constantius*, published in the same year under another pseudonym, it is each time a kind of Letter to the Father “*avant la lettre*”^{VI} — before that of Kafka — signed by a son who publishes under a pseudonym. My own insistence on secrecy corresponds to another reading decision that I will try to justify. However, before all these decisions, one fact remains uncontested,

6. KIERKEGAARD, Søren. *Ceuvres Complètes*, op. cit., p. 109.

which founds the absolute axiom. Nobody would dare refuse it: the very brief narrative of what we call “the sacrifice of Isaac” or “Isaac bound^{VIII}” (“Is’hac aux liens”, according to Chouraqui) leaves no doubt about this fact: Abraham remains silent, at least as regards the truth of what he lends himself to do. For what he knows, but also for what he does not know and finally will never know. Of God’s singular appeal and command Abraham says nothing to anyone. Not Sara, not hers, not men in general. He doesn’t give away his secret, he doesn’t divulge it in any familiar or public, ethical or political space. It doesn’t expose you to anything that Kierkegaard calls generality. Tied to the secret, tied to the secret, guarded by the secret that he keeps throughout this whole experience of the forgiveness asked for by the unforgivable that remains unforgivable, Abraham takes responsibility for a decision. But for a passive decision that consists in obeying and for an obedience that is the same one for which he has to forgive himself — and initially, following Kierkegaard, for the very one he will have obeyed.

Responsible decision of a double secret et doubly designated. First secret: he must not reveal that God has called him and asked him for the highest sacrifice in the tête-à-tête of an absolute alliance. This secret he knows and shares. Second secret, but arch-secret: the reason or meaning of the sacrificial request. In this respect, Abraham is bound to secrecy quite simply because that secret remains secret to him. He is, then, bound to the secret not because he shares, but because he does not share God’s secret. Although he is, as it were, passively obliged, in fact, to this secret that he is ignorant of, like us, he also assumes the passive and active, decisive responsibility of not asking God questions, of not complaining, like Job, about the worst which seems to threaten him at the behest of God. Now, this request, this ordeal has been

at least since then, and here is something that cannot be a simple interpretative hypothesis on my part, the ordeal that consists of seeing to what extent Abraham is capable of keeping a secret, at the moment of worst sacrifice, at the extreme tip of the ordeal of the requested secret: death given, by his hand, to what he loves most in the world, to the promise itself, to his love for the future and the future of his love.

THE FATHER, THE SON AND LITERATURE

For the moment, let’s leave Abraham there. Let us return to that enigmatic prayer, “Sorry for not wanting to say...”, which, one day, as if by chance, a reader might come across.

The reader searches. He searches for himself, trying to decipher a sentence that, fragmentary or not (both hypotheses are equally plausible), could well be addressed to him as well. Because that quasi-sentence, he could have, at the point where he finds himself in his suspended perplexity, have addressed it to himself. In any case, it is also addressed to him, she, also to him since, to a certain extent, he can read or understand it. He cannot rule out that this quasi-sentence, this spectrum of sentences that he repeats and can now quote endlessly, “Sorry for not wanting to say,” is a feint, a fiction, even literature. This phrase is visibly referencing. It’s a reference. A French-speaking reader understands the words and their sentence order. The movement of reference is irrefutable or irreducible to it, but nothing allows us to establish, with a view to a full and secure determination, the origin and end of this prayer. Nothing is said about the identity of the signer, the addressee and the referent. The absence of a fully determining context predisposes the sentence to secrecy and at the same time, jointly, according to the conjunction that matters here, to its literary-becoming: any text entrusted to the public

space, relatively legible or intelligible, can become a literary thing, moreover whose content, meaning, referent, signatory and addressee are not fully determinable realities, realities that are at the same time non-fictional or pure of all fiction, realities handed over, as such, by an intuition, to some determining judgment.

The reader then feels that he is coming to literature through the secret path of this secret, a secret at once guarded and exposed, jealously sealed and opened like a stolen letter. He senses literature. He cannot exclude the eventuality of his own hypnotized paralysis before these words: perhaps he will never be able to answer the question, not even answer this hive of questions: who says what to whom, exactly? Who seems to beg forgiveness for not...? By not wanting to say, what else? What does that mean? And why this “forgiveness” exactly?

The investigator already sees himself, therefore, in a situation that would no longer be that of an interpreter, an archaeologist, a hermeneuticist, a simple reader, finally, with all the status that can be recognized for this: exegete of sacred texts, detective, archivist, word processing machine mechanic, etc. Perhaps he will already become, beyond all this, a kind of literary critic, even a theorist of literature, in any case a reader who is a prey of literature, vulnerable to the question that torments every literary body and corporation. Not just “what is literature?”, “what is the function of literature?”, but “what relationship can there be between literature and meaning? Between literature and the undecidability of the secret?”

Everything is handed over to the future of a “perhaps”. Because that little sentence seems to become literary by retaining more than one secret, and a secret that could, perhaps, perhaps, not be one, and not have anything of this hidden being that he still

spoke of Fear and trembling: the secret of what she means in general, and of which nothing is known, and the secret she seems to confess without disclosing it, since she says “Sorry for not wanting to say...”: sorry for keeping the secret, and the secret of a secret, the secret of an enigmatic “not wanting to say”, of a not-wanting-to-say-this-or-that secret, of a not-wanting-to-say-what-I-want-to-say – or of not mean absolutely nothing, point VIII. Double secrecy, both public and private, manifested in the withdrawal, as phenomenal as nocturnal.

A secret of literature, literature and a secret to which a scene of forgiveness seems to be added, still incomprehensibly but certainly not fortuitous. “Sorry for not wanting to say.” But why “forgiveness”? Why must one ask for forgiveness for “not wanting to say”?

The fabulous reader, the reader of this fable of which I make myself the spokesperson here, asks himself if he reads well what he reads. He seeks a meaning for this fragment which is perhaps not even a fragment or an aphorism. It's maybe a whole sentence that doesn't even want to be judgmental. This phrase, “sorry for not wanting to say”, simply hangs in the air. Even if it is inscribed in the hardness of a stone, fixed in white on black of a painting or entrusted black on white to the immobile surface of a paper, captured on the luminous screen (but with an airy or liquid appearance) of a computer that resonates slightly, this sentence remains “up in the air”. And it is because it remains in the air that it keeps its secret, the secret of a secret that perhaps is not one, and which, for that reason, announces literature. The literature? At least what, a few centuries ago, we called literature, what is called literature, in Europe, but in a tradition that cannot but inherit from the Bible, from there extracting its meaning of forgiveness, but at the same time asking forgiveness for betrayal. there. That is why I inscribe here the question

of secrecy as a secret of literature under the apparently improbable sign of an Abrahamic origin. As if the essence of literature, *stricto sensu*, in the sense that this word from the West holds in the West, was not essentially Greek, but Abrahamic. As if she lived off the memory of that impossible forgiveness, the impossibility of which is not the same on both sides of the supposed border between Abrahamic culture and Greek culture. On both sides, forgiveness is not known, if I may say so, it is known as the impossibility, but the experience of this impossibility, at least my hypothesis, announces itself as different. Untranslatable different, no doubt, but it is the translation of that difference that we will perhaps attempt here later.

The secret, perhaps without secret, of that sentence that remains in the air, before or after a fall, depending on the time of that possible fall, would be a kind of *meteorite*.^{IX}

This phrase sounds as phenomenal as a meteorite or a meteorite (this word has two genders). Phenomenal, this sentence seems to be, because first of all it appears. It appears, that is clear, it is even the hypothesis or the certainty of principle. It manifests itself, it appears, but “in the air”, coming from who knows where, in an apparently contingent manner. Meteorite contingent at the moment of touching a ground (since a contingency also says, according to the etymology, to touch, the touch or the contact), but without ensuring a pertinent reading (since the pertinence also says, according to the etymology, to touch, the touch or contact). Remaining in the air, it belongs to the air, to being-in-the-air. It has its abode in the atmosphere we breathe, it hangs suspended in the air even when it plays. Right there where she plays. That’s why I say meteoric. It is still suspended, perhaps above a head, for example that of Isaac at the moment when Abraham raises his knife above him, when he knows more than we do what is

going to happen, because God has asked him in secret what he has given him. asked him, and because he will perhaps let him do or prevent him from doing what he asked him to do without giving him the slightest reason: absolute secrecy, a secret to be kept in sharing as for a secret that is not shared. absolute asymmetry.

Another example, very close to us, but is it another example? I think of the extraordinary moment at the end of Kafka’s Letter to the Father. This letter is neither in literature nor outside literature. She looks like ^x perhaps with literature, but she does not contain herself in literature. In the last pages of this letter, Kafka addresses himself, fictitiously, more fictitiously than ever, the letter he thinks his father would have wanted, would have owed, in any case would have been able to address in response. “You could answer”, “you could have answered” (Du könntest... antworten), says the son, which also sounds like a complaint or a counter-grievance: you don’t talk to me, in fact, you never answered me and never will, you could have answered, you could have answered, you must have answered. You remained a secret, a secret to me.

This fictitious letter from the father, included in the semi-fictitious letter from the son, multiplies the grievances. The (fictional) father reproaches his son (who therefore reproaches himself) not only for his parasitism, but at the same time for accusing him, he, the father, and for forgiving him and, therefore, for innocent him. This spectral father, Franz Kafka no longer sees him, writing to him, writing himself by his father’s fictitious pen, than Isaac sees coming and understands Abraham, who himself sees God, not seeing God coming or where God wants to arrive at the moment of all these words.

What does this spectral father say to Franz Kafka, to this son who makes him

speaking like that, in a ventriloquist, at the end of his Letter to his father, lending him his voice or giving him speech, but also dictating his speech, making him write you, in reply to yours, a letter to your son, in a kind of fiction in fiction? (Theatre in the theater, “the play’s the thing”. This is how, in this scene of secrecy, forgiveness and literature, we spell out the affiliation of impossible affiliations: that of Isaac, whom his father was about to kill, that of Hamlet – who refuses the son’s name proposed by the king, his stepfather, his mother’s husband, his father in law, his father under law [“A little more than kin, and less than kind,” he replies confidentially when the king calls him “my son”, act I, scene II], that of Kierkegaard who had so much suffering with the name and paternity of his father, that of Kafka, finally, whose literature does not, in short, instruct, from one genitive to the other, but the process Literature would begin there where it is no longer known who wrote and who signed the narrative of the appeal, and the “Here I am!”, between the absolute Father and Son.

So what does the Father say about the Son’s feather, who continues to be the master of quotes? Let us select its arguments in a requisite whose dominant motif remains the *impossibility of marriage*, for Kafka, because of a specular identification with the father, of an identifiable projection that is both inevitable and impossible. As in Abraham’s family, as in Hamlet, as in what links The Repetition to Fear and trembling on the brink of the impossible marriage with Regina, the fundamental question is that of marriage,

7. One could trace this at length in Kierkegaard’s work. I retain only this sign here: the interpretation of Abraham’s “incomprehensible” gesture (Kierkegaard insists on this necessary incomprehensibility, for him, of Abraham’s behavior) passes in particular through Abraham’s silence, through the secret kept, whether with his own, in particular to Sara. This presupposes a kind of rupture of marriage in the heteronomic instance, in the moment of obedience to the divine order and to the absolutely unique alliance with God. You cannot marry if you remain faithful to that God. You cannot marry before God. Now, the whole scene of the letter to the father, and above all, in it, the fictitious letter from the father (literature in literature) is inscribed in a mediation about the impossibility of marriage, as if the secret of literature, of the literary vocation, lay there: write or get married, that’s the alternative, but also write so as not to go crazy by getting married. Unless you get married so you don’t go crazy writing. Crazy to write

more precisely the secret of “taking a wife”. Getting married is doing and being like you, being strong, respectable, normal, etc. However, I owe it and it is at the same time prohibited, I owe it and therefore I cannot; this is the madness of marriage, of ethical normality, Kierkegaard would have said:⁷

... marriage is the greatest act, the one that guarantees the most respectable independence, but it is also the one that is most closely bound to you. There’s something crazy about wanting to get out of there, and each of my attempts is almost punished with madness (*To want to get out of here, therefore, has something of the madness about it, and every attempt is almost punished with it*) [...] I confess that a son like me, a mute, apathetic, dry, degenerate son (fallen, verfallener Sohn) would be unbearable for me, it is probable that, in the absence of any other possibility, I would flee from him, emigrate, like you I wanted to do it one day because of my marriage [we are already, always, at the specular address that will soon become specular from the father’s point of view, this time, to whom Franz will pretend to give the floor]. This, then, may also play a role in my inability to marry (*bei meiner Heiratsunfähigkeit*). [...] But the essential obstacle to my marriage is the conviction, now ineradicable, that to provide for a family, and even more so to truly be the head of it, one must have all those qualities that I recognized in you, good and bad taken together. Will then get married without going crazy! (*Und jetzt heirate, ohne wahnsinnig zu werden!*).

If you had a general opinion about what, in my opinion, explains the fear I have in front of you, could you answer me (Du könntest... antworten): “You free yourself from all guilt

and all responsibility (Zuerst lehnt auch Du jede Schuld und Verantwortung von dir ab), in this, then, our process is the same [Kafka then tells his father that they both act in a mirror and do the same]. But while later, frank both in word and in thought, I throw the blame entirely on you, you endeavor to show an increase in “intelligence” and “delicacy” (“übergescheit” und “überzärtlich”), absolving me, I, of all fault (mich von jeder Schuld freisprechen). Evidently, you only get it in appearance (you don’t want more than that, anyway), and despite all your “phrases” [your ways of speaking, your tournaments, your rhetoric, “Redensarten”] about what you call ways of being, temperament, contradictions, affliction, it appears between the lines that, in reality, I was the aggressor, while in everything you did, you never acted except in your own defense. Having reached this point, you would then, thanks to your duplicity (Unaufrichtigkeit), obtain a rather good result, for you have demonstrated three things (Du hast dreierlei bewiesen): first, that you are innocent, second, that I am guilty, and third that, out of sheer generosity, you are ready not only to forgive me (bereit bist, nicht nur mir zu verzeihen), but still – which is both more and less – to prove and believe yourself against the truth, by the way, that I am equally innocent.⁸

Extraordinary speculation. Bottomless specularity. The son speaks. He speaks in the name of the father. He makes the father say, taking his place and his voice, lending him and giving him the word at the same time: you judge me as the aggressor, but I am innocent, you attribute sovereignty by forgiving me, therefore, asking for forgiveness in my place, then granting me forgiveness and this way, you execute the double blow, the triple blow, and of accusing me, and of forgiving me and of acquitting me, to end up believing me innocent there where you did everything to accuse me, demanding my innocence, therefore yours, since you identify with me. But here is what

reminds us of the father, certainly the law of the father speaking through the mouth of the son speaking through the mouth of the father: if one cannot forgive without identifying the culprit, one cannot forgive and acquit at the same time either. To forgive is to consecrate the evil that is absolved as an unforgettable and unforgivable evil. Because of the same specular identification, one cannot, therefore, acquit by forgiving. You can’t forgive an innocent. By forgiving, one becomes innocent, one is also guilty of forgiving. The pardon granted is as guilty as the pardon sought, he confesses his guilt.^{XI} Desde então, não se pode perdoar sem ser culpado e, portanto, sem ter que pedir perdão por perdoar. “Forgive me for forgiving you”, is a sentence that is impossible to reduce to silence in every forgiveness, and above all, because it culpably attributes sovereignty. But it does not seem possible to silence the opposite sentence: “Forgive me for asking you for forgiveness, that is, for making you, in the first place, by identification requested, carry my guilt, and the weight of guilt of having to forgive me”. One of the causes of this aporia of forgiveness is that one cannot forgive, ask for or grant forgiveness without specular identification, without speaking in the place of the other and through the voice of the other. Forgiving in this specular identification is not forgiving, as it is not forgiving the other as such an evil as such.

The end of this letter to the son, a fictitious moment in the also fictitious Letter to the father, we will not comment on. But it carries in its very depth, perhaps, the essential of this secret passage from secrecy to literature as an aporia of forgiveness. The accusation that the fictitious father will never withdraw, the offense that he never symmetrizes or speculates (by the fictitious voice of the son, according to that legal fiction that is, like

8. KAFKA, Franz. “Lettre au père”, in. *Carnets, Œuvres Complètes*, t. VII, ed. e trad. M. Robert, Cercle du Livre Précieux, 1957, pp. 208-210.

paternity according to Joyce, literature), is the accusation of parasitism. It runs throughout the entire letter, from fiction to fiction in fiction. Finally, it is literary writing itself that the father accuses of parasitism. Parasitism, that's all your son devoted his life to. He made the mistake of writing instead of working; he was content to write rather than marry normally. Everything here, in the name of the father, in the name of the father and the son speaking in the name of the father, in the name of the son accusing himself in the name of the father, without holy spirit (unless Literature interprets the Trinity here), everything accuses parasitism and everything is accused of parasitism. The son is a parasite – like literature. Because the accused who is then asked to apologize is literature. Literature is accused of parasitism; she is begged to ask forgiveness by confessing this parasitism, repenting of this sin of parasitism. This is true even of the dummy card in the dummy card. This is thus seen judicially persecuted by the voice of the father as it is borrowed, taken or parasitized, written by the son: “Or I am strongly mistaken, says the son-father, the father by the voice of the son or the son by the voice of the son. father, or do you still use this letter as such to live like a parasite in me (Wenn ich nicht sehr irre, schmarotzest Du an mir auch noch mit diesem Brief als solchem).”

The father's requisition (speaking to the son through the son's voice speaking through the father's voice), first, had developed at length this argument from parasitism or vampirism. Distinguishing between chivalrous combat and the combat of the parasitic worm (den Kampf des Ungeziefers) that sucks the blood of others, the father's voice is raised against a son who is not only “unable to live” (Lebensuntüchtig), but indifferent to this incapacity, insensitive to this heteronomous dependence, little concerned with autonomy, since he brings

his responsibility (Verantwortung) to the father. Then be autonomous! it seems to him to order the intractable father. For example, the impossible marriage referred to in the letter: the son does not want to get married, but accuses his father of forbidding the marriage, “because of the ‘shame’” (Schande) that would have repercussions on my name”, says the father under son's feather. It is then in the name of the father, a name transfixed, parasitized, vampirized by the son's quasi-literature, that this incredible scene is written like this: as an impossible scene of impossible forgiveness. The impossible marriage. But the secret of this letter, as we had suggested on the occasion of Celan's Todtnauberg, is that the impossible, the impossible pardon, the impossible alliance or marriage took place, perhaps, just like this letter, in the poetic madness of that event called The letter to the father.

Literature will have been meteoric. Like the secret. A phenomenon is called a meteor, exactly that which appears in the luminosity or phainesthai of a light, that which is produced in the atmosphere. Like some kind of rainbow. (I've never been a big believer in what people say the rainbow means, but I couldn't be insensitive, less than three days ago, the rainbow that unfolded over the Tel Aviv airport while I was returning from Palestine, first, after Jerusalem, a few moments before that city is, in an absolutely exceptional way, as this almost never happens to this degree, buried under an almost diluvian snow and cut off from the rest of the world). The secret of the meteorite: it becomes luminous when it enters, as they say, the atmosphere, coming from who knows where – but in any case from another body from which it would have separated. And then, what is meteoric must be brief, quick, passing. Furtive, that is, in its lightning passage, perhaps as culpable and clandestine as a thief. As brief as our still

suspended sentence (“Sorry for not wanting to say...”). A matter of time. Within an instant. The life of a meteorite will always have been too short: the time of lightning, thunder, a rainbow. Lightning flashes or rainbows are said to be meteors. The rain too. It’s easy to think that God, even the God of Abraham, speaks to us meteorically. It descends on us vertically, like rain, like a meteor. Unless he does not go down by suspending the descent, stopping the movement. For example to tell us “Sorry for not wanting to say...”. Not that God himself says that, or portrays himself that way, but that is perhaps what “the name of God” means to us”.

A fabulous reader is represented here. he is working^{xii}. He then tries to decipher the meaning of that phrase, the origin and destination of that message that conveys nothing. This message is currently secret, but it also says that a secret will be kept. And an infinite reader, the reader of the infinite that I see working, wonders if this secret, as far as the secret is concerned, does not confess something like literature itself.

But, then, why speak here of confession and forgiveness? Why must literature have to be confessed? To be confessed for what he doesn’t show? Himself? Why would forgiveness, even a fictitious forgiveness, be asked for here? Because there is this word “forgiveness” in the meteorite (“sorry for not wanting to say”). And what would forgiveness have to do with literature’s double bottom secret?

It would be wrong to believe that forgiveness, assuming its verticality, is always asked from the bottom up – or is always granted from the top down. From very high to down here. If scenes of public repentance

and requested pardons are multiplying today, if they seem to innovate, sometimes descending from the top of the State, from the head or head of State, sometimes also from the highest authorities of the Church, of a country or of a nation-state (not yet France, Poland, Germany, the Vatican), the thing is not without precedent, even if it remains extremely rare in the past. There was for example the act of repentance of Emperor Theodosius the Great (on the order of Saint Ambrose).⁹ More than once God himself seems to repent and show regret, or remorse. He seems to reconsider, reproach himself for having acted badly, recant and pledge not to repeat himself again. And his gesture seems, at the very least, a request for forgiveness, a confession, an attempt at reconciliation. Not to take just this example among others, does Yahweh not return to guilt after the flood? That he does not recant? That he does not repent, as if he asked for forgiveness, regretting, surely, the evil of a curse he had uttered when, before the sacrificial holocaust that Noah offers him, and feeling the pleasant and tranquilizing perfume of the victims rise towards him animals, does he renounce the evil already done, the former curse? Indeed, he exclaims:

I will never again *curse* the ground for man’s sake, for the object of man’s heart is evil from his youth, and I will never again punish every living thing as I did:

All the days that the earth will last,
Seeds and harvest, cold and heat,
Summer and winter, day and night
will not cease.¹⁰

9. Santo Agostinho judges this act “*mirabilis*” in *Cidade de Deus*. Cf. DODARO, Robert. “*Eloquent Lies, Just Wars and the Politics of Persuasion: Reading Augustine’s City of God in a ‘Postmodern’ World*”, *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994), pp. 92-93.

10. Genesis VIII, 21, 22, trans. E. Dhormes, pp. 26-27. [in the original: “Je ne recommencerai plus à maudire le sol à cause de l’homme, car l’objet du coeur de l’homme est le mal, dès sa jeunesse, et je ne recommencerai plus à frapper tout vivant comme je l’ai fait:/Tous les jours que la terre durera,/Semaines et moisson, froid et chaud,/Été et hiver, jour et nuit/Point ne cesseront.” (N.T)].

In another translation, it is also necessary to underline the word of curse, the word to curse which will soon be followed by the word of blessing. Because, follow God. What does he do? What does he say? After having confessed a past curse, which he undertakes not to repeat again, after having, in short, secretly asked for forgiveness, in his intimate forum, as if to speak to himself, Yahweh will profess a blessing. The blessing will be a promise, therefore the sworn faith of a covenant. Alliance not only with man, but with every animal, with every living thing, a promise that is forgotten every time an animal is killed or mistreated today. That the promise or sworn faith of that alliance took the form of a rainbow, that is, of a meteorite, that is what we must still reflect on, always on the trail^{XIII} [*la trace*] of the secret, as of what combines the experience of the secret with that of the meteor.

Eu não *amaldiçoarei* ainda mais a gleba por causa do primeiro homem^{XIV} [Adão]: Sim, a formação do coração do homem é um mal desde sua juventude.

Não castigarei ainda mais todo vivente, como o fiz. Todos os dias da terra ainda, semente e colheita, frio e calor, verão e inverno, dia e noite não folgarão.¹¹

God undertakes, therefore, not to redo what he has done. What he did would have been the evil of an evil deed, an evil to never be done again and, therefore, to be forgiven, either by himself. But does he ever forgive himself?

Immense question. Because if God asked for forgiveness, who would he ask? Who can forgive you something, a wrongdoing (question “what”)? or forgive him, himself (“who” question), for having sinned? Who could forgive him or forgive him if not himself? Can you ever ask yourself for forgiveness? But

could I ever ask someone else’s forgiveness, since I must, it seems, they say, identify myself sufficiently with the other, with the victim, to ask for forgiveness knowing what I’m talking about, knowing, to prove it in my turn, in your place, the harm I did to you? the evil that I continue to do you, at the very moment of asking forgiveness, that is, at the moment of betraying once more, of prolonging that perjury in which the sworn faith, your own infidelity, will already consist? This question of the question, this request for forgiveness seeks its undiscoverable place, on the edge of literature, in the replacement of that “in place of” that we recognize in the letter from the son to the father as a letter from the father to the son, from the son to the son as from the father. father to father.

Can you ask forgiveness from anyone other than yourself? Can you ask for forgiveness?

Two equally impossible questions, and it is the question of God (question of “who”), of the name of God, of what the name of God would mean (question of “what”), the question of forgiveness, we had spoken of it, split between the “who” and the “what”.

Two questions to which one is always obliged to answer yes and no, neither yes nor no.

(NOT) MORE THAN ONE^{XV}

“Sorry for not wanting to say...”

”Can this be forgiven?

If you speak French and if, without any other context, you ask yourself what “se forgive” means, and if it is possible, then the misunderstanding of this grammar, in the phrase “se forgive”, is retained as a double or triple possibility. First, but we have such an eventuality as an accessory, there would be this impersonal passivity of the expression

11. Genesis VIII, 21, 22, trans. Chouraqui, p. 30. [no original: “I will not add yet to curse the glebe because of the glebeous [Adam]:/Yes, the formation of the heart of the glebeous is evil from his youth./I will not yet add to strike all alive, as I did / All the days of the earth still, seed and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will not be idle (N.T).”]

that makes one say: “this error is forgiven” to mean “he is forgiven”, “he is forgiven”, “one can forgive him” (it is forgiven, it is forgivable). Let us be more interested in the two other possibilities, in the reciprocity between one and the other and/or in self-reflexivity: “forgiving one another” and/or “forgiving oneself”. Possibility and/or impossibility that are marked by two syntaxes that both continue, each in its own way, identifying and specular. It is a question of what could be called, altering the expression a little, a speculative grammar of forgiveness.

What was, on its destined path^{XVI}, the letter from the father inscribed in Kafka's letter to the father? In the letter from Kafka's father to the son and signatory of the letter to Kafka's father, through all the genitives and all the signatures of that forgiving genealogy? Undeniably, this letter from the father to the son was also a letter from the son to the father and from the son to the son, a letter to himself whose implication continued that of a pardon to the other which was a pardon to himself. Fictitious, literary, secret but not necessarily private, it continued, without continuing, between the son and himself. But sealed in the intimate forum, in the secret, in the secretary in any case, of a son who writes to exchange without exchanging this abysmal forgiveness with the one who is his father (who actually becomes his father and bears that name since that incredible scene of forgiveness), this secret letter does not become literature, in the literalness of its letter, which from the moment it exposes itself to becoming a public and publishable thing, an archive to be inherited, a phenomenon still an inheritance – or a testament that Kafka did not will have destroyed. Because, as in the sacrifice of Isaac, which was without a witness or had as a surviving witness only his son, namely, an elected heir who will have seen his father's frown at the moment when he raised the knife

over him, all this does not comes to us only in the trail left by inheritance, a trail kept legible as well as unreadable. This trace left, his legacy was also, by calculation or unconscious imprudence, the luck or the risk of becoming a testamentary speech in a literary corpus, becoming literary by this very abandonment. This very abandonment is abandoned to its drift by the undecidability, and therefore by the secrecy, by the destinerrancy of the origin and the end, of the destination and the addressee, of the meaning and the referent of the reference remained a reference in its own suspense. All this belongs to a literary corpus as undecidable as the signature of the son and/or father, as undecidable as the voices and acts that are exchanged there without changing anything (Kafka's “true” father, no more than Abraham, perhaps understood nothing and received nothing and heard nothing from his son; he was perhaps even more “beast” than all the so-called beasts, the ass and the ram who were perhaps the only ones to think and see what happens, what happens to them, the the only ones to know, in their bodies, who pays the price when men forgive each other, if they forgive themselves or among themselves; I mean men, not women; the woman, that we will see why and how she continues to “take,” is conspicuously absent, spectacularly omitted from these scenes of forgiveness between father and son). Corpus as undecidable, therefore, as the exchange without exchange of a pardon named, asked for, granted as soon as named, a pardon so original, a priori and automatic, so narcissistic, in short, that one wonders if it really happened, outside of literature. Because the said royal father knew nothing of him. Is a literary or fictional pardon a pardon? Unless the most effective experience, the concrete resistance to the forgiveness requested or granted, as it would be linked to the postulation of secrecy, does not have its destiny guaranteed in the cryptic

gift of the poem, in the body of the literary crypt, as we suggested above in this regard. of Todnauberg, the forgiveness scene between Heidegger and Celan. Forgiveness, then, would be the poem, the gift of the poem. It doesn't have to be asked. Contrary to what is commonly heard, he must, in essence, not respond to a request.

In "forgiving oneself", in the speculative grammar of the Letter to the father, we had recognized a scene of forgiveness that was both asked and granted – to oneself. This seems both necessary and prohibited, inevitable and impossible, necessary and insignificant in the very ordeal of forgiveness, in the essence or in the becoming-forgiveness of forgiveness. If there is a secret secret of forgiveness, it is that it seems destined at the same time to remain secret and to manifest itself (as a secret), but also to become, for that very reason, by specular identification, self-forgiveness, self-forgiveness. to oneself, requested and granted between oneself and oneself in the mistake of "forgiving oneself", but also annulled, deprived of meaning by this very narcissistic reflexivity. Hence the risk taken by its detached and relevant nature, by that *Aufhebung* that we would like to cite another literature that tempers precisely the code of speculative idealism with the code of taste and cuisine, in *The Merchant of Venice* ("when forgiveness reveals justice", "when mercy seasons justice"). One must only ask for forgiveness from the other, the absolute other^{XVII}, to the other infinitely and irreducibly other, and one must only forgive the other infinitely other – that which at the same time is called and excludes "God", another name of self-forgiveness, of forgiving oneself.

We had noticed: after the flood, there was God's retraction (let's not say his repentance), that retreating movement by which God retracts what he has done. So, he does not just turn towards the evil done to man, namely,

precisely, to a creature in whom malignity dwells in his heart, from the origin and in such a way that the wickedness of God, the flood, would already have meant a sanction, a response, the replica of a punishment corresponding to the evil in the flesh of the creature, in the creature as flesh. That evil in man's heart must already have spurred him on to atonement and to ask for forgiveness: forgiveness against forgiveness, as they say gift against gift. God's recantation, his promise not to start over, to do no more harm, goes far beyond man, the only one accused of evil. God portrays himself in relation to every living thing. He portrays himself before himself, if speaking to himself, but about every living thing and animality in general. And the covenant, which he is soon to promise, commits him to every living thing.

We cannot delve here into the immense question (semantics and exegetics) of God's portrayal, of his examination of conscience about himself and about his creation, of all those movements of reflection and memory that impel him to return to what he did not do well, as if he were both finite and infinite (a tradition that could also be followed in the work of Eckhart, Boehme, Hegel, etc.). If you come to your senses, it is not necessary to rush to translate them as "regret", "remorse" or "regret" (although the temptation is strong and perhaps legitimate). Let's just consider the reduplication, the retraction of retraction, that kind of repentance of repentance that involves, in a way, the covenant with Noah, his offspring and the animals. Between two examinations of God's conscience, between two retractions, the one that provoked and the other that stopped the flood, in the meantime of these two quasi-repentances of God, Noah is, in a way, twice forgiven. On two occasions he finds grace. As if the Alliance between the father and the son could only be sealed through repetition, the double re-betrayal^{XVIII},

of the examination of conscience [re-venir sur soi] of this withdrawal or this retraction – of what is not yet necessary, I insist, to carry with the contributions that a psychology, a theology and a dogmatics to come will project in the regret, in the remorse or in the repentance. Unless these last notions do not depend, in their bottomless depth, on this coming to himself of God, on this contract with himself in which God thus contracts to withdraw. The asymmetric contract of the Alliance, then, seems to assume the double trait [trait] of this re-trait (Entzug, one would say in German), the reduplicated re-treatment of God.

If the texts that we are going to read seem, then, to want to say something (but do they want to say it? Or do they ask us for forgiveness for not wanting to say it?), it is perhaps something that one must hear even before every act of faith, before any accreditation that would grant them any status: revealed word, myth, ghostly production, symptom, allegory of philosophical knowledge, poetic or literary fiction, etc. It is perhaps this minimal postulation, this nominal definition, which must then be articulated with what we called above the “absolute axiom”: it belongs to what is called God, Yahweh, Adonai, the tetragrammaton, etc., to be able to retract, others would say “regret”. To this “God” belongs the power to remember, and to remember that what he did was not necessarily well done, perfect, without error and without blemish. History of “God”. On the other hand, always content with analyzing the semantics of inherited words and concepts, namely, the inheritance itself, it is difficult to think of a retraction that does not imply, at least in a virtual state, in the gesture of confession, a forgiveness requested.

But asked by God to whom? There are only two possible hypotheses, and they are valid for all forgiveness: this can be asked of the other or oneself. The two possibilities

remain irreducible, of course, and yet they amount to the same thing. If I ask forgiveness from the other, from the victim of my error, then, necessarily, from a betrayal and some perjury, it is to the other that, through a movement of retraction which I affect^{XIX}, I am self- and hetero-affect, I identify myself at least virtually. Forgiveness is always asked, therefore, through retraction, to oneself as to another, to another self. God, here, would virtually ask forgiveness from his creation, from his creature like himself for the mistake he made by creating evil men in their hearts – and first, listen to him, men of desire, men subject to sexual difference, men womanizers, men driven by the desire to take a woman. In any case, before recognizing some status and value, before believing in it or not, this inherited text suggests this: forgiveness is a story of God. It is written or addressed in the name of God. Forgiveness takes place as a covenant between God and God through man. It passes through man’s body, through man’s little imperfection^{XX}, through man’s evil or defect—which is only his desire, and the place of God’s pardon, according to the genealogy, inheritance, filiation of that man. double genitive. To say that forgiveness is a God story, a matter between God and God, through whom we men meet, is neither a reason nor a way to get away from it. It is at least necessary to know that as soon as one says or hears “forgiveness” (and, for example, “forgiveness for not wanting to say...”), well, God is involved. More precisely, the name of God is already murmured. Reciprocally, as soon as one says “God”, among us, someone is muttering “forgiveness”. [Without the connection of this anecdote being necessary for what I am proposing here, I remember that one day Lévinas told me, with a kind of sad humor and ironic protest, behind the scenes of a thesis defense: “Today, when says “God”, one almost has to ask for forgiveness or

apologize: “God; allow me the expression...”).

The first moment of divine retraction supervenes, men multiplying on the surface of the earth, when God sees their desire. It is not said that he is envious of them, but that he sees men desire. His portrayal begins when he sees men's desire – and that the creation of that desire belongs to him. It is noticed that men perceive that “the daughters of men were beautiful”. “They therefore took for themselves women from among all those whom they had chosen”¹². They take for themselves, translates Chouraqui, these daughters who are “good”.

As always, it is desire that engenders error. He is the mistake. He commands, then, the logic of repentance and forgiveness. Seeing that men appropriate women, that they take women (and as in the Letter to the Father, the scene of forgiveness, like that of betrayal and perjury, revolves around “taking a woman”), God says (but to whom He says to himself, then, “My spirit shall not always abide in man, for he is yet flesh. His days shall be one hundred and twenty years.”¹³ (Dhormes). “My breath will not last forever in man. In his raving he is flesh: his days are a hundred and twenty years.”¹⁴ (Chouraqui).

God, then, “repents”, says one translation (that of Dhormes who notes without laughing that “anthropomorphisms abound in the narratives of chapters II, IV, VI); he “wails”, says another (the one from Chouraqui) to use a word that, it seems, they say to me in

Jerusalem, would mean something like “he consoles himself”, he goes back to grieve, in some way, if consoling. This verb would not be without etymological relationship, as usual, with the proper name of Noah. But, despite the slight difference between “repent” and “regret”, the two translations I am going to quote agree to say, according to the same expression, that Noah finds “grace” in the eyes of Yahweh. Having regretted or having regretted having done evil by creating such an evil man, God decides, in fact, to exterminate the human race and to suppress all trace of life on earth. He thus extends the genocidal annihilation to all species of living beings, to all their creatures, with the gracious exception of Noah, his family and a couple of each animal:

Yahweh saw that the malice of man on earth was great, and that all the thoughts of his heart were nothing but evil. Yahweh was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and he was angry in his heart. Yahweh said [but to whom is he speaking, then?]: “I will wipe out the men whom I have created from the surface of the ground, from men to animals, to creeping things and birds of the air, for I regret having made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of Yahweh. Here is the story of Noah¹⁵

For what matters here, I just remember, without reading it all the way through, that Chouraqui's translation says “I regret” and “I regretted” instead of “repented” and “I regret”

12. Genesis VI, 1, 2, tr. Dhormes. Chouraqui: “And that's when the glebeous begin to multiply/on the faces of the glebe, daughters are born to them./The sons of the Elohim see the daughters of the glebeous: yes, they are good./They take women from among all those they have chosen.” [in Portuguese: “É quando o homem começa a se multiplicar/sobre the faces of the turf, daughters are born to them./The sons of Elohim see the daughters of man: yes, they are good./They take wives for themselves among all those whom they chose” (N.T)].

13. In the original: “Mon esprit ne restera pas toujours dans l'homme, car il est encore chair. Ses jours seront de cent vingt ans.” (N.T).

14. In the original: “Mon souffle ne durera pas dans le glébeux en pérennité. Dans leur égarement, il est chair: ses jours sont de cent vingt ans” (N.T).

15. Gênes VI, 5-8, tr. E. Dhormes. [in the original: Yahweh saw that the malice of man on earth was great and that all the thoughts of his heart were always only evil. Yahweh repented of having made man on earth and he was angry in his heart. Yahweh said [...]: ‘I will destroy from the surface of the ground the men whom I have created, from men to cattle, to creeping things and to the birds of the heavens, for I repent of have done.’ But Noah found favor in the sight of Yahweh. This is the story of Noah.” (N.T)].

– but keeps the same word “ grace” to the end given to Noah.

However one interprets the logic of this scene, one hesitates forever between justice and perversion, both in the act of reading and in what is read. The grace that Noah finds in the eyes of Yahweh, we know its continuation, do we have the right to translate it as “forgiveness”? Nothing stops him, it seems to me. God forgives Noah, just him, his family and a couple of animals of each kind. But by so terribly limiting his grace, he chastises and destroys all other life on earth. Now, he carries out this almost absolute pan-genocide to punish an evil and in the impulse of regret for an evil that, in short, he himself committed: having created men who have evil in their hearts. As if he did not forgive men and living beings for their own guilt, for the evil they have in them, namely, desire, despite the fact that it was he who made the mistake of putting it in them. As if, in short, at the same time, he did not forgive himself the damage, the evil done by his creation, namely, the desire of man.

In case you still wonder how and why, lamenting an injury, an evil deed for which he is hardly consoled, he authorizes himself both to pardon Noah and his people, and to punish all the other living beings, let us take into account two recitals of this sentence. On the one hand, it is said right after that Noah was a “righteous one”. If he is thus pardoned as righteous, and God recognized him as righteous, it is because, in short, he is more righteous than God himself, not the God who recognizes him as righteous (one must be righteous for that), but the God that he still has to regret an evil from which he cannot be exempt or that he finds it difficult to forgive himself. As if (I often say “as if” on purpose, as if I didn’t mean what I say, and that would be the entry of revelation in literature) God asked forgiveness from Noah or before Noah,

16. In the original: “J’établirai mon alliance avec toi...” (N.T).

17. In the original: “Je lève mon pacte avec toi” (N.T).

granting him right after the pact or alliance. On the other hand, by also pardoning the couples of animals in the ark, not killing the promise of life and regeneration, God did not only pardon Noah, his family and a couple of each species. In Noah’s justice, he exemplarily pardons a future life, a life whose future or re-birth he wants to save. The Alliance passes through this incredible grace, which makes it really difficult to know who grants it to whom, deep down, in the name of whom and for what.

Yes, in the name of whom and what, this chastisement, this grace and this covenant? Apparently, the movement goes from God to Noah and his. But God punishes and pardons in order to forgive himself by making himself forgiven, in order to regret the evil and pardon himself. Then, the grace granted to you by the metonymy of Noah, in the name of God in the name of Noah, behold, it extends exemplarily, metonymically even to all life, to all life to come, to re-come. Shortly before the Flood (V, 22), and after having lamented the evil in creation, God says, in effect, to Noah: “I will establish my covenant with you...”¹⁶ (Dhormes), “I make my pact with you”¹⁷ (Chouraqui). Noah the righteous is now 600 years old. At the moment when he will command you to settle in the ark, God will say to you “I saw that you were righteous before me”, “Yes, I saw, you, a righteous one, before me”. The moment of the Covenant is located, therefore, in the great abyss of these forty days. Announced, promised at the beginning of the flood, this moment is repeated, confirmed when, as Noah raises “burnt offerings” (“ascents”) to the altar, God announces, without regret, certainly, but promising not to start over again, that he will not He will curse the earth more because of man, whose heart is evil, and that he will no longer hurt every living thing. By blessing Noah and his sons,

he confirms the Alliance or the Pact, but also man's power over all living things, over all the animals of the earth. As if the abyssal alliance and forgiveness were accompanied by this sovereignty of man over other living beings. A frightening sovereignty, of a terror at once resented and imposed by man, inflicted on other living beings. All this in the specularity of a God who made man "in his own image"¹⁸ (Dhormes), as your "replica"¹⁹ (Chouraqui).

Elohim blessed Noah and his son. He said to them: "Produce and multiply, fill the earth! The fear and dread you inspire will spread to all the animals on earth and all the birds in the sky. [Chouraqui: "His trembling, his astonishment will be on every living thing on earth." Dhormes must specify in a note: "The fear and dread you inspire, literally "your fear and your dread". As if terror could not be inspired but by being resented and shared.] All of whom the ground ants, and all the fish of the sea, shall be given into his hand. Everything that moves and lives will be food for you like green grass: I have given you all these. You will only not eat meat with its soul, that is, its blood. As for his blood, I will require the soul of man at the hand of man, at the hand of each one, the soul of his brother. Whoever sheds the blood of man, his blood, by man, shall be shed, for in the image of Elohim, Elohim made man. As for you, produce and multiply, abound in the earth and have authority over it"²⁰

Promising his covenant with man and all the living, God then promises not to start doing evil again. He will make it so "that there will be no more Flood to destroy the

earth." But, to avoid damage or perversity, he will need a memorandum, a sign in the world, a mnemonic that will no longer be just the spontaneity of a living and self-affecting memory. The sign of this will be the meteoric rainbow: "The bow will be in the cloud and I will see it to remember the everlasting covenant between Elohim and every living creature and every flesh that is on the earth." ("I will memorize my pact", translates Chouraqui).

Soon thereafter²¹ it is recalled that Shem saw his father's nakedness and told his brothers. Is it a fortuitous chaining? The fable we continue to tell, the time ellipse of the whole story, is also the father's nakedness. After so many generations, when this alliance is renewed with Abraham, it still happens between two times, before and after the supreme test. Initially, there was a first time, God announces his covenant commanding Abraham to be just and perfect (XVII,2), then, after the said sacrifice of Isaac, in a second time, he confirms it by swearing that he will bless him and multiply his seed (XXII, 16). Let's skip at once over so many pardons or graces, like the one that Abraham asks for the righteous of Sodom (XVIII, 22-33). Let's skip at once over so many oaths, for example, the sworn faith in the covenant of Beersheba with Abimalech, an alliance that was made in the name of God (XXI, 22-33), even before the ordeal of Isaac's sacrifice. Let us return very quickly to what I called at the outset the absolute axiom.

The axiom obliges us to place or assume a demand for secrecy, a secret requested by God,

18. In the original: "à son image" (N.T).

19. In the original: "réplique" (N.T).

20. Gèneses IX, 1-17. [In the original: Elohim blesses Noah and his sons. He said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth! The fear and dread that you will inspire will be imposed on all the animals of the earth and on all the birds of the skies. [Chouraqui: 'Your trembling, your bewilderment will be on every living thing on earth' (...)] All those with which the ground swarms, and all the fishes of the meat, there shall be delivered into your hand. Everything that moves and lives will serve you as food, as green grass: I have given you all this. Only you will not eat the flesh with its soul, that is to say its blood. As for your blood, I will claim it, like your souls: I will claim it from the hand of every animal, I will claim the soul of man from the hand of man, from the hand of each his brother's soul. He who sheds the blood of man, his blood through man will be shed, for in the image of Elohim Elohim made man. As for you, be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and have authority over it." (N.T)].

21. Genesis IX, 22.

for what the covenant proposes or promises. Such a secret does not have the sense of a thing to hide, as Kierkegaard seems to suggest. In the ordeal to which God will subject Abraham, through the impossible order (for which both must, in a certain way, be forgiven), through the interruption of the sacrifice that still looks like a grace, a reward for the kept secret, fidelity to the implicitly requested secret does not essentially concern the content of something to hide (the order of sacrifice, etc.), but the pure uniqueness of face-to-face with God, the secret of this absolute relationship. It is a secret with no content, no meaning to hide, no secret other than the very request of secrecy, namely absolute exclusivity of the relationship between the one who calls and the one who answers "Here I am": the condition of the call and the answer, if there is one, and that it be pure. There is, therefore, nothing else sacred in the world for Abraham, for he is ready to sacrifice everything. This ordeal would thus be a kind of absolute desacralization of the world. As there is also no content to the secret itself, one cannot even say that the secret to be kept is sacred, the only sacredness that remains. Strictly speaking, it can be called "holy" (in the sense of "separated"), but not sacred. (If literature, the modern thing that legitimately bears that name, "desacralizes" or "secularizes" the Scriptures, holy or sacred Scripture, then it repeats, laying it bare and in the world, delivering it to the world, the sacrifice of Isaac). As if God were saying to Abraham: you will not speak of him to anyone, not so that no one will know (and, in fact, it is not a matter of knowing), but so that there are no third parties among us, none of what Kierkegaard will call the generality of ethical, political or legal. Let there be no third party among us, no generality, no calculable knowledge, no conditional deliberation, no hypothesis, no hypothetical imperative, so that the alliance is absolutely and absolutely

unique in the act of election. You will commit to not opening up to anyone. (It would be said today: you will not trust anyone, you will not trust any member of your family, you will not open up to your loved ones, or to those close to you, or to friends, whether they are the closest of those close to you, you he will not let his absolute confidants, nor his confessor, and above all not his psychoanalyst suspect anything). If you did, you would betray, you would perjure, you would betray the absolute allegiance between us. And you will be faithful, be it, at all costs, in the worst moment of the worst trial, even if you must, for that purpose, condemn to death the one who is dearest in the world to you, your son, that is, in truth, the future itself, the promise of the promise. For this request to have the sense of a trial, Isaac's condemnation to death must not be the true object of the divine injunction. What interest would God have, moreover, in the death of this child, were it to be offered in sacrifice? He will never have said it or wanted to say it. Isaac's death sentence then becomes an even more monstrous eventuality, as secondary. In any case, it is no longer the thing to hide, the contents of a secret to be saved. She doesn't make any sense. And everything will be suspended to this suspension of meaning. The injunction, the order, the request of God, his imperious prayer is not addressed, to put it to the test of an absolutely singular appeal, but to the resistance of Abraham. Only his determination is at stake, his passive-and-active commitment to not-being-able-to-mean, to keeping a secret even under the worst conditions, therefore, unconditionally. To enter into an unconditionally unique covenant with God. Simply to respond, in a responsible manner, to a co-responsibility compromised by the appeal. It is the ordeal of unconditionality in love, namely, in the sworn faith between two absolute singularities.

For that, it is necessary that nothing is said and that all this, deep down, in the bottomless depth of this bottom, does not mean anything. "Sorry for not wanting to say...". In short, it would be necessary the secret to be kept is basically without object, without any object other than the unconditionally unique covenant, the mad love between God, Abraham and the one who descends from him. Your son and his name.

With the one who descends from him, however, the uniqueness is sealed, but necessarily betrayed by the inheritance that confirms, reads and translates the covenant. By the will itself.

What would literature have to do with the testamentary secrecy of this "pardon for not wanting to say...", with the inheritance of this promise and this betrayal, with the perjury that haunts this oath? What would literature have to do with a pardon for the kept secret that could be a "sorry for not wanting to say..."? In other words, where does literature descend from Abraham, both to inherit and to betray? And to apologize for perjury? "Sorry for not wanting to say...". Is literature this forgiveness asked for the desacralization, others would say religiously the secularization of a holy revelation? A pardon asked for the betrayal of the holy origin of pardon itself?

Since literature (in the strict sense: as a modern Western institution), implies in principle the right to say everything and to hide everything, as it is inseparable from a democracy to come;

Since the supposedly fictitious structure of every work exempts the signatory from responsibility, before political or civic law, for the meaning and referent (of what it means and aims at, displays or encrypts the inside of its text, which can always, then,, not stopping to establish any meaning or referent, not wanting to say anything), while at the same

time increasing to infinity his responsibility for the singular event that constitutes each work (null and infinite responsibility, like that of Abraham);

Since the secrets or effects of secrets encrypted in such a literary event do not have to respond or correspond to some meaning or reality in the world and that they invoke a suspension in that respect (not the suspension of reference, but the suspension, the placement between parentheses or between quotation marks of the thesis of the determined meaning or the real referent, of their interruption; hence the properly phenomenological, therefore, meteoric virtue of the literary phenomenon);

Since literature is the place of all these secrets without secrets, of all these depthless crypts, without any other background than the abyss of appeal or address, without any other law than the singularity of the event, the work;

Since this literary right to fiction presupposes a story that establishes a *authorization* (the status of a author irresponsible and hyperresponsible) to the performative decision to produce events that, as language acts, are both addresses and responses;

Since the advent of this right implies an indissoluble alliance between an extreme autonomy (the democratic freedom of each and every one, etc.) and an extreme heteronomy (this right is given and can be retaken, it is limited by the precarious border of the contract that delimits the literary based on criteria *external*: no sentence is literary in itself, nor does it reveal its "literality" during an analysis *internal*; it does not become literary, it only acquires its literary *function* according to context and convention, that is, from non-literary powers);

Therefore, literature certainly inherits a holy history whose Abrahamic moment

remains the essential secret (and who will deny that literature remains a remnant of religion, a connection and a trace of sacred sanctity in a society without God?), but it denies also this history, this belonging, this heritage. She denies this filiation. She betrays her in the double sense of the word: she is unfaithful to her, she breaks with her at the very moment of manifesting her “truth” and revealing her secret. Namely, his own affiliation: possible impossible. This “truth” is only on the condition of a renegade whose ligature of Isaac already implied the possibility.

From this double betrayal, literature can only ask for forgiveness. There is no literature that cannot, right in its first word, forgive. In the beginning, there was forgiveness. For nothing. Not to mean anything.

We interrupted here at the moment when God *swears*. Suspending the sacrifice himself, despatching his angel to a second address, he cries out, he calls Abraham and swears. But he only *swears* before himself, he says it, he confesses it or claims it. How could he have done otherwise? Could he mean anything other than this tautology which means nothing?

In that instant, but from this single instant onwards, autonomy and heteronomy are nothing more than One, yes, (no) more than One.

“The angel of Yahweh called Abraham a second time from the highest heaven and said: ‘By Myself I have sworn – oracle of Yahweh – that since you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only one, I will bless you and I will multiply your race like the

stars of the heavens and like the sand that is on the sea coast, so that your race will occupy the gate of your enemies”.²²

“The messenger of YahvH shouts to Abraham/a second time from heaven./ He says: ‘I swear it by myself, harangue of Yahweh:/yes, since you have fulfilled this speech/and have not spared your son, your only one, /yes, I will bless him, I will bless him,/I will multiply his seed,/like the stars of the heavens, like the sand on the seashore:/ his seed will inherit the gate of his enemies”.²³

22. Genesis XXII, 15-17, tr. E. Dhormes. (Grifos meus). [no original: “The Angel of Yahweh called Abraham a second time from heaven and said: ‘By myself I have sworn – oracle of Yahweh – that since you have done this thing and you have not refused your son, your only son, I will bless you and multiply your descendants like the stars of the heavens and like the sand that is on the shore of the sea, so that your descendants will occupy the Gate of their enemies.” (N.T)].

23. Ibid., tr. A. Chouraqui. (Grifos meus). [no original: “The messenger of IhvH cries out to Abraham/a second time from the heavens./He says: ‘I swear by me, harangue of IhvH:/yes, since you have made this word/and have not spared your son, your only son,/yes, I will bless you, I will bless you,/I will multiply your seed,/like the stars of the skies, like sand, on the lip of the sea:/your seed shall inherit the gate of its enemies’. (N.T)].

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