

INACTION AS THEME AND STRUCTURE IN DOSTOYEVSKY'S "NOTES FROM
UNDERGROUND" AND MELVILLE'S "BARTLEBY, THE SCRIVENER"

by
ERGİN ÇENEBAŞI

Submitted to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Sabancı University
Spring 2010

IN ACTION AS THEME AND STRUCTURE IN DOSTOYEVSKY'S "NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND" AND MELVILLE'S "BARTLEBY, THE SCRIVENER"

APPROVED BY:

Prof. Dr. Sibel Irzık
(Thesis Supervisor)

Assist. Prof. Dr. Hülya Adak

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Lamia Gülçur

DATE OF APPROVAL:

© Ergin Çenebaşı 2010

All rights reserved

Abstract

INACTION AS THEME AND STRUCTURE IN DOSTOYEVSKY'S "NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND" AND MELVILLE'S "BARTLEBY, THE SCRIVENER"

Ergin Çenebaşı

Cultural Studies, MA Thesis, 2010

Prof. Sibel Irzık, Thesis Supervisor

Keywords: inaction, resentment, acedia, potentiality, modern criticism

This study aims to reveal the significance of inaction on both thematic and structural levels in Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener" and Dostoyevsky's "Notes from Underground". It explores the ways in which inertia, as the dominant theme of both works, affects the responses of readers and critics. It focuses primarily on the bipolarity inherent in the concept of inaction, which brings binary opposites together. Drawing on the key terms acedia, resentment and potentiality, it examines various causes and consequences of this bipolarity with a special emphasis on its anti-dialectical nature. Posing inaction as the problem not only of the protagonists, but also of the readers and critics, this study underlines the correspondence between theme and structure which characterizes both works. Although it identifies inaction as the main commonality between the two short novels, it points out the fundamental differences separating the ways in which inaction functions within each work.

Özet

DOSTOYEVSKI’NİN “YERALTINDAN NOTLAR” VE MELVILLE’ İN “KÂTİP BARTLEBY” ESERLERİNDE TEMA VE YAPI OLARAK EYLEMSİZLİK

Ergin Çenebaşı

Kültürel Çalışmalar, MA Tezi, 2010

Prof. Sibel Irzık, Tez Danışmanı

Anahtar Sözcükler: eylemsizlik, ressentiment, akedia, potansiyel, modern eleştiri

Bu çalışma, Melville’in “Kâtip Bartleby” ve Dostoyevski’nin “Yeraltından Notlar” eserlerinde eylemsizliğin tematik ve yapısal düzeydeki önemini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. İki eserde de baskın tema olan eylemsizliğin, okurların ve eleştirmenlerin tepkilerini nasıl etkilediğini incelemektedir. Öncelikle, ikili karşıtlıkları bir araya getiren eylemsizlik kavramına özgü çift kutupluluğa odaklanmaktadır. Anahtar terimler akedia, ressentiment ve potansiyelden yola çıkarak, bu çift kutupluluğun nedenleri ve sonuçları, diyalektik karşıtı doğasına yapılan özel bir vurgu ile incelenmektedir. Eylemsizliği sadece kahramanların değil aynı zamanda okurların ve eleştirmenlerin de bir problemi olarak ortaya koymak suretiyle bu çalışma, iki eseri de tanımlayan tema ve yapı uyuşmasının altını çizmektedir. Eylemsizliği iki kısa romanın başlıca ortak noktası olarak tanımlasa da onun her bir eserde ayrı bir şekilde işlenmesini sağlayan temel farklılıklara dikkat çekmektedir.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
1. INTRODUCTION– ACEDIA: THE COMMON INFLICTION THAT BEFALLS BOTH LITERATURE AND CRITICISM	1
2. “NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND”: THE INACTION OF RESENTMENT.....	9
1. Polyphonic Novel and the Whirlpool of Inaction.....	11
2. Resentment and Triangular Desire.....	24
3. Bernstein and the Saturnalian Dialogue.....	34
4. Nietzschean Resentment.....	42
3. BARTLEBY AND THE QUESTION OF SUBVERSIVE INACTION.....	55
1. Potentiality and the Politics of Inaction.....	58
2. Bartleby: Is he a Nihilist or the Overman.....	65
3. Bartleby: The Point of Indistinction between Subversion and Submission.....	74
4. CONCLUSION.....	80
5. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	85

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CC: The Coming Community

ECC: Essays Critical and Clinical

HS: Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life

NP: Nietzsche and Philosophy

P: Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy

S: Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture

1. INTRODUCTION– ACEDIA: THE COMMON INFLECTION THAT BEFALLS BOTH LITERATURE AND CRITICISM

*Nowhere do I find rest, I must ever quarrel
with myself. I sit, I lie, I stand, but am always
in thought.*

Andreas Tschering: *Melancholy speaks herself*

Acedia is a concept that dates back to medieval ages. It is the former and less demonized form of sloth, one of the seven deadly sins. In medieval times it was used to refer to the disease that befell monks who led solitary lives closed in their cells. Although it is a medieval concept, its roots can be found in humoral theory of ancient Greek. It is related to the black bile which is responsible for melancholy and sadness. It is also possible to find its traces in our modern day in psychological diseases such as depression. Although in time acedia suffered some changes in meaning that turned it into sloth, a deadly sin, and then depression of our time, it also carries a positive meaning. Originally acedia had both a negative meaning for being a deadly sin and a positive one for a way to reach salvation. Acedia manifests this ambiguous and essentially contradictory original meaning in Dostoyevsky's short novel "Notes from Underground" and in Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener". It is exactly this essential ambiguity stemming from acedia that locks all readers, all readings and all theories of the two works in an eternally contradictory circle. Thus, I will at first turn to acedia in order to draw the outer frame within which I will set the two exceptional works. The dominance of this theme in the modern literature will also prove that despite the changes acedia have undergone through centuries, it still preserves its importance in modern times. Moreover, it will serve as the cipher not only for the readings but also for the criticisms of these works of literature which present inert characters.

The medieval concept acedia will be the primary focus mainly because through this concept the bipolarity pertaining to inaction can be easily revealed. Like acedia which holds binary opposites such as salvation and damnation, creative contemplation and useless wandering of the mind, inaction of Bartleby and Underground Man seems to

oscillate between positive and negative values. Although the general tendency among critics is to evaluate these two inert heroes either as glorious rebels or apathetic monsters, a more detailed reading of their accounts reveals that their claims also reflect this bipolarity instead of reducing it to one positive or negative conclusion. Therefore it seems that only the criticisms that embrace this double bind at the expense of falling into contradictions manage to make sense of the ambiguities that dominate the two novellas. However, since the works themselves push the readers and critics into contradictory positions which mirror their own, readers and critics find themselves in the same situation with the heroes. Therefore the inaction which originally resides in the work spreads out of it inflicting the readers and critics. This is a clear sign of the fact that inaction is not limited to the theme of these works; it also has a structural bind. In this thesis my primary aim will be to demonstrate that both in “Notes from Underground” and “Bartleby, the Scrivener” inaction appears in not only thematic, but also structural levels and its appearance in both levels depends on a double bind of opposite values which never leads to any sort of synthesis.

Acedia is a term that comes from an ancient Greek word meaning “noncaring state” (Radden 69). However, in the middle ages the monks called it “noonday demon,” the name of the psychological distress that befalls the monk especially at noon. This curse is sometimes seen as more dangerous than the plague in the eyes of these people who lead solitary lives and rarely leave their cells, because the noonday demon distances them from God. John Cassian, an influential Christian monk who lived in fourth century, defines this unfortunate state in the following way:

And when this has taken possession of some unhappy soul, it produces dislike of the place, disgust with the cell, and disdain and contempt of the brethren who dwell with him or at a little distance, as if they were careless or unspiritual. It also makes the man lazy and sluggish about all manner of work which has to be done within the enclosure of his dormitory. It does not suffer him to stay in his cell, or to take any pains about reading, and he often groans because he can do no good while he stays there, and complains and sighs because he can bear no spiritual fruit so long as he is joined to that society. (Radden 71-72)

Although acedia has various definitions each of which differs slightly from the others, “lassitude, weariness, inaction, carelessness and neglect were all aspects of acedia to varying degrees in various instances” (qtd. in Radden 71).

Even though various parallelisms can be drawn between acedia and the protagonists of “Notes from Underground” and “Bartleby, the Scrivener”, the clearest connections can be found in the list of sloth’s daughters (*filiae acediae*), which is prepared by

medieval church fathers. Most of the elements in this list can be used to define either Underground Man or Bartleby. Giorgio Agamben explains the elements in the list one by one:

In the first place there is *malitia* (malice, ill will), the ambiguous and unstoppable love-hate for good in itself, and *rancor* (resentment), the revolt of bad conscience against those who exhort it to good; *pusillanimitas*, the “small soul” and the scruple that withdraws crestfallen before difficulty and the effort of spiritual existence; *desperatio*, the dark and presumptuous certainty of being condemned beforehand and the complacent sinking into one’s own destruction, as if nothing, least of all divine grace, could provide salvation; *torpor*, the obtuse and somnolent stupor that paralyzes any gesture that might heal us; and finally, *evagatio mentis* (wandering of the mind) the flight of the will before itself and the restless hastening from fantasy to fantasy. (S 5)

All the elements here could be used to define Underground Man, but only *desperatio* and *torpor* seem to be suitable for Bartleby. *Malitia* and *rancor* are two dominant traits of Underground Man because he is a man of resentment. For him every excitation is painful even the most beautiful ones. Unlike Underground Man, Bartleby does not suffer from either *malitia* or *rancor* because of his innocence. However, *desperatio* and *torpor* can be used to define both since Underground Man and Bartleby “sink into their own destruction” and both seem to suffer from a different kind of paralysis. The fact that there are more elements to define Underground Man does not mean that acedia is more suitable for Underground Man than Bartleby. The reason for this imbalance stems from the fact that the list was only describing the negative aspects of acedia. Agamben claims that the term acedia has been emptied of its original meaning and reduced to what we now call laziness and unwillingness (S 5). However, acedia was originally not based on laziness, but on sadness and it is this special kind of sadness that has a positive connotation for church fathers. “According to Saint Thomas,” Agamben says,

sloth was, in fact, a *species tristitiae* (kind of sorrow), and more exactly, sadness with regard to the essential spiritual good of man, that is, to the particular spiritual dignity that had been conferred on him by God. What afflicts the slothful is not, therefore, the awareness of an evil, but on the contrary, the contemplation of the greatest of goods: *acedia* is precisely the vertiginous and frightened withdrawal (*recessus*) when faced with the task implied by the place of man before God”

(S 5).

Agamben claims that introducing saving sorrow (*tristitia salutifera*) next to deadly sorrow (*tristitia mortifera*), the church fathers effected a dialectical inversion. This dialectic arises from the “fundamental ambiguity” lying at the heart of acedia: “*it is the perversion of a will that wants the object, but not the way that leads to it, and which*

simultaneously desires and bars the path to his or her own desire” (Agamben, *S* 6). As a result of this dialectic, a link between the object of desire and the slothful subject is secured. With its deadly aspect that may cause destruction, acedia also offers a way towards salvation. Moreover it can also lead one to wisdom: “Insofar as his or her tortuous intentions open a space for the epiphany of the unobtainable, the slothful testifies to the obscure wisdom according to which hope has been given only for the hopeless, goals only for those who will always be unable to reach them” (Agamben, *S* 7).

If we turn back to the close relationship between acedia and melancholia, the positive value attributed to acedia becomes less surprising. Walter Benjamin also emphasizes the dialectic that underlies melancholia: “The gloomy conception of melancholy is not of course the original way of seeing it. In antiquity it was, rather, seen in a dialectical way” (147). Benjamin refers to Aristotle as the example of this dialectical way of seeing melancholia. Asking “[w]hy is it that all men who have become outstanding in philosophy, statesmanship, poetry or the arts are melancholic?” Aristotle attributes a positive value to melancholy, but he also mentions that it can lead to madness (155). Although Agamben says that it is not possible to clearly point out the period when acedia and melancholy merged, he claims that “[t]his reciprocal penetration of sloth and melancholy maintained intact their double polarity in the idea of a mortal risk latent in the noblest of human intentions, or the possibility of salvation hidden in the greatest danger” (*S* 13-14).

The dialectic structure of melancholia is also revealed in Max Pensky’s analysis of Walter Benjamin. Pensky argues that “[m]elancholy appears under the dialectic of illness and empowerment” (21). In addition, he maintains that this is not the only pair that melancholy brings together. It is also “a dialectic of genius and illness, of spiritual empowerment and paralytic sadness, of subjective intensification and absorption into the realm of objects” (Pensky 21). Pensky turns to Freud in order to elaborate on this dialectic of illness and empowerment. He quotes a passage from “Mourning and Melancholia” where Freud argues that the melancholic is closer to truth especially in his self-accusations:

He also seems to us justified in certain other self-accusations; it is merely that he has a keener eye for the truth than other people who are not melancholic. When in his heightened self-criticism he describes himself as petty, egoistic, dishonest, lacking in independence, one whose sole aim has been to hide the weaknesses of his own nature, it may be, so far as we know, that he has come pretty near to

understanding himself; we only wonder why a man has to be ill before he can be accessible to a truth of this kind. (Freud 246)

This positive aspect of heightened self-criticism, which reveals the truth about one's self no matter how distasteful it is, can be observed in *Underground Man*. As we will develop on this issue later on, Bakhtin also refers to the benefits of self-consciousness as the artistic dominant in the novelistic structure and he considers "Notes from Underground" as the most successful representative of this technique.

Pensky sustains that the sociology of melancholia is defined by two elements: "solitude and the inability to act" (33). As for the first element—solitude—Pensky says, "[m]elancholy isolates; conversely, the enforced isolation from social institutions and practices produces both melancholy sadness and the alienation necessary to gain a critical insight into the structure of society itself" (33). This isolated position of the melancholic makes him/her a rebel who contradicts society's givens. Pensky refers to two sociologists, Robert Merton and Wolf Lepenies, who consider melancholia as a special kind of social rebellion. However, Pensky emphasizes that Lepenies' adaptation of Merton's ideas is based on "retreatism" a specific form of rebellion in which "the supreme value of the success-goal has not yet been renounced' although the possibility of its attainment has vanished, and the ability for instrumental action is thus repressed" (254). Since the melancholic experiences the social order as "suffocating", he falls into imaginary or concrete helplessness and despair when he is confronted with society: "The melancholic's rebellion is therefore a passive one" (Pensky 34). Because s/he thinks that all the ways that lead to action are foreclosed, "the melancholic rebel recedes into a resigned interiority, brooding over the very conditions of the impossibility of action themselves" (Pensky 34). This is the position of *Underground Man*, who is convinced that there remains no way leading to effective action, and who only reflects on the issue of the impossibility of action. Moreover, *Bartleby's* utter inaction can also be regarded as a retreat since he may also be said to believe that there is no meaning in action at all. Pensky refers to *acedia* as the "melancholic's indifference and paralysis" and maintains that there is an ambiguity concerning the issue whether this is an enforced inaction or a personal retreat. Pensky seems to posit this issue as a chicken-egg problem. Although the inaction of the subject can derive from the concrete social conditions, subject's pessimistic viewpoint or his indecisiveness which renders all possible ways for action impossible can also be the underlying reason (Pensky 35). The same ambiguity also depicts the inertia of *Underground Man* and *Bartleby*. We do not know whether

their inaction stems from a personal choice or from social conditions that put them into an inevitable position. For example Underground Man seems to descend into the underground after several attempts to blend in the society. Although he states that it was his decision to choose the underground, the case could be just the opposite. We know that Underground Man's former schoolmates hate him as much as he hates them. Therefore Underground Man cannot be the only one to be held responsible for his utter isolation. Moreover Bartleby's preferences might also have been influenced by his former job as a clerk in Dead Letter Office. Bearing witness to the process of burning the letters that could have led to happiness or sorrow, Bartleby might have reached the conclusion that it is futile to write anyway. Another reason for Bartleby's total inaction can be the constant attempts of his employer to make him do certain things other than his own job which is copying. However, these are only possible reasons and it always remains ambiguous whether Bartleby's inaction is enforced or not.

Acedia seems to be a disease that inflicts not only the heroes of the literary works, but also critics and readers. Even though criticisms concerning the Underground Man and Bartleby are either generally positive or generally negative, they are full of contradictory claims which bring their approaches to a standstill. The inevitability of contradictory positions with regard to both works is based on two reasons.

In the "Notes from Underground" the critic and the reader cannot penetrate the text, since all the possible positions have already been anticipated by Underground Man. These anticipations foreclose Underground Man's own actions because he closes off all the possibilities of action in order to make sure that others will not make any claims about him. This is a very demanding strategy, but this kind of thinking also belongs to the tradition of acedia. What makes Underground Man anticipate the possible reactions is his heightened self-criticism which is an important symptom of melancholia. Therefore the reader or the critic is inflicted with acedia when s/he realizes that all the possible ways of interpretation are foreclosed beforehand.

In "Bartleby", acedia of the hero is transmitted through utter inaction. Unlike Underground Man who forecloses his own possibilities for action in order to anticipate the reaction of others, Bartleby prefers not to do anything and utters almost nothing other than his formula: "I would prefer not to". This total inaction and the absence of any kind of clue for his insistence on remaining immobile open an immense potentiality for the critic. But this time the critic cannot avoid contradiction since every second claim is doomed to contradiction due to the difficulty of interpreting non-action. The

attempt to find a position where all positions have already been taken is as impossible as the attempt to create a position where none exists. The only way to approach “Bartleby” therefore passes through contradiction. Bartleby is a character that is inflicted with acedia therefore he embodies conflicting traits. The dialectical structure of acedia, which brings together the hope of salvation and the deadliest of the sins, makes it impossible to approach Bartleby from a non-contradictory perspective. Hence the criticisms always oscillate between positive and negative aspects.

This thesis is based on the analysis of inactive characters whose inaction spreads to their interpretations. The main reason for such an analysis is that this peculiar kind of inaction is a highly modern phenomenon. Ressentiment, which will be one of our leading concepts in the analysis of “Notes from Underground”, is an important connection that links the long tradition of melancholia to modernity. Ressentiment can be summarized as “imaginary revenge” of those who cannot properly act out their reaction. Max Scheler, in his book “*Ressentiment*”, which was published in 1912, notes that “perhaps the German word ‘Groll’ (rancor) comes closest to the essential meaning of the term. ‘Rancor’ is just such a suppressed wrath, independent of the ego’s activity, which moves obscurely through the mind” (27). As it has been pointed out above, rancor is one of the daughters of acedia. In the same book Scheler maintains that resentment must be strongest “in a society like ours”

where approximately equal rights (political and otherwise) or formal social equality, publicly recognized, go hand in hand with wide factual differences in power, property, and education. While each has the “right” to compare himself with everyone else, he cannot do so in fact. Quite independently of the characters and experiences of individuals, a potent charge of resentment is here accumulated by the very structure of society. (34)

Therefore the main concept of our analysis of “Notes from Underground” is indeed a very modern concept that lies at the very heart of the problems of our time. Moreover, Michael André Bernstein’s analysis, which connects the tradition of Saturnalian dialogue with charismatic murderers like Charles Manson through resentment-ridden Underground Man, reveals another aspect of resentment in today’s society.

Bartleby is another character that seems to address some important issues of modernity in that he serves as a rich source of inspiration for contemporary European philosophers. Agamben, Deleuze, Žižek, Blanchot and Derrida are among these philosophers who seem to be fascinated with this inactive character. Most of these

leading figures of continental philosophy regard *Bartleby* either as a real alternative against sovereign ideology or the new Christ, a new Messiah.

Either as a new alternative of resistance or a key to the truth of modernity, inaction seems to play an important role in modern man's life. However, the significance of inaction and its subversive power can only be understood through such limit figures as *Underground Man* and *Bartleby*. The analysis of the ambiguous nature of inaction in these works will therefore reveal some important issues about modernity.

Finally, this thesis also questions the nature of the critical methods which are used to analyze these works. The aim of this questioning is to find satisfactory answers for the immobility that is transferred from the literary work to the criticism. Agamben defines criticism as "the enjoyment of what cannot be possessed and the possession of what cannot be enjoyed" (*S* xvii). This thesis will also test the applicability of this formulation to the criticisms in question.

2. “NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND”: THE INACTION OF RESENTMENT

“Notes from Underground”, published in 1864, first appeared in Dostoyevsky’s own journal *Epokha* (*Epoch*). The novel consisted of two parts each of which was published separately in the two issues of the journal. Critics seem to have a general agreement about the special position of the novel within Dostoyevsky’s art. This peculiarity attributed to the book stems from its borderline characteristic separating Dostoyevsky’s mature works from the former ones. In this sense “Notes from Underground” is believed to bear the seeds of masterpieces such as *Crime and Punishment*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *The Idiot* and *The Devils*. Moreover another common tendency among critics with regard to the novel is to see it as a fervent criticism of Enlightenment values, Romanticism, Idealism and Russian socialist movements which characterize nineteenth century political and social environment in Russia and Europe in general. Considering the fiery disposition of its protagonist, it is not very difficult to agree with this approach. However, under a closer scrutiny, it becomes apparent that the novel warns its readers in advance against such simple interpretations. Many well-known critics have written about Dostoyevsky and most of them have also focused on “Notes from Underground”. Together with many orthodox criticisms, this provocative character of the novel also took the attention of such respected figures of literary criticism as Mikhail Bakhtin and René Girard who tried to analyze it in their own ways. Even though all these criticisms, comprehensive or not, have tried their best to analyze the short novel as completely as possible, there still remains a lot to be said about it and this is another proof that the novel is indeed inexhaustible.

This inexhaustible nature of the novel does not discourage other critics; on the contrary, it encourages them to provide new perspectives from which it becomes possible to see the unexplored aspects of it. However, the criticisms are generally based on partial or complete refutation of previous analyses. The origin of such general disposition can be traced back to the work itself. Like the Underground Man, who constantly criticizes other people and the dominant social, moral and political values, the critics also spend a considerable part of their effort to criticize other criticisms of the novel. It is not hard to see the negative implications of this kind of criticism, yet the controversial structure of the novel and the contradictory remarks of the protagonist make it almost impossible to avoid reacting to other interpretations. Nevertheless such

reactions cannot always be said to be unfruitful. If the structure of the book also demands, indeed provokes, such reactive criticism and aims at creating a discussion among as many parties as possible, what remains is to give in to this provocation, bearing in mind the dangers that it entails.

My way into this grand discussion on the “Notes from Underground” will be based mainly on the issue of inaction. I will turn to Girard’s and Bakhtin’s analyses since their criticisms reflect the convergence of the thematic problems of inaction into structural ones. The claims of two well-known critics seems to mirror Underground Man’s in that they follow a circular path that forecloses any kind of forward movement. Even though their criticisms pose Underground Man as the ultimate figure of self-consciousness and contradictions, their own accounts come to mirror Underground Man’s whenever they attempt to explain his contradictory statements. They both seem to agree that there is hardly anything that can be said about Underground Man that he does not know, but they still come up with arguments about his desires and his polyphonic dialogues with his imaginary readers. In the end, both Bakhtin and Girard cannot escape from being turned into two of these imaginary interlocutors by Underground Man. In other words, their claims seem to have already been anticipated and discarded by Underground Man. However, this does not mean that their criticisms are completely meaningless. On the contrary, it is only through being one of those imaginary interlocutors and falling into contradictions that Underground Man’s ambiguous arguments and above all his inertia can be understood. Underground Man’s account not only pushes the readers and critics into the role of his imaginary interlocutors, but it also makes them mirror his own position. The problem here is not that there is no way out from this double bind that Underground Man entraps his readers. On the contrary, the problem here is to try to escape from this entrapment, in order to come up with clear cut arguments about Underground Man by referring to his deranged psyche, his alienated life and other anomalies that surround him. Such consistent arguments are the ones to be crushed on the spot by Underground Man’s most ruthless criticisms. Therefore “Notes from Underground” appears as a text which resists interpretations that attempt to explain its ambiguities from outside without establishing a contact with it as one of the interlocutors. Although this is the same argument that Bakhtin makes when he claims that the only way to approach this text is to address it in a dialogic way, that is; as if speaking to person in a dialogue since Underground Man addresses his readers directly (he always uses second person pronouns: you, your, yours), he never mentions the

possible problems that may entail this kind of response. In the following I will argue that the ultimate consequence of addressing the text directly as one of the imaginary interlocutors of *Underground Man* is inertia. This inertia, like *Underground Man*'s inertia, stems from the heightened self-consciousness that derives from the reader's or the critic's attempt to take a position that has not already been anticipated by *Underground Man*. Although this attempt is doomed to failure, it is still the only way to gain a truer insight of the text as opposed to the mainstream approaches that reduce the text to simple propositions.

Michael André Bernstein's book *Bitter Carnival: Ressentiment and the Abject Hero* will also be one of my leading references regarding the concept of ressentiment. Since I will base my analysis on the issue of inaction, ressentiment will be of crucial importance and a key concept in my discussion. Therefore I will also refer to Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* where he elaborates on the concept of ressentiment. Furthermore Deleuze's book *Nietzsche and Philosophy* will be another important reference, especially for establishing the relationship between ressentiment and inaction.

1. Polyphonic Novel and the Whirlpool of Inaction

In his comprehensive work *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin defines Dostoyevsky as a revolutionary figure whose particular style shook the foundations of the European novel and led to fundamental changes. What is emphasized again and again throughout his study of Dostoyevsky's art is its revolutionizing advent of polyphony: "A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels" (Bakhtin 6). Apart from polyphony, Bakhtin also emphasizes the point that Dostoyevsky's heroes and his novels are unfinalizable. In other words, unlike the mainstream European novel before Dostoyevsky, the Russian novelist never finalizes his novels and his heroes by using them as means to give a message. Bakhtin believes that there are no such full-fledged points in Dostoyevsky's novels, on the contrary Dostoyevsky's novels are the battleground of these opposing ideas none of which are held as nobler over others. According to Bakhtin this is the case in "Notes from

Underground” which is the work he believes to be one of the best representatives of Dostoyevskian unfinalizability and polyphony. In this part I will argue that even though the polyphony and unfinalizability are good at work in Underground Man’s account, they form a kind of whirlpool of inaction which draws in not only Underground Man himself, but also the readers and the critics.

In Bakhtin’s eyes this polyphony, which dominates all of Dostoyevsky’s novels, is a direct challenge to the monologic structure of the European novel. The European novel, until the advent of Dostoyevsky’s polyphonic novels, consisted of characters who were only the mouthpieces of their authors, in other words, objectified versions of author’s own discourse. However, according to Bakhtin, Dostoyevsky’s characters are not objects created and used by the author to reflect his own thoughts. They are “*subjects of their own directly signifying discourse*” (Bakhtin 7). The revolution effected by Dostoyevsky does not end here since the same structure can also be used in a monologic framework. The author may create a character who is the subject of his own discourse only to be crushed in the end by the author’s own discourse. In contrast to these subjugated discourses, the discourses of the characters in Dostoyevsky’s novels, Bakhtin claims, are not subordinated to the discourse of the author. Both hero’s discourse and the author’s have equal validity. This equal validity of the discourses and the status of equal subject conferred upon the hero by the author make the hero’s consciousness independent. Therefore according to Bakhtin, the hero in Dostoyevsky’s novels enjoys a freedom which has never been experienced by the characters of monologic novels. However, this revolutionary and ground-breaking structure, whose discovery Bakhtin attributes to Dostoyevsky, involves some contradictory points which concentrate on the issue of the independence and the freedom of the character. “This astonishing internal independence of Dostoyevsky’s characters,” Bakhtin says,

is achieved by specific artistic means. It is above all due to the freedom and independence characters possess, in the very structure of the novel, vis-a-vis the author— or, more accurately, their freedom vis-a-vis the usual externalizing and finalizing authorial definitions. This does not mean, of course, that a character simply falls out of the author's design. No, this independence and freedom of a character is precisely what is incorporated into the author's design. This design, as it were, predestines the character for freedom (a relative freedom, of course), and incorporates him as such into the strict and carefully calculated plan of the whole.
(13)

As it has been reformulated above, this freedom the character enjoys is conferred upon him by the author within the structure of the novel. Therefore, as Bakhtin claims, we

can only speak of a relative freedom. The contradiction in this formulation can best be expressed through these questions: How can equal validity of discourses be maintained between two parties, one of whom provides the freedom of the other? If the freedom conferred upon the character can only be relative, is it really possible to expect an equal relationship between the author and the hero? Obviously these questions are only a part of a huge debate between structuralists and post-structuralists. However, these questions gain extra importance especially when we attempt to approach to “Notes from Underground” from a Bakhtinian perspective.

“Notes from Underground” appears for the first time in Bakhtin’s study in a long quotation he takes from L. P. Grossman, whom Bakhtin characterizes as one of the rare critics ever to have understood the true value of Dostoyevsky’s art. In this quotation Grossman underlines the parallelism between Dostoyevsky’s novels and the musical principle of polyphony:

Here Dostoevsky, with great subtlety, transfers onto the plane of literary composition the law of musical modulation from one tonality to another. The tale is built on the principle of artistic counterpoint. The psychological torment of the fallen girl in the second chapter corresponds to the insult received by her tormentor in the first, but at the same time, because of its meekness, its refusal to answer back in kind, her torment contradicts his feeling of wounded and embittered self-love. This is indeed point versus point (*punctum contra punctum*). These are different voices singing variously on a single theme. This is indeed “multivoicedness,” exposing the diversity of life and the great complexity of human experience. (qtd. in Bakhtin 42)

Bakhtin praises Grossman for not interpreting Dostoyevsky’s art like other critics who miss the most important characteristic of it: its polyphony. In this quotation, however, the main dialogic part of the text is omitted. In “Notes from Underground” it is possible to find several positions that contradict the hero’s discourse, but the most serious contradictions that almost reach the point of chronic conflicts take place within the hero. It is first and foremost the Underground Man himself that contradicts his own discourse. He is unstoppable. He makes a claim and after developing it with various supporting arguments he refutes it all of a sudden.

The short novel starts with the brief footnote by Dostoyevsky. This short passage is the only part where it is possible to hear a voice different from that of the Underground Man. Following this footnote the first chapter begins with Underground Man’s sharp tone saying “I’m a sick man... I’m a spiteful man” (Dostoyevsky 3). Then he goes on talking about the life that he led before he descended to the underground. He mentions his workplace and his position as a civil servant. He says that he had always been a

spiteful and rude civil servant. However, barely a page after this self depiction as a spiteful man, he says, “Well, I lied about myself just now when I said I was a spiteful civil servant. I lied out of spite. I was simply having a little fun with these petitioners and the officer, as in fact I could never really be spiteful” (Dostoyevsky 4). In the first two pages Underground Man contradicts what he has previously said at least two times. In the beginning he says that he is a spiteful man. Then he says that he is not a spiteful civil servant. He confesses that he has lied, but out of spite again. This means that the spiteful character that he assumed previously was a lie which was told because he was spiteful. This is a vicious circle that draws in everyone who happens to get close. This discussion has no end and this is the real polyphony dominating the whole novel. These contradictory remarks of Underground Man about himself set the tone of the work from the beginning.

Bakhtin returns to “Notes from Underground” in his discussion of the unfinalizability of Dostoyevsky’s heroes. Bakhtin maintains that Dostoyevsky’s heroes can be perceived as having contradictory, confused and imbalanced personalities by many critics who try to squeeze them into their monologic way of understanding. According to Bakhtin, this monologic perspective constantly tries to reduce the hero to a particular personality through its finalizing analysis. Before Dostoyevsky, the European novel fed this type of approaches with the heroes finalized by their creators to serve as their own mouthpieces. Therefore when confronted with Dostoyevsky’s unfinalizable heroes, this monologic perspective does not work. It either sees these characters as chaotic beings that are impossible to understand or reduces their dialogic personalities to monologic ones by focusing on only one of their manifold traits. Bakhtin believes that all heroes in Dostoyevsky’s novels resist these monologic interpretations that tend to finalize them. Dostoyevsky, as the creator of his heroes, not only does not finalize them unlike his predecessors did, but he also creates them in such a way that renders them unfinalizable by any other critic or reader. Self-consciousness of the heroes, Bakhtin claims, plays an important role in this process.

Self-consciousness, as the artistic dominant in the construction of the hero's image, is by itself sufficient to break down the monologic unity of an artistic world—but only on condition that the hero, as self-consciousness, is really represented and not merely expressed, that is, does not fuse with the author, does not become the mouthpiece for his voice; only on condition, consequently, that accents of the hero's self-consciousness are really objectified and that the work itself observes a distance between the hero and the author. (51)

Bakhtin gives an example from “Notes from Underground” for this particular use of self-consciousness in Dostoyevsky’s novels. Underground Man’s self-consciousness is mainly based on the anticipated reactions of others to his thoughts. Each time he asserts an idea, he provides a possible reaction that can be given against this idea. However, he does not stop there. He also thinks of a possible reaction to that reaction. Bakhtin quotes the passage where Underground Man tells his imagined readers that he would indeed prefer being a loafer to his current indefinite position: “It would mean that I was positively defined, it would mean that there was something to be said about me” (Dostoyevsky 17). Therefore in this way Underground Man implies that his inertia cannot be defined as laziness. Even laziness can be seen as a career and be used for definitive purposes whereas he cannot in any way be defined. Obviously this is also another reaction to finalization. His self-consciousness prevents all the attempts to define him. This is mainly because Underground Man constantly tries to anticipate all the possible responses of another person and he gives that response before anyone does. For example, due to his style, Underground Man’s account can easily be interpreted as a confession. Even though he criticizes other people and their ideas, he criticizes himself even more severely as if seeking repentance. In the third page he says, “So don’t you think, gentlemen, that I’m repenting of something to you, asking you to forgive me for something? I’m certain that’s what you think. But I assure you it’s all the same to me if that’s what you’re thinking...” (Dostoyevsky 5). This is the first anticipation in his account which is to be followed by many others. “You’re probably thinking, gentlemen, that I want to make you laugh. Well, there you’re mistaken too” he says on the same page again anticipating another reaction (Dostoyevsky 5). But his anticipations get more irritating for the reader since it seems like he is always one step ahead. He goes as far as to say, “I’m ready to bet that’s what you think”, although he again claims, “I’m completely indifferent to what you may think” (Dostoyevsky 11). The most irritating part for the reader can be the fact that he is almost always right in his anticipations. At the end of the first part he gives a reaction to another anticipated reaction of his readers:

But here you might start quibbling and ask: if you’re not counting on having any readers then why do you make such compacts with yourself - on paper, what’s more; that is to say, that you won’t be introducing any order or system, that you’ll just write down what you happen to remember, and so on and so on? Why are you explaining all this, why all these excuses?” (Dostoyevsky 36).

The response to these questions posed by him comes from himself again: “Well you just think” he says. But he does not close the chapter without providing some other reasons

for writing in a style which assumes readers even though he is quite resolved not to publish his notes. He says that maybe it is because he is simply a coward or because imagining some readers may make it easier for him to write in a more organized way. Although there can be thousands of reasons he says, “there’s something else”: “If it’s not for the public then couldn’t I very well commit everything to memory without putting pen to paper? Quite so; but it will turn out somehow grander on paper. There’s something inspirational about it, one can be more self-critical, and it makes for better style. Besides, perhaps by writing I shall find relief” (Dostoyevsky 37). Although these last words lose their importance after he declares as a final reason “lastly, I’m bored, I do nothing the whole time”, it is obvious that self-criticism is not a simple reason like others. He makes a separate room for it. It is “something else”. This disposition to anticipate and respond to the possible reactions to his ideas confirms Bakhtin’s thesis that self-consciousness, which is independent of the author’s discourse, is indeed enough to bring down the whole monologic structure. Bakhtin notes that Underground Man’s “consciousness of self lives by its unfinalizability, by its unclosedness and its indeterminacy” because “he also knows that all these definitions, prejudiced as well as objective, rest in his hands and he cannot finalize them precisely because he himself perceives them; he can go beyond their limits and can thus make them inadequate” (53).

This unfinalizability, Bakhtin claims, is maintained through the true representation of the idea in Dostoyevsky’s novels. Bakhtin believes that Dostoyevsky’s heroes do not represent certain real life social or psychological types. They are, indeed, the representations of ideas. Dostoyevsky’s distinguished ability to represent a *fully valid idea* depends on his peculiar understanding of idea. “The artistic representation of an idea” Bakhtin says, “is possible only when the idea is posed in terms beyond affirmation and repudiation, but at the same time not reduced to simple psychical experience deprived of any direct power to signify” (80). This binary opposition of affirmation and repudiation plus Bakhtin’s insistence on the point that a fully valid idea has to be beyond this opposition correspond to the double bind of acedia. As it has been explained in the introduction, acedia brings together completely opposite elements, but never implies a synthesis. At this point Bakhtin’s proposition concerning the truly dialogical representation of idea could only be achieved through a state of indecision which is to be followed by paralysis and inaction. As it is the case with Underground Man, Dostoyevsky cannot be said to reach a synthesis out of the many opposing ideas. Bakhtin believes that this constitutes both the weakness and superiority of Dostoyevsky:

Dostoevsky's extraordinary artistic capacity for seeing everything in coexistence and interaction is his greatest strength, but his greatest weakness as well. It made him deaf and dumb to a great many essential things; many aspects of reality could not enter his artistic field of vision. But on the other hand this capacity sharpened, and to an extreme degree, his perception in the cross-section of a given moment, and permitted him to see many and varied things where others saw one and the same thing. Where others saw a single thought, he was able to find and feel out two thoughts, a bifurcation; where others saw a single quality, he discovered in it the presence of a second and contradictory quality. Everything that seemed simple became, in his world, complex and multi-structured. In every voice he could hear two contending voices, in every expression a crack, and the readiness to go over immediately to another contradictory expression; in every gesture he detected confidence and lack of confidence simultaneously; he perceived the profound ambiguity, even multiple ambiguity, of every phenomenon. But none of these contradictions and bifurcations ever became dialectical, they were never set in motion along a temporal path or in an evolving sequence: they were, rather, spread out in one plane, as standing alongside or opposite one another, as consonant but not merging or as hopelessly contradictory, as an eternal harmony of unmerged voices or as their unceasing and irreconcilable quarrel. (30)

Bakhtin's negative ideas about the nature of dialectic are obvious here. He believes that "the unified, dialectically evolving spirit, understood in Hegelian terms, can give rise to nothing but a philosophical monologue" (26). At this point a parallel can be drawn between Bakhtin's anti-dialectic position and what Max Pinsky calls frozen dialectic. In his book *Melancholy Dialectics* Pinsky poses the structure of melancholy, which brings together opposites like genius and illness, spiritual empowerment and paralytic sadness, as frozen dialectic. As opposed to the Hegelian dialectic of absolute motion, frozen dialectic refers to a stasis that stems from the absence of a synthesis. In the same way, Bakhtin's hostility toward dialectic and his insistence on eternal dialogue without synthesis can also be interpreted as views that accord with the idea of frozen dialectic. However, as Bakhtin observes, this kind of anti-dialectical thinking leaves the thinking subject in a complete inaction. The fact that Dostoyevsky saw a bifurcation in every simple material that others saw only a singular trait prevents him from drawing a conclusion. His works always reflect ideas that are in conflict and he is never able to pick one out of it. The same situation can be observed in his characters as well. According to Bakhtin, in Dostoyevsky's novels, the heroes' points of view never coincide with the author's, simply because representing the idea itself, the hero does not have a monologic nature: "We could say that in Dostoevsky man transcends his "thingness" and becomes the "man in man" only by entering the pure and unfinalized realm of the idea, that is, only after he has become an unselfish man of the idea" (86). If

we approach *Underground Man* from this perspective we would see that his ideological discourse about the world coincides only with his discourse about himself (Bakhtin 79). *Underground Man* advocates the unfinalizability of man, maintaining that it is neither by the laws of nature nor by science that man can be calculated. This ideological discourse finds its reflection in *Underground Man*'s person. From the Bakhtinian perspective, he is no more than the idea itself. A fully valid idea, in Bakhtinian terms, has to be dialogic. As a typical Dostoyevskian hero, *Underground Man* also presents his ideas dialogically. He constantly refers to the possible reactions to his ideas, in addition; as a representation of a fully valid idea has to be, he is also unfinalizable. Therefore, like Dostoyevsky, *Underground Man* also sees a bifurcation in everything he looks at. These bifurcations prevent him from acting as they prevent Dostoyevsky from reaching a conclusion. However the chain does not end there. This anti-dialectic structure that leaves all bifurcations without a synthesis and even adds novel ambiguities to the already existing ones pushes the readers and critics to a similar position to Dostoyevsky's and *Underground Man*'s. Both readers and critics suffer from an inaction that stems from the absence of trails within the novel to reach a synthesis. In the end, critics and readers find themselves in the same inactive position with the author and the hero.

Later in his discussion of "Notes from *Underground*", Bakhtin maintains that *Underground Man* achieves this unfinalizability through the loopholes that he adds after each ideological position he takes (233). Bakhtin notes that this constant use of loopholes is a widespread form in Dostoyevsky. These loopholes that *Underground Man* turns to, following each assertion are closely related to his anticipations. *Underground Man* gains his unfinalizability through these loopholes. Bakhtin underlines this in his structural analysis of the work. He claims that *Underground Man* always tries to reserve the final word for himself. "This final word" Bakhtin says, "must express the hero's full independence from the views and words of the other person, his complete indifference to the other's opinion and the other's evaluation" (229). A good example to cite for the discussion of loopholes can be the part where *Underground Man* constructs and refutes his argument concerning human volition. The first part of his fervent and strong defense of volition against the laws of nature and the calculations of science ends with "the devil only knows what volition is" (Dostoyevsky 24). He begins the second part with an anticipation: "'Ha, ha, ha! Well, if you like, essentially there's no such thing as volition!' you interrupt with your guffaws"

(Dostoyevsky 24). He again refutes this imagined reaction in the following part of his discussion by claiming that the day science discovers the laws governing our desires and develops a mathematical formula out of it, is the last day for mankind, “[b]ecause what is a man without his volition but a stop on a barrel-organ cylinder?” (Dostoyevsky 27) His well-developed argument based on this impossibility of desiring according to numbers and calculations ends with “Twice two will make four without my willing it. So much for your will!” (Dostoyevsky 29). However Underground Man never leaves anything without a loophole. Even this elaborately constructed argument in favour of volition and free will is brought to suspense with a loophole in the beginning of the next part which is followed by another: “Of course I’m joking, gentlemen, and I myself know that I’m not joking very successfully, but really, you mustn’t take everything as a joke” (Dostoyevsky 29). In one sentence Underground Man squeezes two loopholes. The whole novel is full of such loopholes and Bakhtin observes that these loopholes are, in fact, the products of a vicious circle created by the constant effort to anticipate the readers’ responses:

He fears that the other might think he fears that other's opinion. But through this fear he immediately demonstrates his own dependence on the other's consciousness, his own inability to be at peace with his own definition of self. With his refutation, he confirms precisely what he wishes to refute, and he knows it. Hence the inescapable circle in which the hero's self-consciousness and discourse are trapped. (229)

Bakhtin notes that Underground Man’s awareness of his own inability to escape from this circle creates a *perpetuum mobile* which is “made up of his internal polemic with another and with himself, an endless dialogue where one reply begets another, which begets a third, and so on to infinity, and all of this without any forward motion” (230). Now that the notion of *perpetuum mobile* is introduced, it would be appropriate to return to the initial question of inaction in “Notes from Underground”.

Throughout his whole study on Dostoyevsky’s poetics, Bakhtin sees the Russian novelist as a revolutionary figure who introduced a totally new perspective into the European novel. Bakhtin attributes the success of Dostoyevsky’s novels to their polyphonic structure, dialogic tone and unfinalizable heroes. As it has been mentioned above, all these revolutionary aspects of Dostoyevsky’s novels are achieved through the secession of the “umbilical cord” that unites the hero and his creator (Bakhtin 51). The first problem in this comprehensive analysis of Bakhtin seems to be the relative independence of the hero which is conferred upon him by the author himself. If the

Dostoyevskian hero is, by nature, unfinalizable and represents a dialogic, therefore, fully valid idea, how can he accept such limited freedom? Bakhtin claims that Dostoyevsky has an unsurpassed ability to equally represent the views of an other together with his own. Therefore it must be this ability of Dostoyevsky's that prevents the inequality between the author and his hero. However, when we see Dostoyevsky's novel as a work in which each detail and each elaboration is arranged deliberately by its author to represent a dialogic, hence, fully valid idea, Dostoyevsky always remains out of the picture as the creator. Even though Bakhtin claims that Dostoyevsky includes his own voice too into the polyphony as the author, he is standing on a totally different plane from the hero. Since Dostoyevsky is the one who constructs this whole structure of polyphony by representing highly contradictory ideas, his superiority to his heroes is unquestionable. In this formula the heroes are, as Bakhtin says, ideas that are brought into the novel by the author. If we were disposed to see that *Underground Man* were a hero shaped by Dostoyevsky's distinguished capabilities of gathering various conflicting ideas within the same character without one dominating the other, we would have to give the credit of the novel's success to Dostoyevsky's deliberately shaped structure. However we may also approach the novel from another aspect. Instead of believing in Dostoyevsky's extraordinary capacity to represent a *fully valid idea*, it is possible to think that it is Dostoyevsky's incapacity to finalize his heroes that makes his novels successful. In this way it would be possible to overcome the problematic position of the author with regard to his work. Certainly it cannot be argued that Dostoyevsky's art depends on his inability to take sides and reach a conclusion. The presence of a structure that does not allow the reader to approach the novels from a monologic perspective cannot be overlooked. However, a structure that leads both the hero and the readers to a vicious circle cannot be achieved with purely deliberate attempts. If this structure were to be achieved only with Dostoyevsky's conscious and deliberate insistence on the unfinalizability of man, it would be nothing more than a monologic novel. Therefore Dostoyevsky should be introduced into this structure from his privileged position if the novel is really a polyphonic novel. Dostoyevsky and his heroes can only be on the same plane if Dostoyevsky also becomes an element of this polyphonic structure. This incapacity of finalizing his heroes should be considered together with the capability of representing other opinions, a capability Bakhtin attributes to Dostoyevsky. It is true that the structure resists finalization, but it equally resists its author's finalizing attempts. The success of Dostoyevsky's novels should be

sought not only in his deliberate structures that are purposefully left unfinalized, but also in his fortunate inability to finalize. This does not make Dostoyevsky's success a coincidence; on the contrary, this makes him a distinguished person who is able to fully understand various ideas, but not able to present one of them as the dominant one. It can be this indecision that gives birth to a successful short novel like "Notes from Underground". This inability to reach a final, conclusive idea appears as the real gift of the novelist. However, this inability should not be considered as an inability to defend an idea strongly. In "Notes from Underground" the Underground Man displays a rare ability of persuasion with his logically sound and strongly supported arguments. But these are mere poses assumed by him in order to feel like a person who can be defined. All his hatred and his envy are indeed baseless. In his fervent arguments he seems as if he were rebelling against syllogisms, rationalism, nineteenth century morality, natural laws, civilization, mathematics, science and so on, but in fact he is not happy with living underground. He cannot find a position for himself between the two sides: underground and normal life. He equally hates and desires both.

So, long live the underground! Although I may have said that I envy the normal man with all the rancor of which I'm capable, I wouldn't care to be him, in the situation in which I see him (although I shan't stop envying him all the same. No, no, in any event the underground is more advantageous!) There one can at least... Ah! You see, here again I'm lying! I'm lying because I myself know, as sure as twice two is four, that it's not underground that's better in any way, but something else, something completely different, which I long for but which I just can't find! To hell with underground! (Dostoyevsky 34)

As Bakhtin observes, this inability to find a position for himself is a consequence of Underground Man's unfinalizability. He cannot take sides because he always wants to keep a loophole in all of his arguments in order not be finalized. What can be suggested as a variation of Bakhtin's analysis is that Underground Man is unfinalizable not only because Dostoyevsky refuses to finalize him, but also because he cannot finalize him. There must be some sort of incapability on the part of Dostoyevsky if the novel is creating a vicious circle that haunts not only the Underground Man, but also the readers. "There is literally nothing we can say about the hero of "Notes from Underground" that he does not already know himself", Bakhtin says:

[H]is typicality for his time and social group, the sober psychological or even psychopathological delineation of his internal profile, the category of character to which his consciousness belongs, his comic as well as his tragic side, all possible moral definitions of his personality, and so on—all of this, in keeping with Dostoevsky's design, the hero knows perfectly well himself, and he stubbornly and agonizingly soaks up all these definitions from within. Any point of view

from without is rendered powerless in advance and denied the finalizing word.
(52)

Here the problem is that in Bakhtin's analysis Dostoyevsky, as the creator, seems to be the only one who has the privilege of saying something about the Underground Man. However the existence of even one person to say something about an unfinalizable hero that he does not know himself would be the end of his unfinalizability. If this one person is the author of the novel, it would be worse since, as Bakhtin claims, polyphony of the novel depends strictly on the separation of the hero and its creator. Therefore Dostoyevsky should not be thought outside this whirlpool that "Notes from Underground" creates. The vicious circle does not only include the constant rotation of contradictory positions within Underground Man, it also includes the readers since they cannot say anything about him that he does not know himself. Hence Underground Man is not the only one to be doomed to *perpetuum mobile*. Even Bakhtin cannot be said to be safe.

Bakhtin's position is also in danger when he is confronted with the very structure he reveals in Dostoyevsky's poetics. Bakhtin begins his analysis with a general overview of the critical works on Dostoyevsky's novels. In this overview he denies the validity of criticisms developed by some well-known Russian critics due to their incapacity to comprehend the polyphonic nature of Dostoyevsky's poetics. He establishes the goal of his analysis as grasping the unity of Dostoyevsky's polyphonic novel, as opposed to the previous attempts which interpret his novels "as a *single* word, a *single* voice, a *single* accent" (Bakhtin 43). Therefore he bases his analysis on concepts like polyphony, dialogue and unfinalizability. Although he manages to explain a great many contradictory elements in Dostoyevsky's novels thanks to these concepts, when they are brought under a close scrutiny, they can also be regarded as monologic attempts that tend to finalize the novels. No matter how elaborately Bakhtin develops his analysis, the claim that Dostoyevsky's heroes are unfinalizable, is a finalizing argument. These heroes can only be unfinalizable if they also take such an argument into the vicious circle they create. In other words, Underground Man already knows that he is unfinalizable. Indeed, he develops one of his arguments against science and natural laws in order to prove that:

[E]ven if it were really the case that man turned out to be a piano key and if this were to be proven to him even by natural sciences and mathematics – even then he wouldn't see reason but would deliberately do something to contradict this, out of sheer ingratitude, just to have things his own way. (Dostoyevsky 28)

Bakhtin also observes that the unfinalizability of man is one of Underground Man's main arguments:

The hero of "Notes from Underground" is the first hero-ideologist in Dostoevsky's work. One of his basic ideas, which he advances in his polemic with the socialists, is precisely the idea that man is not a final and defined quantity upon which firm calculations can be made; man is free, and can therefore violate any regulating norms which might be thrust upon him. (59)

If the unfinalizability is an argument that is placed within the polyphonic structure of "Notes from Underground", it can only be regarded as one part of the great dialogue. Therefore Bakhtin's claim that Dostoyevsky's heroes are unfinalizable seems to have already been anticipated by Underground Man and foreclosed in advance. This point takes us back to the issue of *perpetuum mobile*.

This term, which is used in physics as well as in music, defines a perpetual movement that has no end. The phenomena Bakhtin defines as perpetual movement is the constant change of positions that takes place in Underground Man's consciousness. Therefore there is, indeed, no movement that can be observed from the outside. No sooner does the Underground Man pose an argument than he challenges it with a counter argument. This is a totally reactive movement that occurs only in the mind of Underground Man. In other words, the perpetual movement in "Notes from Underground" is no movement. This is simply because Underground Man's over-reactive consciousness forecloses any possibility of action beforehand. The underground is the world of inaction and it draws everything into itself. It is not only the Underground Man who is inflicted with inaction. He spreads it to anyone that comes in contact with him. Neither the author, nor the readers and critics are spared. Bakhtin, as a critic who defines this whirlpool with perfect accuracy as mentioned above, gets caught by it. Consequently, it seems that it is not enough to underline the unfinalizability and the inconclusiveness of the novel. These arguments explain the unity of Dostoyevsky's poetics with great success but they cannot escape from their own finalizing claims. These issues of polyphony and finalizability create their own *perpetuum mobile*. Instead of rejecting all the interpretations that focus on a single feature of the novel, it would be a better idea to try to hear all these monologic interpretations as a polyphony created by the novel's invitation to the great dialogue. In the end, parallel to Underground Man's ideas on the unfinalizable nature of man, this insistence on the issue of unfinalizability forecloses any forward movement.

What seems to be of great importance is that both the critic and the reader find themselves in the same inevitable position with the Underground Man. No matter what they claim and no matter how hard they try to oppose the Underground Man, they end up being just like him. They come to a standstill since all the positions they would want to take have already been discarded by Underground Man. Therefore by contradicting their own arguments, their attempts only create a vicious circle. Instead of explaining Underground Man's contradictory remarks, critics themselves fall into contradictions. As for this peculiar situation, it would be appropriate to turn to the concept of resentment, which would provide valuable insight into the key issues such as the consequences of heightened consciousness, the infinite reactive movement within consciousness and the conflicting feelings that oscillate between ultimate hatred and ultimate love for the other.

2. Resentment and Triangular Desire

In the introduction to Max Scheler's book translated into English as *Ressentiment*, Manfred S. Frings gives a threefold answer to the question "What is resentment?" First, Frings notes that "Resentment is an incurable, persistent feeling of hating and despising which occurs in certain individuals and groups" (6). Frings emphasizes the point that these feelings originate from the impotency and weaknesses of the particular group or subject. "The individuals and groups concerned," Frings goes on, "suffer from a blockage to communicate with others. They tend to come on slow and, if at all, they can hardly vent what keeps on plaguing them" (6). The second part of Frings' answer states that "[a]ny feeling of resentment stemming from the impotency in a resentment-subject is accompanied by hidden feelings of self-disvalue over against others" (6). In other words, unlike an individual of strong personality who is "ready and willing to accept values higher than those he represents," the man of resentment is obsessed with the *unattainability* of these higher values (Frings 7). In the last step of the definition of resentment, Frings touches the difference between resentment and resentment proper: "The constant state of resentment is distinguished sharply from furious reactions or outbursts of anger. Whenever a prosaic resentment-feeling finds satisfaction by way of, say, successful revenge and retaliation, there is no resentment

proper at hand” (7). Therefore the three-fold definition gives us the outlines of ressentiment as a strong feeling of hatred and revenge that derives from impotency leading to utter isolation and a constant state of inaction. In order to see the connection between ressentiment as defined above and the Underground Man, it would be appropriate to turn to René Girard’s analysis which is closely related to the concept of ressentiment.

In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, his keen analysis of modern novel, René Girard argues that the direction of desire does not invariably follow a straight line between the subject of desire and the desired object. More often than not, it will follow a triangular path with a third element which is the mediator. Girard believes that this triangular structure of desire is revealed only by the great novelists. He interprets the novels of Cervantes, Stendhal, Proust and Dostoyevsky from this perspective. In the first pages of his book’s initial chapter Girard refers to the concept of ressentiment. He believes that ressentiment appears as a natural consequence of *internal mediation*. In order to establish the link between ressentiment and internal mediation, Girard’s concept of triangular desire should be explained.

Girard’s theory of triangular desire depends mainly on the introduction of the mediator into the structure of desire between the subject and the object. The mediator appears either as a model who determines the objects of desire for the subject, or as a rival who desires or possesses the same objects. Girard defines two types of mediation that derive from these two different mediators. When the distance between the mediator and the subject is far enough to separate them from each other, Girard calls this *external mediation*. However, if the distance between the subject and mediator is not sufficient to prevent any kind of relation between the two, this type of mediation is defined as *internal mediation* (Girard 9). Girard emphasizes that the distance does not have to be necessarily physical. It can be social or political and above all, spiritual: “Although geographical separation might be one factor, the *distance* between mediator and subject is primarily spiritual” (9). The most important difference between external and internal mediation lies in the relationship between the subject and the mediator. In the external mediation, the subject praises his model and declares openly his admiration and loyalty to him/her whereas “the hero of the internal mediation, far from boasting of his efforts to imitate, carefully hides them” (Girard 10). Since in internal mediation the mediator is regarded as a rival who desires or possesses the same object which the subject desires, the subject constantly feels offended by the mediator’s apparent hostility toward

himself. However, this does not prevent him from being fascinated by his rival. Therefore “the subject” Girard notes, “is torn between two opposite feelings toward his model—the most submissive reverence and the most intense malice. This is the passion we call *hatred*” (10). This hatred derives from the need to conceal the admiration the subject feels for the mediator. The subject reverses the order of desire by claiming that he has been the first to desire the object, therefore the mediator is responsible for the rivalry, even though these claims are simply attempts to conceal the imitation of the subject (Girard 11). Referring to Max Scheler’s book *Ressentiment*, Girard claims that all the phenomena explored in that book are “the result of internal mediation” (11). Girard then goes on to establish the relationship between resentment and internal mediation through the three sources of resentment proposed by Scheler: envy, jealousy and rivalry. Girard claims that jealousy and envy are always triangular since the presence of a third person is implied together with the subject and object. This third person appears as the one not only to whom jealousy and envy are directed but also whose desire is imitated. However, “like all victims of internal mediation” Girard says, “the jealous person easily convinces himself that his desire is spontaneous, in other words, that it is deeply rooted in the object and in this object alone” (12). Therefore rivalry is inevitable with the third person who is believed to have interrupted the supposedly spontaneous desire of the subject. Referring to Scheler’s definition of envy as “a feeling of impotence which vitiates our attempt to acquire something, because it belongs to another,” Girard confirms the accuracy of Scheler’s analysis, but he believes that Scheler is unable to establish the relationship between the self-deception of the envious person and the impotence ensuing from the failure to acquire the object (13). According to Girard what is common to envy, jealousy and rivalry is the powerful tendency to imitate. Girard then draws a parallel between these three sources of resentment and Stendhal’s “modern emotions,” which are “envy, jealousy, and impotent hatred”: “Stendhal’s formula gathers together the three triangular emotions; it considers them apart from any particular object; it associates them with the imperative need to imitate by which, according to the novelist, the nineteenth century is completely possessed” (14). Moreover this powerful urge to imitate cannot be explained with the large numbers of jealous peoples:

If the *modern* emotions flourish, it is not because “envious natures” and “jealous temperaments” have unfortunately and mysteriously increased in number, but because *internal* mediation triumphs in a universe where the differences between men are gradually erased. (Girard 14)

In his study, Girard analyzes the novels of Stendhal, Proust and Dostoyevsky—“the three great novelists of internal mediation”. He places Dostoyevsky at the end of the list since he believes that Dostoyevsky “precedes Proust chronologically but succeeds him in the history of triangular desire” (Girard 41). According to Girard, in spite of the promising attempts of Proust, only the Russian novelist did indeed reach “the highest level of internal mediation,” since the distance between the subject and the mediator in Dostoyevsky’s novels is much closer compared to the novels of the others (42). The proximity between the mediator and the subject makes the already existing dilemma more painful.

Girard’s claim that “western readers sometimes feel a little lost in Dostoyevsky’s universe” seems to reverberate with Bakhtin’s argument that Dostoyevsky’s novels may seem as a chaos for those who are used to monologic novels (Girard 42; Bakhtin 8). The parallelism between the two continues when Girard observes in line with Bakhtin that “Dostoyevsky’s ‘admirable monsters’ should not be considered as so many meteorites with unpredictable trajectories” (Girard 43). However, Girard believes that Dostoyevsky’s superiority does not reside in his autonomy as others claim. Above all, he thinks that one can only speak of a relative autonomy of Dostoyevsky since we could not understand his works otherwise (Girard 43). This is the point where Girard diverges from Bakhtin. Girard does not agree with the idea that Dostoyevsky brought a completely new perspective to the European novel. According to Girard, we should not seek Dostoyevsky’s genius in his relative esoterism. It is his distinctive ability to forge the traditional material in an utterly new way that reflects his genius. This novelty that Dostoyevsky introduces consists of bringing back that true hierarchy of desire. Girard notes that the real hierarchy is established by placing the mediator in the foreground and taking the object to the background (45). This change in the hierarchy is a move that parallels the consciousness of a resentment-ridden subject. According to the definition of Frings, the subject of resentment suffers from a self-disvalue when he compares himself with others and his hatred, envy, jealousy and revenge are all directed towards the other who dominates his consciousness. He constantly compares himself with others and always finds his position worse than theirs. As it is clearly stated in Bakhtin’s analysis, this is the same problem that *Underground Man* suffers from. As it is mentioned above, Bakhtin observes that *Underground Man* always addresses others, that is; his imagined readers in all his arguments. He formulates *Underground Man*’s dilemma with regard to the other’s consciousness as “extraordinary dependence upon it

and at the same time extreme hostility toward it and nonacceptance of its judgments” (Bakhtin 230). Bakhtin’s analysis of Dostoyevsky’s poetics can be said to be based on this dilemma. All the concepts that he introduces in order to interpret Dostoyevsky’s novels such as polyphony and dialogue celebrate the validity of other discourses. Girard claims that it is the urge to become the mediator that gives rise to this dilemma and he supports his argument with Underground Man’s letter to the officer by whom Underground Man feels deeply offended. This officer takes the Underground Man who is trying to block his way by the shoulders and without even noticing Underground Man’s attempts, puts him out of his way. Underground Man says that he would not have been so much offended and would have even forgiven it if the officer had beaten him, but he cannot forgive what the officer did to him by not even noticing him. Underground Man never forgets this incident. For years he looks at the officer with “anger and loathing” whenever he sees him, but the officer does not recognize him and this only aggravates his hatred. Over the years Underground Man follows this officer and he acquires the name of the officer and learns where he lives by bribing the caretaker. He develops some plans to get his revenge. He considers challenging him to a duel, but since he is almost sure that the officer would decline his challenge in a humiliating way in front everyone, he gives up on this idea. He also writes a short story to denounce the officer through caricature but the journal does not publish it. However the letter that Underground Man writes to challenge him to a duel after all these attempts includes some strange feelings toward the officer. About the letter he never sends to the officer Underground Man says:

The letter was written in such a way that if the officer had had the least inkling of the ‘sublime and beautiful’ then no doubt he would have come running to me to throw his arms around my neck and offer me his friendship. Oh, how wonderful that would have been! What a life we would have spent together, what a life! He would have protected me with his exalted rank; I would have ennobled him with my culture and... well, with my ideas all kinds of things – so many – would have been possible! (Dostoyevsky 46)

The same desire to make friends with his utmost enemy appears again the day before Underground Man goes to the dinner arranged for Zverkov, an army officer who went to the same school with Underground Man. The dinner has been arranged by Zverkov’s schoolmates and Underground Man accidentally happens to be there when the details about the dinner are discussed by Zverkov’s friends who, unlike Underground Man, have not stopped seeing each other after the school days were over. Underground Man mentions his hatred toward Zverkov that dates back to the school years to his gentlemen

readers, but when he realizes that the group is arranging a dinner for Zverkov, he tells them that he would very much like to be present at this dinner even though none of them invites him. The group is surprised by Underground Man's eager wish to be invited to this dinner since he has seen neither Zverkov nor any other friends from school since their graduation. This dinner turns out to be one of the most important events in Underground Man's life. Even the day before the dinner Underground Man begins to tremble with anxiety. Even though his feelings of despise and hatred toward each member of the group are mutual, he dreams of winning over everyone at the dinner, especially Zverkov.

[I]n my most violent paroxysm of feverish cowardice I still dreamed of gaining the upper hand, making mincemeat of them, winning them over, forcing them to like me – well, if only for the 'loftiness of my thoughts and undeniable wit'. They would desert Zverkov and he would take a back seat, silent and ashamed, and I would crush him. Later, perhaps, I might make it up with him and drink with him as an intimate friend. (Dostoyevsky 63)

However, Girard believes that at the origin of this need to befriend, attract and finally become the mediator, there is self-hatred and this self-hatred derives from the "unlimited demands" Underground Man makes on himself (Girard 56; Dostoyevsky 39). According to Girard, these impossible demands made on oneself indicates a false promise and "In Dostoyevsky's eyes the false promise is essentially a promise of metaphysical autonomy" (56). Girard claims that this is the same fallacy that befalls the modern man. He thinks that he is the only one who does not enjoy the divine inheritance and this is what turns his life into hell. However, it is not easy to follow Girard at this point. He claims that everyone hides this false promise as a secret and for each individual it is the other who enjoys the divine inheritance (Girard 58). He quotes Underground Man's famous line "*I am alone, and they are together*" to support this claim but the deep isolation and eccentricity of a character like Underground Man make it hardly appropriate to generalize his inclinations to the majority. As we can get from the text itself, the others do not seem to be going through the same dilemmas as the Underground Man. It is enough to notice the relationship among Zverkov and Underground Man's other school mates who still see each other and have chats about Zverkov's affairs, his successes and his acquaintances from the higher ranks. It is hard to imagine Zverkov making impossible demands on himself and suffering from its consequences like Underground Man. Although "*I am alone, and they are together*" is a statement that may appear in the minds of all people, not all of them can be expected to

think like that since they have realized the falseness of this promise of metaphysical autonomy. Girard's analysis presents enough evidence for the fact that the fallacy of metaphysical autonomy underlies our desires, but only figures like Underground Man can realize this false promise and suffer from its consequences. Therefore even though Girard's concept of internal mediation is quite capable of explaining the dilemmas of Underground Man, Girard abolishes the peculiar status of Underground Man conferred upon him by himself. As Girard has claimed previously, the great novelists are the ones who reveal the real imitative nature of desire, and therefore, their heroes are not unaware of the false promise of metaphysical autonomy. Internal mediation may underlie the desires of modern man, but the realization that this is a false promise is reserved for characters like Underground Man. This realization can be said to be the one of the primary causes of Underground Man's inertia. Being aware of the fact that his autonomy as an individual is nothing more than an illusion, Underground Man finds himself in a horrible position. His insistence on the human volition which assumes the autonomy of the individual seems to be a desperate attempt to escape from a confrontation with reality. Girard believes that although Underground Man is aware of the falseness of metaphysical autonomy he chooses to deny it. However, as it is clear from his controversial arguments Underground Man is never able to escape from this fact no matter how hard he tries. Consequently, by giving up on everything he falls into utter inertia.

The success of the concept of triangular desire in interpreting the Underground Man's contradictions is comparable to Bakhtin's formula. However, as it has been mentioned above, Girard disagrees with some points of Bakhtinian interpretations. Moreover Girard sees Bakhtin's polyphony only as an implication of internal mediation. He claims that the frequent changes of the mediator in Underground Man's desire leads to a change of personality. The less the duration of the reign of the mediator in one's desire, the more painful the consequences will be. According to Girard the reign of the mediators in Underground Man is so brief that he has more than one mediator to imitate simultaneously. Therefore these various voices are nothing but different personalities that are derived from different mediators: "In fact the man from underground is often torn between several simultaneous mediations. He is a different person every moment of his existence and for everyone he is with—this is the *polymorphosis* of the Dostoyevskian being which has been pointed out by all the critics" (Girard 92). However, this internal mediation pushed to its limits in Dostoyevsky by bringing the

mediator and the subject closer leads to serious problems. The multiplicity of mediators first of all gives rise to chaos in the subject. Always feeling miserable under the superiority of these mediators that swiftly change and multiply, the Underground Man's mediation, Girard claims, turns into a dictatorship dominating his whole existence (93). Girard believes that the meaning of the *modern* lies in this totalitarian nature of internal mediation. Therefore he again makes a point that contrasts with Bakhtin's analysis. Bakhtin finds Otto Kaus' interpretation of Dostoyevsky's art as "the purest and most authentic expression of the spirit of capitalism" insufficient since he fails to realize that the spirit of capitalism appears "in the language of art" (20). This is an important mistake in Bakhtin's eyes because anything that is presented in the language of the polyphonic novel should not be transferred directly "from the plane of novel to the plane of reality" (20). However, Girard criticizes exactly this point of view when he claims that "Dostoyevsky alone describes for us a phenomenon which must, however, be considered in the framework of history. We must not see in it, as some of the Russian novelist's admirers do, the sudden revelation of an eternal truth which previous writers and thinkers had all missed" (94). This is what Bakhtin does when he gives full credit for the discovery of polyphonic novel to Dostoyevsky. He maintains that all the novelists that came before Dostoyevsky authored only monologic novels and Dostoyevsky is the first to introduce polyphony to the European novel. Even though he agrees with Kaus about the idea that "polyphonic novel could indeed have been realized only in the capitalist era", according to Bakhtin while interpreting Dostoyevsky's novels, the priority should be given to understanding the novelistic framework, which is different from reality (19-20). However, there is a similar tendency in Girard to discard all the other approaches that fail to see the importance of the imitative nature of desire as Bakhtin discards all the other interpretations that do not realize the polyphonic nature of Dostoyevsky's poetics. Although both Girard and Bakhtin approach Dostoyevsky's novels from different perspectives and they disagree on the point where the essence of Dostoyevsky's novels lies, their theories reveal a structure which is very similar to resentment.

The part where Girard mentions the contagious nature of internal mediation reflects some important common points between internal mediation and resentment. Girard observes that "[i]nternal mediation is present when one 'catches' a nearby desire just as one would catch the plague or cholera, simply by contact with an infected person" (99). As it will become clearer in the discussion of Nietzschean resentment, the man of

ressentiment is also inclined to form groups by making others like himself. However, Girard's internal mediation spreads due to rivalry. Underground Man can be seen as a man of ressentiment only when we think his ressentiment together with Girard's internal mediation. The contagious nature of Nietzschean ressentiment can be found in the remarks Deleuze attributes to the man of ressentiment: "I who accuse you, it is for your own good; I love you in order that you will join me, until you are joined with me, until you yourself become a painful, sick, reactive being, a good being..." (NP 128). This inclination to form groups and constitute herds seems to contradict with Underground Man's isolation, but this contradiction finds an explanation in the false promise of metaphysical autonomy Girard mentions. "This sickness is contagious" Girard observes, "yet it isolates individuals; it turns them against the other. Each believes he alone knows the truth and each is miserable when he looks at his neighbors" (282). However this explanation is also generalizing Underground Man's peculiar position within his society. In order to clarify this situation it would be appropriate to turn back to Dostoyevsky's footnote at the beginning of the novel:

The author of these notes and the *Notes* themselves are, of course, fictitious. Nevertheless, such people as the writer of these notes not only can but even must exist in our society – taking into consideration those circumstances in which our society was formed. I wanted to bring before the public more distinctly than usual one of the characters of the recent past. He is a representative of a generation that has survived to this day. (Dostoyevsky 3)

Even though this passage was written by Dostoyevsky himself, the tone of the paragraph is highly polyphonic. This passage cannot be said to state clearly that Underground Man can be any person. First of all he is fictitious; yet again his existence in the society is inevitable. Although he states that "he is a representative of a generation", in the previous sentence he says that his aim is to bring that character before the public "more distinctly than usual". If we quickly return to Bakhtin again, he notes that Dostoyevsky's heroes lead lives which are invariably *on the threshold*. While describing the hero of "Bobok" Bakhtin states that "he is one who has deviated from the general norm, who has fallen out of life's usual rut, who is despised by everyone and who himself despises everyone—that is, we have before us a new variety of the 'underground man'" (138). Moreover by claiming that it is only in Dostoyevsky's novels that internal mediation reaches the highest level, Girard also seems to agree with Bakhtin about the eccentricity of Dostoyevsky's characters. This means that Dostoyevsky can be said to take the model of his heroes from an average person within

the society, but he does not represent this normal person as he is. He puts him into extreme situations and writes about the probable consequences that may arise from these situations. Therefore we can say, along with Bakhtin, that as a Dostoyevskian hero Underground Man is a person who is *on the threshold*. This threshold can be anything; it can be a mental, social, political, existential or historical threshold. Even though according to Dostoyevsky's footnote Underground Man is a representative for a whole generation, this does not necessarily mean that everyone suffers from the same dilemmas that Underground Man undergoes. As a result, Girard's conclusion that all modern men, parallel to Underground Man, crawl under the reign of internal mediation and metaphysical desire which both join and isolate people is not a sufficient one. Underground Man, as a novel hero, has an unquestionable power of representation, but this extraordinary ability to represent derives from his utmost eccentricity. It is not surprising that Underground Man anticipated this question as well and answered it beforehand:

I know that you will perhaps be angry with me because of this, you'll stamp your feet and say: 'You are speaking of yourself alone and your underground misery, so don't you dare say *all of us*.' But excuse me, gentlemen, I'm not trying to justify myself by this *all of usness*. Strictly speaking, as far as I'm concerned, I've merely carried to extremes in my life things that you've never had the courage even to take halfway and what's more you've interpreted your cowardice as commonsense and found comfort in deceiving yourselves. So perhaps I'll prove to be 'more alive' than you. (Dostoyevsky 118)

The 'reality' of Underground Man is not a simple one. There is a dialogue between the voice of Dostoyevsky in the footnote and these last words of Underground Man. It seems as if Underground Man is addressing Dostoyevsky who says in the preface that the author of these notes is fictitious. He says that he is the one who is really alive. This is indeed a direct challenge to the conventional understanding of reality. Here Bakhtin's insistence on the separation between the novelistic plane and the plane of reality becomes more important. The shift from the novelistic realm to reality must not be abrupt. First, Underground Man should be analyzed in the framework of art. Only after this first step would it be appropriate to analyze him on the plane of reality.

Although his position in the real world is ambiguous, what is clear about Underground Man is that he is an eccentric character within the boundaries of the novel itself. Because if he were not so, all the other characters in the novel would descend to the underground and he would not be able to eavesdrop on anybody. This eccentricity of Underground Man, which in Bakhtin turns into a whirlpool drawing in readers, critics

and the author himself, appears as a form of internal mediation in Girard. Girard's analysis poses Underground Man as a hero at the highest level of internal mediation. However, Girard cannot escape this whirlpool created by the short novel especially when he claims that "The correct interpretation of Dostoyevsky's work is the discovery in it of the revelation of metaphysical desire in its supreme phase" (269). To capture Underground Man with an extraordinarily comprehensive theory, Girard has to let go of some important issues. He enthusiastically embraces the sentence "I am alone and they are everyone" as the motto of underground, but he discards the issues of impotence, inertia, fatigue, which are propelled by those others, that is; the mediators. The real polyphony of Underground Man does not allow any kind of finalizing statements as Bakhtin notes, but Girard regards polyphony as a by-product of internal mediation that derives from the simultaneous mediations. Both Bakhtin's and Girard's approaches are highly capable of explaining the controversies inherent in Dostoyevsky's novels, but both begin their analyses by discarding the other approaches. This need to prove others wrong becomes more contradictory in Bakhtin who advocates polyphony. However, it is not less problematic in Girard. Girard comes up with a finalizing word for a few novelists, as opposed to Bakhtin who writes only on Dostoyevsky's poetics. According to Girard, the correct way of interpreting not only Dostoyevsky, but also Proust, Stendhal, Zola and Cervantes must include metaphysical desire. While trying to prove the importance of internal mediation in Dostoyevsky's works, Girard leaves a hole in his strict theory. To explain the technique of "hiding feelings and revealing words" Girard states that "all the images which cause the action of characters become so obscure and confused that any analysis would falsify their nature. This is indeed the situation in most of Dostoyevsky's work" (246). Therefore while analyzing a hero like Underground Man we need to question the very action or its absence in order not to fall into this trap.

3. Bernstein and the Saturnalian Dialogue

Another critic who comes up with an analysis of "Notes from Underground" is Micheal André Bernstein. In his book *Bitter Carnival: Ressentiment and the Abject Hero*, Bernstein places "Notes from Underground" into the tradition of Saturnalian

dialogue. This particular type of dialogue takes place in three different modes: between a master and his slave, between a monarch and his fool, and between a philosopher and a madman. The particularity of this type of dialogue lies in the reversal of participants' roles. In a Saturnalian dialogue the master turns out to be the slave and the monarch turns out to be the fool and so on. Bernstein believes that this is a trope that can be traced back to the Saturnalian carnivals of ancient Rome during which the social roles were reversed for a limited time. Bernstein establishes links that make "Notes from Underground" a modern version of this dialogue. Although he sets the tone of his study as a polemic from the beginning, his own perspective concerning this trope cannot be seen as positive. In the introduction, he emphasizes the dangers that may derive from the blind appreciation of the subversive figures in these dialogues. One of his striking examples is Charles Manson. He believes that the popularity of and sympathy toward such murderers can be attributed to their manipulation of the Saturnalian tradition. The link between the Roman carnival and Charles Manson is the novel. According to Bernstein the novel introduced the 'Abject Hero' who emerges from the combination of resentment and abjection. Bernstein comes up with a definitive comparison between the two concepts:

Abjection and resentment can be distinguished most readily by their different relationships to temporality and to the urge for vengeance: abjection suffers constantly new, and usually externally imposed, slights and degradation, whereas resentment is trapped forever in the slights of the past. A lacerated vanity nourishes both abjection and resentment, but repetition is less crucial to abjection than to resentment, which experiences its existence as a perpetual recurrence of the same narcissistic injury. Moreover, the man of resentment is actually "proud" of his abjection, and, as in "Notes from Underground", he sees in it both his torment and the sign of his higher consciousness. The sufferer from abjection derives no such compensatory pride from his humiliation, but neither does he dwell as obsessively on fantasies of revenge on imaginary enemies. What "empowers" someone afflicted by resentment is the intensely focused, but impotent, hatred with which he feeds his sense of having been treated unfairly, and his hope of someday forcing others to suffer in his place. (26)

Bernstein's definition of resentment seems to differ from Frings' in that Bernstein sees resentment as "a malignant modern outgrowth of abjection, a kind of 'empowered abjection'" (Bernstein 27). In other words for Bernstein, resentment is an aggravated version of abjection. While describing another murderer Ira Einhorn, Bernstein notes that "[w]hat Einhorn made clear to me was how, in the right circumstances, abjection could lead directly to a resentment embittered enough to erupt into murder" (9). This tendency to see resentment as a form of extreme violence contradicts with the third

part of Frings' three-fold definition of resentment which specifies resentment as unfulfilled revenge:

While persons committing acts of violence may entertain a prosaic resentment, one must, reading Scheler's text, come to the conclusion that throughout terrorism resentment is prone to be found among those who do not place bombs to kill, etc., but among those who stay behind such acts. Thus, resentment-subjects are often to be found among sympathizers of violence rather than among the criminals themselves doing violence. (Frings 11)

Bernstein begins his analysis with this association of resentment and murderers. Although the implications of this association are huge, I will leave this issue aside for now to discuss it later in the context of Nietzschean resentment. Unsurprisingly, Bernstein's analysis of "Notes from Underground" reflects his particular understanding of resentment. Although he notices that the inability to take action is central to Underground Man's resentment, Bernstein still reflects on the political and ethical limitations of Underground Man's rebellion (99). Bernstein quotes a long passage from "Notes from Underground" in order to support his claim that it is hard to find a work of fiction that can match this short novel in its great ability to represent resentment (102). However, this passage reads like a preface to the attempts of Underground Man to take revenge on the officer who did not notice him. In this passage Underground Man describes the man of heightened consciousness who considers himself a mouse when confronted with his antithesis, the normal man. The reactions these two different types give when they are offended differ greatly. Unlike the normal man, the mouse cannot take his revenge quickly.

There, in his foul, stinking cellar, our offended, downtrodden and ridiculed mouse immerses himself in cold, venomous and, chiefly, everlasting spite. For forty years on end he will remember the offence, down to the smallest and most shameful detail, constantly adding even more shameful details of his own, maliciously teasing and irritating himself with his own fantasies. He himself will be ashamed of his fantasies, but nevertheless he will remember all of them, weighing them up and inventing all sorts of things that never happened to him, on the pretext that they too could have happened and he'll forgive nothing. Probably he'll start taking his revenge, but somehow in fits and starts, pettily, anonymously, from behind the stove, believing neither in his right to take revenge, nor in the success of his revenge and knowing beforehand that he will suffer one hundred times more from every single one of his attempts at revenge than the object of his revenge, who, most likely, won't give a damn. (Dostoyevsky 10-11)

This passage clearly demonstrates the specifications of Underground Man's revenge. Certainly, Underground Man is talking about himself and refers to himself as mouse since his own attempts to take revenge on the officer reverberate with the attempts of

the mouse. He constantly changes his plans of revenge. He thinks of challenging him to a duel and for two years he follows him everywhere to acquire information about him. He even writes a short story to ridicule the officer but it is not published. The final plan seems to be the most demanding one. He decides not to step aside the officer's way deliberately on Nevsky Prospekt, the street where generals, officers and ladies take a stroll. Underground Man always has to make way for these important people whenever he takes a walk on this street. This is the amazing plan that makes him so restless. The revenge plan has nothing to do with any kind of violence, especially with murder: "Of course, I won't exactly give him a shove... I'll simply not make way, bump right into him, not too painfully, but shoulder to shoulder... I'll bump into him only as hard as he bumps into me" (Dostoyevsky 48). Underground Man has to suffer a lot before he can fulfill his revenge plan because his outfit is not appropriate for the mission. To arrange an appropriate outfit for a stroll on same street which is filled with generals and officers he has to borrow money. The painful process of borrowing the money and finding a collar that has a decent look only marks the beginning of Underground Man's suffering. Like the mouse he describes in the first chapter, Underground Man suffers a hundred times more than the object of his revenge. He confronts the officer several times on the Nevsky Prospekt without being able to collide with him. This discourages him and in the day of another sleepless night when he admits that his plan is doomed to failure he manages to collide with the officer and he goes home "feeling completely avenged" (Dostoyevsky 50). If this is the end of the ultimate plan for revenge, it is hard to trace a link between Underground Man and murderers like Charles Manson and Ira Einhorn.

Bernstein regards characters like Underground Man as more subversive than the monstrous figures due to their in-between position between "the satanic and the servile" (27). This position again reminds us of the bipolarity inherent in the concept of acedia. Since Bernstein's analysis points out the danger of being attracted to evil resentment-ridden figures that are even more dangerous than monster figures, the links that he establishes between serial killers and Underground Man do not seem to be appropriate. The primary reason for the inappropriateness is that Underground Man's in-between position leads him to utter inertia unlike the murderers who are, on the contrary, very active figures. While Underground Man's position between the satanic and the servile can be seen as a frozen dialectic that constitutes the core of acedia, murderers like Manson and Einhorn seem to reach a synthesis which makes them highly attractive and dangerous figures. However, since Bernstein sees Manson and Einhorn as descendants

of Underground Man, he puts them into the same group under the name of abject hero. Bernstein situates this type of hero's paradoxical desire as an attempt to make both others and himself believe that he is a monstrous character. The paradox arises from the fact that only a monster could desire such an identity (Bernstein 31). Therefore according to Bernstein Underground Man appears as an even more dangerous figure than the monster. Bernstein believes that the reason for these characters' desire to be seen as monsters stems from their lack of authenticity. They want to be seen like original monster figures but they are all aware of the fact that they are only copying the type of the fool in the Saturnalian dialogue. Texts like "Notes from Underground" remove the traces that link them to the tradition of Saturnalian dialogue. The readers, thus failing to notice the links, have difficulty in finding a position for themselves with regard to the text. However, Bernstein notes that this is not the only difficulty that will befall the readers of such texts. The main problem for the reader is that these modern versions of Saturnalian dialogue "force the reader to occupy the place of one of the stereotyped antagonists, all the while knowing how untenable such a position really is" (Bernstein 23). In other words, the reader has to either agree with the Underground Man siding with the monstrous wise fool or disagree with him taking the dull position of the monarch or the master (Bernstein 23). However, Bernstein observes that it is hard to keep the balance between the two positions. He maintains that "although Dostoevsky is not always able to sustain that balance, at his best he negotiates the challenge with unique authority (Bernstein 100). Bernstein implies that even though both positions are untenable, to disagree with Underground Man is all the more difficult. The attraction of these resentment-ridden characters links them to the murderers like Einhorn in the eyes of Bernstein. He claims that the contradictory personalities of these characters make them attractive even for the ones who are criticized by them. "[F]or all the Underground Man's irrationality, seediness, and spite" Bernstein notes:

Indeed largely because of these very qualities— it is hard to find any commentator on "Notes from Underground" ready to confess that he shares the earnest beliefs of the novel's "gentlemen readers." One has the feeling that were these "gentlemen" to read Dostoevsky, they too would refuse to recognize where their real kinship of mind and temperament lies and would begin to applaud the Underground Man's speeches. (159)

In the introduction, Bernstein mentions the similar reaction of academicians, politicians and businessmen toward Einhorn. "[P]eople like Einhorn" Bernstein says, "were welcomed sympathetically by leaders of the very institutions they despised" (7).

The contradictory turn in Bernstein's analysis appears exactly at this point. He emphasizes the impossibility to side with both positions, but then he mentions the unstable balance. This impossibility to take sides turns into an impossibility to take sides with the "gentlemen readers". Therefore these positions that Bernstein first describes as untenable become tenable since Underground Man lures the readers to his own side. This contradiction arises from the assumption that there are only two untenable positions in "Notes from Underground" as it is a modern version of Saturnalian dialogue. On the contrary, it can be argued that there are several positions that Underground Man presents to the reader. Since Underground Man always refutes his own ideas or discards them by saying that he is only joking, he cannot be said to be representing only one position. Underground Man indeed forces the reader from position to position. Each anticipatory remark directs the reader toward a new position. With each "So don't you think gentlemen...", "You're probably thinking, gentlemen..." Underground Man introduces new positions for the reader. The untenability of these positions, to repeat Bakhtin, derives from the plenitude of all equally valid positions. The loopholes within these positions and the anticipations of Underground Man foreclose all the possible maneuvers of the reader. Therefore Underground Man seems to be sacrificing his own capability to act in order to make sure that his imaginary readers will not gain the upper hand. His fervent attempts to keep one step ahead of his readers foreclose the movements of both sides. Unlike Einhorn who leads campaigns against political figures and gives speeches to anyone who is willing to listen, Underground Man descends into the underground after he fails to manage the affair between him and Liza. The eloquent speech he gives to Liza after the eventful dinner arranged for Zverkov can be seen as an indicator of the parallelism between two figures. However, Underground Man's life at school tells us much about the differences between him and Einhorn. At the school where he met Zverkov and the other school mates who arranged the dinner he was a lonely student. He says that the rare friendships that he established with others did not last long: "In the end I couldn't hold out any longer: with the passing years I developed the need for people, for friends. I tried to get close to a few of them, but this attempted rapprochement always turned out unnatural and so it simple fizzled out of its own accord" (Dostoyevsky 61). Nonetheless, Underground Man mentions an exception; he had a friend once at school and his approach to friendship can indeed be seen as rather monstrous.

I did once have a friend. But I was already a despot at heart, I wanted to have

unlimited authority over his soul; I wanted to instill in him a contempt for his surroundings; I demanded that he should make an arrogant and definitive break with those surroundings. I frightened him with my passionate friendship, I reduced him to tears, to nervous convulsions. He was a naïve, submissive soul, but when he surrendered himself completely to me I immediately hated him and brushed him aside – it was just as if I'd needed him only to win victory over him, simply to bring about his total submission. But I couldn't get the better of everyone. My friend was also quite unlike any of the others and in this he was an extremely rare exception. (Dostoyevsky 61-62)

Although Underground Man desires total dominion over his only friend, he loses all his interest once this friend responds with total submission. Unlike Einhorn who tries to gather followers for himself, Underground Man forsakes anyone who completely surrenders to him. Perhaps the most important difference between the two is that Underground Man deals only with “extremely rare exceptions”. Underground Man does not have any acquaintances among academicians and politicians or people who enjoy a high status in the society. Such acquaintances are highly unexpected for a character like Underground Man. Although his understanding of friendship and love is based on total domination, Underground Man does not or cannot sustain these relations once he gains the upper hand. Although his aims may look similar to Einhorn's, he never turns to physical violence. As opposed to Einhorn who says that “Violence is the simplest mode of contact—it allows touch without formality”, Underground Man's tactics consist of powerful and eloquent speech (Bernstein 6). He is in no position to inflict physical violence as it is obvious from his ultimate revenge plan for the officer which is based on a not too painful collision with him. Of course, Underground Man's aims cannot be justified, but the two victims that are mentioned in “Notes from Underground” cannot be compared to Einhorn's or Manson's victims. Since we do not know much about the exceptional boy at school, we do not have any clue whether he was deeply hurt or not by Underground Man's cruelty. However, there are more clues about the Liza's feelings. Although with his eloquent speech Underground Man manages to lure Liza, who is a young prostitute, he turns out to be the one who suffers more than her. The day after he meets Liza, Underground Man goes mad because he has given his address to her. He gets almost no sleep for days due to the probability of her visit. It is the fear of being despised by Liza that disturbs him so much about her visit. He fears because on the night that he met her, he talked to her in a heroic manner and he made her believe that he is indeed a gentleman. When she comes to see him, she will see the desperate condition he is living in and he will be humiliated. “What if she comes?” Underground

Man says, “[a]h well, let her come. Hm. Only, the rotten thing is, she’ll see how I live, for instance. Yesterday I made myself out to be such a ... hero ... but now, hm!” (Dostoyevsky 99). Liza comes in the most inappropriate moment possible. She sees Underground Man clinging to the collar of his servant in a hysteric crisis. Then Underground Man falls into tears in front of Liza. This time the roles are reversed. When he first met Liza, it was Underground Man who pushed Liza into hysteria through his eloquent speech, but now it is Underground Man who is crying in convulsions. Underground Man later realizes that she has come because she loves him, but this he cannot stand. Underground Man’s inability to love stems from his peculiar understanding of love. “I was incapable of falling in love” Underground Man says,

because, I repeat, to me love meant tyrannizing and being morally superior. All my life I’ve been unable even to imagine any other kind of love and I’ve reached the point where I sometimes think that love consists in the right, voluntarily given by the loved one, to be tyrannized. Even in my underground dreams I couldn’t conceive of love as other than a struggle that I invariably embarked upon with hatred and finished with moral subjugation, after which I couldn’t imagine what to do with the vanquished victim. (Dostoyevsky 114)

However, with Liza the situation turns out to be a lot more complicated. Instead of getting rid of the vanquished victim, Underground Man feels oppressed by Liza’s presence. She is not a victim at all since she has seen Underground Man in his most vulnerable moments. Therefore Underground Man has lost all his tyrannizing powers. When the oppression reaches the unbearable point Underground Man very crudely knocks on the screen reminding her that she must go. Just before she leaves, Underground Man puts some money into her hand and quickly withdraws to his room. This is his last attempt to gain the upper hand through humiliation, but it also backfires. Liza leaves the money on the table before she goes out. He cannot even get near to achieving his goal. This failed relationship with Liza can be seen as a proof of Underground Man’s inability to sustain any kind of relationship. His acquaintances do not and cannot last long enough to be called relationships. He sees Liza only twice and even in this short time, he manages to turn everything upside down. Underground Man cannot be compared to Einhorn from this perspective. Bernstein claims that “[t]he lesson of Dostoevsky’s writing, from *The Insulted and the Injured* on, is that once in power, victims can become the worst tormentors of all, finding in their former victimization the emotional need and ideological justification to oppress others” (99). However, in this scene that involves Liza, Underground Man cannot be said to be a cruel tormentor. This is not to say that Liza has not been injured by his humiliating

remarks, but she never sees him again. He cannot be the worst tormentor because he cannot sustain his relations long enough. He forsakes his victim or is forsaken by him/her when he gains ultimate power over him/her. Only when Underground Man's behaviors and feelings are exaggerated can he be compared to a monster like Einhorn. The most important difference between the two resides in the difference of their resentment.

Unlike Einhorn, Underground Man cannot murder anyone, because his is a truer form of resentment. Even though when Liza comes to visit him he says, "I really think I could have killed her," he does not kill her. All his revengeful feelings invariably remain imaginary. This is indeed the definition of resentment that Bernstein quotes from Nietzsche: "Nietzsche defines resentment as the chief characteristic of 'natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge'" (102). Bernstein also emphasizes Nietzsche's admiration of Dostoyevsky. As it has been pointed out above, Bernstein also believes that "[i]n fiction, it is hard to think of any work that has chronicled the inscape of *resentment* with greater narrative flair than *Notes from Underground*" (102). Even though Bernstein regards Nietzsche as the "most brilliant philosophical diagnostician" of resentment and quotes his definition as the most succinct one, he associates resentment with murderers and serial killers (102). The contradiction in this association arises from the fact that in resentment the revenge always remains imaginary. The most basic characteristic of the man of resentment is his inability to fulfill his revenge. Moreover Bernstein also underlines the importance of memory in resentment. However, he does not mention the inhibitory role that memory plays in the actions of the man of resentment. Gilles Deleuze in his book *Nietzsche and Philosophy* gives a clear account of the dynamics of Nietzschean resentment. Deleuze's analysis gains extra importance for our project since he delineates the relationship between resentment and inaction.

4. Nietzschean Resentment

Resentment is a term Nietzsche develops and heavily elaborates on in his book *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Nietzsche is believed to use the French word as a proper match for it does not exist in German. However, in his comprehensive genealogy

Nietzsche turns it into a technical term which defines the combination of hatred and envy accompanied by a constant recollection of memories, especially the hurtful ones. Nevertheless, the man of resentment is best understood through “imaginary revenge” that characterizes him. In *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche uses the term resentment for the first time to refer to its centrality in the slave revolt, and here he also mentions “imaginary revenge”: “The slave revolt in morals begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and ordains values: the resentment of creatures to whom the real reaction, that of the deed, is denied and who find compensation in an imaginary revenge” (22). In these initial remarks on resentment another key feature that defines it is revealed. The man of resentment has to seek compensation in an imaginary revenge because he cannot act out his revenge. The man of resentment is by definition a man of inaction. The slave revolt in morals, which, according to Nietzsche, began two thousand years ago with the Jews and came to dominate the modern world, has inaction in its basis. There are many different mechanisms in resentment that inhibit action and through this inhibition create values that constitute slave morality. In his book *Nietzsche and Philosophy* Gilles Deleuze gives a clear account of these mechanisms that work within the man of resentment underlining their inhibitory role in the realization of reaction. Up till now I have only dealt with the question whether approaches to Underground Man from the perspective of resentment are compatible with the concept itself. However now, I will delve into the issue of whether Underground Man can be regarded as a man of resentment.

According to Nietzsche the turn of the evaluating gaze to the other marks the beginning of slave morality:

While all noble morality grows from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says no to an ‘outside’, to an ‘other’, to a ‘non-self’: and this no is its creative act. The reversal of the evaluating gaze—this necessary orientation outwards rather than inwards to the self—belongs characteristically to *ressentiment* (22).

It is exactly in this orientation that the reactive origin of slave morality resides. The man of resentment constitutes his own self image based on his reactions to others. According to Nietzsche, “[i]n order to exist at all, slave morality from the outset always needs an opposing, outer world” as opposed to the aristocratic mode of evaluation which “only seeks out its antithesis in order to affirm itself more thankfully and more joyfully” (22). His existence is entirely based on this outer world since slave morality “needs external stimuli in order to act—its action is fundamentally reaction” (Nietzsche

22). However, the remaining question is how this particular type of morality, based purely on reaction, gains dominance over aristocrat morality—the morality of the active noble man? Gilles Deleuze provides an answer: “Ressentiment designates a type in which reactive forces prevail over active forces. But they can only prevail in one way: by ceasing to be acted” (*NP* 111). Although this only explains the reversal of power relation between active and reactive forces, Deleuze also explains that such a change of power relation between reactive and active forces can indeed lead to a similar impact on the two types of morality represented by these two forces: “Ressentiment itself is always a revolt and always the triumph of this revolt. Ressentiment is the triumph of the weak as weak, the revolt of the slaves and their victory as slaves” (*NP* 116-117). This passive nature of reactive forces ensures that their revolt will lead to nothing but triumph because their triumph means that they remain the way they were before the revolt, that is; passive and inactive. Up to this point Underground Man can be counted as a man of ressentiment. It has already been mentioned above that the thoughts of the other carry the utmost importance for Underground Man. The importance of the other finds its best explanation in Bakhtin’s analysis. When Bakhtin celebrates “Notes from Underground” as the most dialogic work of Dostoyevsky, he emphasizes Underground Man’s orientation toward the other:

The destruction of one's own image in another's eyes, the sully of that image in another's eyes as an ultimate desperate effort to free oneself from the power of the other's consciousness and to break through to one's self for the self alone—this, in fact, is the orientation of the Underground Man's entire confession. (Bakhtin 232)

However, Bernstein makes a very valid argument when he maintains that the polyphony of “Notes from Underground” cannot always be regarded as a positive feature of Dostoyevsky’s art. He claims that it is also “the very root of the Underground Man’s whole dilemma” (Bernstein 105).

Besides total dependence on others, what is common to both Underground Man and the man of ressentiment is their “imaginary revenge”. Underground Man is never able to take his revenge. When he manages to bump into the officer in Nevsky Prospekt he says, “I went home feeling completely avenged”, but he still remembers the officer and bothers to tell the pathetic story of the painful process he goes through to take his revenge. Underground Man still wonders what the officer is doing fourteen years after this incident: “I haven’t set eyes on him for fourteen years. What’s he doing now, my dear old chum? Who’s he trampling on now?” (Dostoyevsky 50). The memory that still

haunts him is important since it is a sign of his incomplete revenge that can never be fulfilled. Deleuze notes that in the man of resentment

the memory of traces is full of hatred in itself and by itself. It is venomous and depreciative because it blames the object in order to compensate for its own inability to escape from the traces of the corresponding excitation. This is why *ressentiment*'s revenge, even when it is realized, remains 'spiritual', imaginary and symbolic in principle. (NP 116)

Underground Man is unable to fulfill his revenge since he cannot do away with anything that befalls him. This inability not to feel offended by everything around is another common point between the Underground Man and the man of resentment. "Excitation can be beautiful and good" Deleuze states, "and the man of resentment can experience it as such... He will none the less feel the corresponding object as a personal offence" (NP 116). "How many times, for example, have I taken offence, just like that for no reason" Underground Man says,

And I myself knew very well that I had no reason to take offence and that I was putting it on, but I would work myself up to such a degree that in the end I really did feel offended. All my life I've been attracted to playing games like that, so that I finally lost all self-control. (Dostoyevsky 15)

Underground Man's absolute dependence on the others and his inability to take revenge get him closer to the man of resentment, but at some points resentment fails to explain him. For instance, Underground Man's inability to play the role of the master when his victim completely surrenders parallels the triumph of the man of resentment who remains weak despite his triumph. But what remains a problem is that Underground Man cannot be a part of a group and he cannot form a group for himself, either. Since resentment is a herd phenomenon, Underground Man's true isolation contrasts with this concept.

The reactive forces gain the upper hand over active forces through a strategy based on the conglomeration of the men of resentment. Nietzsche emphasizes that this strategy is put into practice by the ascetic priest who "changes the direction of resentment" (105). This change in the direction of resentment, which is originally oriented toward outside, to the man of resentment himself marks the beginning of bad conscience. Ascetic priest's strategy, which is based on the imposition of bad conscience to the men of resentment, plays an important role in the success of the slave revolt since it aims at bringing together these typically weak and powerless men who are reluctant to act. Ascetic priests appear as highly controversial figures who "juxtapose this life (along with what belongs to it, 'nature', 'world', the whole sphere of

becoming and the ephemeral) to a completely different form of existence” (Nietzsche 96). In this way life, according to the ascetic, “functions as a bridge to that other existence” (Nietzsche 96). Nietzsche does not locate the ascetic priest in a specific historical, social or political concept since he “appears in almost all periods; he belongs to no single race; he thrives everywhere; he emerges from all classes of society” (96). This controversial figure is ridden by “a particular kind of resentment” which according to Nietzsche “seeks not to master some isolated aspect of life but rather life itself, its deepest, strongest, most fundamental conditions” (97). Another controversial aspect of the ascetic priest is that he should be weak and sick so as to understand the weak, yet he also should be strong in order to be able to keep the herd in one piece and protect it (Nietzsche 104). The murderers Ira Einhorn and Charles Manson, whom Bernstein regards as resentment-ridden characters, seem closer to the ascetic priest. Although Bernstein puts Manson, Einhorn and Underground Man into the same category as wise fools of the Saturnalian dialogue, Manson and Einhorn differ from Underground Man in some important points. First of all, they do not suffer from unfulfilled revenge. They prove to be quick in their violent actions, unlike Underground Man who hesitates again and again over a small collision with the target of his revenge. Furthermore they seem to have a group or some kind of a family of their own. Einhorn had contacts with religious and political leaders. As a highly active figure, Einhorn gave public speeches and his advice was also sought by the Episcopal Bishop and city’s underground press alike (Bernstein 4). Einhorn’s public charisma is something that Underground Man never has. The two murderers resemble the ascetic priest in their janus faced characters. They are sick enough to understand the resentment-ridden characters, but they are also strong enough to form a herd out of them. Both Manson and Einhorn are rather popular figures who have their own devoted followers, but Underground Man has nobody other than his servant Apollon who also despises him. Now it is time to deal with the questions “What makes the ascetic priest so attractive for the men of resentment?”, “How does the redirection of resentment towards the man himself through bad conscience work as a useful strategy for the ascetic priest to form a community of the weak?” and “How can bad conscience be a means of seduction for others to join the community?”

According to Nietzsche the man of resentment is the one who is responsible for the creation of ‘evil man’. Through his reactive evaluating gaze which is turned to his enemy, that is, the active noble man, the man of resentment conceives the evil man,

yet depending on this evil man, he also constitutes himself: “[H]e has conceived him as a fundamental concept, from which he now derives another as an after-image and counterpart, the ‘good man’—himself!...” (Nietzsche 25). However this orientation towards the other changes with the invention of bad conscience. The man whose animal instincts drive him into war, wilderness and adventure was put into a taming process. The regulating forces like state organizations and religions together with the moralities developed by these forces made the man give up those instincts. As a result these men were “reduced, these unfortunate creatures, to thinking, drawing conclusions, calculating, combining causes and effects, to their ‘consciousness’, their most meagre and unreliable organ” (Nietzsche 65). Although the morality values introduced by religions play an important role in this scheme, Christianity takes the situation to a completely new dimension. Nietzsche believes that justice is originally based on a simple relationship between a creditor and a debtor. In the earliest communities those who caused injury to another member were expelled from the community, but later when the communities grow larger they sought for a compromise between the injured party and the one who caused the injury.

Compromise with the fury of the man immediately affected by the misdeed; an effort to localize the case and to obviate further or even general participation and unrest; attempts to find equivalents and to settle the whole business (the *composito*); above all, the increasingly definite emergence of the will to accept every crime as in some sense capable of being *paid off*... these are the characteristics which become more and more clearly stamped on the later development of the penal code. (Nietzsche 53)

The new perspective which Christianity introduced to this creditor-debtor relationship is that it transformed the debt into something impossible to pay. In Christianity God sacrificed himself for the guilt of the man. Therefore all the ways to redemption are precluded from the beginning. There remains no way for the man to pay his debt, that is; his guilt, his original sin (Nietzsche 72). Hence Christianity plays an important role in this introversion of the animal instincts. In Christianity Deleuze notes “it is no longer a matter of suffering through which the debt is paid, but of a suffering through which one is shackled to it, through which one becomes a debtor forever. Suffering now only pays the interest on the debt; *suffering is internalized, responsibility-debt has become responsibility-guilt*” (NP 141). Although this idea of transforming men into permanent debtors is found in Christianity, its application is not limited to this religion. This idea is used quite skillfully by the priest. The man of resentment thinks, “I am suffering: someone must be to blame”, but it is the priest who tells him that “someone must be to

blame: but you yourself are this someone, you alone are to blame—you alone are to blame for yourself!” (Nietzsche 106). These are the words of the shepherd who, with his mastery of reactive forces, creates a herd of men and protects it. This formula, that changes the direction of resentment, proves handy for taming the natural instincts of man. Deleuze emphasizes the point that this change in the direction of resentment does not in the least take away the revengeful and hateful side of it; on the contrary, bad conscience takes resentment one step further to its aim: “[B]ad conscience extends resentment, leads us further into a domain where the contagion has spread” (NP 128). Deleuze mentions the perfect compatibility among resentment, bad conscience and the ascetic priest. The success of reactive forces depends on this perfect harmony. Ascetic priest directs the inclination of spreading that resentment has. He forms a community from these weak men: “Wherever there are herds, it is the instinct of weakness which has willed the herd, and the prudence of priests which has organized it” (Nietzsche 114). Unlike the strong, the weak are inclined to form groups and according to Deleuze this inclination can also be found in the hateful gaze of the man of resentment towards other: “I who accuse you, it is for your own good; I love you in order that you will join me, until you are joined with me, until you yourself become a painful, sick, reactive being, a good being...” (NP 128). Therefore the hatred of the man of resentment does not necessarily imply a desired separation from the other. It works exactly in opposition to such a separation or isolation. The man of resentment does not want to be left alone. His hatred is indeed a tactic that he uses to draw others to himself. This tactic becomes more powerful when bad conscience is introduced by the priest. Now the man of resentment keeps his hatred and his revengeful nature, but he is also full of self-contempt. He says “I wish I were anyone else but myself!... but there is no hope of that. I am who I am: how could I escape from myself?” (Nietzsche 101). Deleuze clearly states that this is another tactic to win others over to their side: “‘It is my fault’, this is the cry of love by means of which we, the new sirens, attract others to us and divert them from their path” (NP 142). Underground Man also attracts Liza to himself through a similar tactic. He interrupts his speech with remarks of self-contempt such as “Perhaps, I’m worse than you” and “I might be a miserable wretch like you and I’m wallowing in muck because I’m sick at heart too” (Dostoyevsky 83-84). However, these remarks are carefully interspersed into the speech in order to increase its effects on the victim. Underground Man tries to convince Liza of her miserable life and the worse that awaits her. He wants to win her over by making her feel as if her life were far worse

than she thinks. He manages to make Liza go into convulsions. Underground Man is also taken aback by the surprising effects of his speech on Liza: “[I]t had made such an impact my nerve suddenly failed me” he says (Dostoyevsky 94). That night when he first met Liza, Underground Man can be said to triumph over her. He seems to infect another human with his own resentment, but he cannot maintain his relationships. Therefore he fails to form a group. When Liza visits him, Underground Man himself goes into convulsions and he turns out to be the weaker one. We know that Underground Man is no priest, but he is not a part of the herd, either. Unlike Underground Man, Nietzsche’s man of resentment forms herds by spreading his resentment. Once they have enough power to attract others, the weak are inclined to spread their bad conscious. According to Nietzsche, it is due to this infectious nature of reactive forces that those who are infected should be segregated from the other healthy individuals (103). Nonetheless, the perfect collaboration between men of resentment and the priest leads to herds that grow larger and these growing communities lead to the prevalence of reactive forces over active forces.

Although the reasons for the domination of reactive forces are explained above, all these do not provide us with necessary evidence about the historical, political and social reality of such a revolt, which, according to Nietzsche, marks a turning point in the history of mankind. Deleuze maintains that resentment gains a historical, social, biological and political reality by forming a type. He defines the type as “a reality which is simultaneously biological, psychical, historical, social and political” (Deleuze, *NP* 115). The formation of a reactive type depends on the prevalence of the reactive forces. However, in order to understand the typological aspect of resentment it is necessary first, to have an insight into the topological aspect. Both the typological and topological aspects through which Deleuze explains Nietzschean resentment are closely related to the issue of memory which plays a vital role in its development. Although the contagious nature of resentment does not comply with Underground Man, his memory functions follow the same pattern with a memory inflicted with resentment.

Nietzsche begins the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* with some reflections about the nature of forgetting. According to him forgetting is not—as psychoanalysts and many others think it is—a passive and negative function that is originally reactive; on the contrary, “[f]orgetfulness is no mere *vis inertiae*, as the superficial believe; it is rather an active—in the strictest sense positive—inhibiting capacity” (Nietzsche 39). This active apparatus is needed to keep the consciousness

fresh and open to new functions. This apparatus helps one to digest the external excitations so that their traces should not invade the consciousness. Any kind of dysfunction in this apparatus may lead to serious problems since the activity of consciousness will decrease due to the invasion of the memory traces. “The man in whom this inhibiting apparatus is damaged and out of order may be compared to a dyspeptic (and not only compared)—he is never ‘through’ with anything” Nietzsche says (39). Deleuze’s topological analysis of the resentment is based on the relationship between two reactive systems separated by this faculty of forgetfulness. The first reactive system Deleuze mentions is the unconscious. It is defined by “mnemonic traces, by lasting imprints. It is a digestive, vegetative and ruminative system” (Deleuze, *NP* 112). The second system within the reactive apparatus cannot be separated from consciousness (Deleuze, *NP* 113). It is “a system in which reaction is not reaction to traces but becomes a reaction to the present excitation or to the direct image of the object” (Deleuze, *NP* 113). The task of the active faculty of forgetting is to keep these two systems separate. In order to be ready for new excitation, the consciousness should always be kept clear especially from the invasion of the mnemonic traces of the first reactive system. Therefore “in order to renew consciousness” this active apparatus “constantly has to borrow the energy of the second kind of reactive forces, making this energy its own in order to give it to consciousness” (Deleuze, *NP* 113). This topological perspective makes it easier to comprehend the importance of the forgetting. When there is a problem in this faculty, the reaction to the mnemonic traces gets into consciousness and there remains no apparatus to refresh the consciousness for new excitations. “*Thus at the same time*” Deleuze argues, “*as reaction to traces becomes perceptible, reaction ceases to be acted*” (*NP* 114). Since there is no new excitation, there is no energy to borrow from the second kind of reactive forces and since there is no energy to borrow, the two systems blend into each other. “Even the functional decay of the faculty of forgetting” Deleuze says, “derives from the fact that it no longer finds in one kind of reactive forces the energy necessary to repress the other kind and to renew consciousness” (*NP* 114). The “inertia” by which Underground Man feels crushed cannot be explained better. The second chapter of the short novel which is two times longer than the first is indeed an account of a memory that particularly torments Underground Man.

Only today, for example, I’m particularly oppressed by some very ancient memory. It came vividly to mind only recently and since then has plagued me like

some tiresome musical motif that one can't get rid of. But meanwhile I must get rid of it. I have hundreds of similar memories, but at times one of them stands out from the hundreds and weighs heavily on me. (Dostoyevsky 37)

Underground Man never breaks free from the oppression of these vivid memories. His consciousness is under constant invasion of these memories. Once these memories are not digested and ascend to consciousness they impede the true reaction. The consciousness of Underground Man is indeed full of such memories. Underground Man says that “even any amount of consciousness is a disease” (Dostoyevsky 7). He also sees inertia as the “direct result” of the laws of heightened consciousness (Dostoyevsky 8). His consciousness is full of memories. The sickness of his consciousness and the ensuing inertia can indeed be attributed to the memories that cannot be forgotten. Bernstein notes that “Underground Man was always a personality of the past” since he believes that Underground Man is a resentment-ridden character (109). Underground Man's revengeful nature can also be regarded as a result of his inability to forget. In the passage where Underground Man describes how a man of heightened consciousness—whom he refers to as a mouse—goes through a rather painful process to take his revenge he says that “[f]or forty years on end he will remember the offense, down to the smallest and most shameful detail, constantly adding even more shameful details of his own, maliciously teasing and irritating himself with his own fantasies” (Dostoyevsky 10-11). As it has already been pointed out above, Underground Man goes through the same processes when he tries to take his revenge on the officer. The dysfunction in the faculty of forgetting and the inability to (re)act which are the main characteristics of the man of resentment are also observed in Underground Man. Moreover being a man of heightened consciousness himself, Underground Man is also inflicted with the diseases of consciousness which Nietzsche refers to as the “most meagre and unreliable organ” of man. Since according to Nietzsche the dominance of consciousness marks the beginning of resentment, Underground Man's heightened consciousness can also be seen as a sign of resentment. At this point we may add another factor besides polyphony which according to Bernstein, cannot only be seen as a “positive feature of Dostoyevsky's art”. Apart from polyphony, Bakhtin also emphasizes the importance of the self-consciousness of the hero as a way to “break down the monologic unity”. However in addition to polyphony, self-consciousness has also other implications than disturbing the monologic unity. What Bernstein says about polyphony can also be said

about self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is another problem that Underground Man suffers from and it also inhibits his actions.

Deleuze passes to the typological analysis of resentment after he establishes its topological structure. As I mentioned above, Deleuze defines type as “a reality which is simultaneously biological, psychical, historical, social and political” (*NP* 115). And we already know that it is only by forming a type that the reactive forces prevail over active forces. Before getting to Deleuze’s ideas on the type that resentment gives birth to, it seems necessary to first remember Nietzsche’s reflections on the issue of “subject”. According to Nietzsche the subject is a fiction created by resentment. This fiction allows the man of resentment to separate the force from its effects:

A quantum of force is also a quantum of drive, will, action—in fact, it is nothing more than this driving, willing, acting, and it is only through the seduction of language ...—language which understands and misunderstands all action as conditioned by an actor, by a ‘subject’—that it can appear otherwise.
(Nietzsche 29)

This subject makes it possible for the man of resentment to think that as a subject he can choose not to act. In other words he believes that he can separate the force from its effect. “But no such substratum exists” Nietzsche says, “there is no ‘being’ behind doing, acting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction imposed on the doing—the doing itself is everything” (29). The relation between this fictitious subject and the type is revealed in Deleuze’s discussion of the typology of resentment. The dysfunction in the faculty of forgetting creates a type that characteristically has a “prodigious memory”, an “incapacity to forget anything” and a “spirit of revenge” (Deleuze, *NP* 115). It is only the spirit of revenge which is not explained in the topological analysis because it belongs to the typology of resentment. While discussing the revengeful trait of this type, Deleuze underlines the fact that resentment does not appear by accident. It is not an exceptionally strong excitation nor the weakness of the forces which are unable to react that causes resentment. The origin of the spirit of revenge should not be sought in such exceptional situations. It can only be found in the way the man of resentment uses the forces that constitutes him.

[F]or Nietzsche, what counts is not the quantity of force considered abstractly but a determinate relation in the subject itself between the different forces of which it is made up this is what he means by type. Whatever the force of the excitation which is received, whatever the total force of the subject itself, the man of resentment uses the latter to invest the trace of the former, so that he is incapable of acting and even of reacting to the excitation. (Deleuze, *NP* 115)

Here the relation between the type and the subject is established. The subject is nothing but the amalgam of different forces and the relations between these forces create the type. Without the active faculty of forgetting everything is happening among reactive forces (Deleuze, *NP* 114). All the energy is spent by the reactive forces which inhibit one another. If we turn to Underground Man again, we will witness another similarity between him and the man of resentment. Underground Man talks about the “warring elements” inside him while mentioning his failure even to become a spiteful man:

I was always conscious of the abundance of elements diametrically opposed to that. I felt that they were literally swarming inside me, those warring elements. I knew that they had been swarming there all my life, begging to be set free, but I wouldn't set them free, oh no, I wouldn't, I deliberately wouldn't set them free. (Dostoyevsky 4)

The war between these elements can easily be interpreted as the struggle between reactive forces within the man of resentment. Since “everything takes place between reactive forces” and all the energy is used by these reactive forces which try to destroy one another, the (re)action cannot be realized (Deleuze, *NP* 114). Therefore along with the man of resentment, Underground Man also falls into inertia. To continue Deleuze's typology, a type is born out of these clashing reactive forces. Since there is no energy left to act the reaction, this type is always full of revenge that cannot be acted. “As a result of his type” Deleuze says, “the man of resentment does not ‘react’: his reaction is endless, it is felt instead of being acted” (*NP* 115). Even the beautiful and good excitations offend the man of resentment since he cannot react to them. Therefore the man of resentment blames everything that he cannot react. He plans to take revenge on everything that he cannot react. It is impossible to miss the parallelism between Underground Man and the man of resentment at this point. Underground Man conceives Liza's visit as the worst thing that could happen in the world, although he later understands that she has no grudge against him and she bears no will to humiliate him for his poverty. Despite all her compassion toward him, Underground Man feels oppressed by her presence. She comes to visit him purely out of her positive feelings toward him, but he can perceive this innocent visit as an attempt of humiliation.

If it were not for the inclination to form herds, Underground Man could safely be considered as a man of resentment, but with such an important obstacle it is not possible to count him as one. The reason for not categorizing Underground Man as a man of resentment has nothing to do with separating him from murderers and monsters since the concept of resentment itself does not include violence. The need to

turn to the concept of resentment arises from the accuracy with which it can explain the issue of inaction. Thanks to Deleuze's analysis of Nietzschean resentment, Underground Man's inertia comes to make sense.

3. BARTLEBY AND THE QUESTION OF SUBVERSIVE INACTION

Herman Melville's short story "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street" was first published in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* in two pieces. It appeared anonymously in the November and December issues of the magazine in 1853. In 1856, it was printed again together with five other short stories under the title of *Piazza Tales*. The story seems to have attracted various criticisms due to its weird protagonist. As a limit character, Bartleby is generally placed in the same lineage with Gogol's Akaky Akakievich, Kafka's Joseph K. and Musil's Ulrich along with Melville's other unorthodox characters like Billy Budd. Although all these characters share a few common points, what connects them indeed is their idiosyncrasy. The main element that separates Bartleby from other literary figures is his formula: "I would prefer not to". Bartleby utters hardly anything other than this formula. Even though in his first weeks as a scrivener in a law office he prefers not to fulfill any demands brought to him other than copying, he later prefers not to copy, either. It is his insistence on his preferences that makes Bartleby a problematic hero leading to the immense amount of critical work that reflects a wide spectrum. From Marxist readings to the interpretations that focus on Biblical references, the story has received a great variety of criticism. However, it seems to have gained a special importance for contemporary European philosophers. The story can be said to be a rich source of inspiration for well-known figures of continental philosophy like Giorgio Agamben, Gilles Deleuze, Slavoj Žižek and Maurice Blanchot. Moreover, political philosophers Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt also refer to Bartleby in their collaborative work *Empire* as a revolutionary figure of absolute refusal. The deep interest of contemporary philosophers, cultural critics and theoreticians in this inert character can be read as a sign of story's success in addressing some important modern issues of our time even though it was written in the 1850's. Although there seems to be a growing interest in Melville's story recently, it cannot be said to have been ignored before. Between 1922 and 1981 over 175 articles were written about Melville's short story (Beverungen & Dunne 173). Nevertheless, what is common to the readings of the contemporary philosophers is that they are all inclined to see Bartleby as a highly subversive figure challenging not only the ontological but also the political givens of the society.

As to our purposes concerning “Bartleby”, we will proceed by examining some of the widely accepted interpretations to turn to the main question of the reasons behind Bartleby’s subversive inaction. The powerful status attributed to Bartleby as a figure that introduces a real alternative in a world full of pseudo alternatives makes Bartleby all the more interesting for our purposes. The powerful subversion of this purely inactive character brings to the mind the role of inaction in this subversion. In the discussion of Bartleby’s subversive inaction, Agamben and Deleuze will be the leading references. In 1993 Giorgio Agamben’s and Gilles Deleuze’s articles on “Bartleby” were published in the same book titled *Bartleby: La formula della creazione* (Bartleby or the formula of creation). Although each philosopher’s approach bears important differences that separate one from the other, they seem to share the same opinion that Bartleby offers an original alternative to challenge the sovereign law. In “Bartleby, or On Contingency” Agamben elaborates on the concept of potentiality that has its origins in Aristotle’s philosophy. He claims that Bartleby embodies the principal of potentiality which is enough to destroy the ontology of Being and Non-Being. As for Deleuze, in “Bartleby; or, the Formula” he mentions the possibility that the scrivener might be the “Man of the Future or New World Man” whom the nineteenth century has been seeking. He announces Bartleby as the “new Christ”, the doctor who will cure America. The problem concerning the interpretations of both philosophers is that despite the extraordinary challenge that he brings, Bartleby remains powerless before the law. In his book *Homo Sacer: Il potere sovrano e la vita nuda* (Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life), which was published two years after the publication of his article on Melville’s short story, Agamben claims that Bartleby, along with the philosophies of Schelling, Nietzsche and Heidegger, “push the aporia of sovereignty to the limit” but they “do not completely free themselves from its ban” (HS 48). A similar idea can be inferred from Deleuze’s article. According to the schema Deleuze draws concerning the three types of characters in Melville’s fiction, the saintly characters like Bartleby and Billy Budd are to be sacrificed in the name of human law by the father figures like the attorney in “Bartleby” or Captain Vere in “Billy Budd”. Therefore, however strong the challenge they bring to the law or the norms of society, these pure and innocent characters end up as sacrifices. This inability to escape from the ban of the law and the inevitable role of the sacrifice make us question the subversive power of Bartleby’s challenge. Therefore we will focus on this issue of the validity of Bartleby’s challenge, which is closely related to his inaction.

The discussion of subversive inaction will be based upon two concepts. The first concept is potentiality, which constitutes the core of Agamben's reading. Agamben introduces Bartleby as the perfect example of his peculiar understanding of potentiality, which depends largely on Aristotle's formulation. Hence, in the section about potentiality our aim will be to point out the strong relationship between Agamben's notion of potentiality and total inaction. The second concept which will inform our discussion is nihilism. Nihilism gains particular importance in Deleuze's article on Bartleby. In his article Deleuze classifies Melville's characters under three categories. He maintains that the first two types belong to Primary Nature whereas the third one is subject to the secondary Nature which, unlike Primary Nature, is "governed by the Law" (ECC 79). Deleuze defines the first two types as "Originals" and he classifies them according to their particular position with respect to human will. The two terms that he uses to ascertain the difference between the two Original characters are "nothingness of the will" and "will to nothingness". Although Deleuze does not focus on the link between Bartleby's formula and nihilism, in his book *Nietzsche and Philosophy* he frequently uses "nothingness of will" and "will to nothingness" in his discussion of nihilism. In the book published twenty-seven years before the article, these two types of will do not seem to have positive meaning due to their negative connotations within Nietzsche's philosophy, but in the article on "Bartleby", there is no emphasis on the nihilism they suggest. This can also be seen as a contradictory point with regard to Bartleby's subversion. As a character who is put into the same category with those who have "nothingness of will" Deleuze not only points at the relationship between Bartleby and the principal of nihilism, but he also presents him as the "new Christ".

Both Agamben's and Deleuze's analyses reflect an in-between position that reminds us of the dialectical structure of acedia. In Agamben's analysis Bartleby appears as a highly subversive figure, but in his later writings Agamben claims that Bartleby's challenge is doomed to failure. Moreover, his special understanding of potentiality also assumes an in-between position that oscillates between the extreme ends of evil and good. Therefore as it is the case with acedia, Bartleby, who is the utmost figure of potentiality, embodies bipolarity without any sort of synthesis. Similar to Agamben's analysis, Deleuze's ideas with regard to Bartleby positions the inert scrivener in a double bind. Bartleby appears both as a savior and as the worst type of nihilist (passive nihilist) in the French philosopher's analysis. We can add Slavoj Žižek's analysis to

these two as another interpretation that attributes bipolar traits to Bartleby. Žižek believes that Bartleby's inaction, indeed, signifies a total violence. According to Žižek, the two polar opposites of total withdrawal and absolute violence that Bartleby embodies are two perspectives of the same phenomena that result from parallax view. Žižek explains parallax view as "constantly shifting perspective between two points between which no synthesis or mediation is possible" (4). There is an extraordinary parallelism between this definition of parallax view and the structure of acedia which brings together highly contradictory elements without any synthesis. Consequently the analyses of all three philosophers concerning Bartleby are generally based on a double bind which also structures acedia. Our aim in this chapter is to point out the relationship between this bipolarity and inaction which characterizes Bartleby.

1. Potentiality and the Politics of Inaction

Potentiality can be said to be one of the key concepts that frequently appears in the works of Giorgio Agamben. He even has a book called *Potentialities* which is a collection of his articles about the concept. The book consists of three parts each of which has several articles. In the last part named "Contingency" there is only one article and it is the article about "Bartleby". However, it is not only in this book that Agamben refers to potentiality. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* which is one of his most important and well-known books, Agamben develops his argument about the form of the law through the concept of potentiality. *Homo Sacer* is published two years after the article about Bartleby. In the chapter titled "Potentiality and Law" Agamben states that "Until a new and coherent ontology of potentiality (beyond the steps that have been made in this direction by Spinoza, Schelling, Nietzsche, and Heidegger) has replaced the ontology founded on the primacy of actuality and its relation to potentiality, a political theory freed from the aporias of sovereignty remains unthinkable" (HS 44). Agamben's main argument concerning potentiality and sovereignty in *Homo Sacer* can be summarized in the following way: Potentiality resides in the root of all kinds of political power, but it is in sovereign power that potentiality reaches its peak since only sovereignty benefits fully from the principle of potentiality. Therefore according to Agamben, law can be said to gain its form through

potentiality. Apart from *Homo Sacer* and *Potentialities*, Agamben also refers to Bartleby in his book *The Coming Community*. Although this book was published in 1990—three years before “Bartleby; or On Contingency”—here it is possible to find the seeds of his more comprehensive analysis. In the chapter named “Bartleby”, Agamben refers to the scrivener as the “extreme image” of the angel of *Qalam* (Pen) that has a special place in Arab tradition due to its “unfathomable potentiality” (CC 37). After the brief introduction to the concept of potentiality and its particular significance in Agamben’s theory, we will pass to a deeper analysis of the concept.

Agamben constantly emphasizes the long history of potentiality in his discussions. However, he regards Aristotle as the first philosopher ever to come up with such a comprehensive formula of potentiality. Agamben never misses a chance to praise the genius of Aristotle in all his discussions of potentiality. According to Aristotle there are two kinds of potentiality, one is *generic* and the other is *existing* potentiality (Agamben, P 179). Agamben states that Aristotle is less interested in the former than the latter. While generic potentiality can be exemplified with the potential of a child to become the head of State, existing potentiality is illustrated with an architect who has the potential to build or a poet who has the potential to write poems (Agamben, P 179). Since the poet or the architect does not have to go through a change by way of learning, Agamben claims that the potentiality of both the poet and the architect is truly revealed when they do not put their potential into actuality: “Thus the architect is potential insofar as he has the potential to not-build, the poet the potential to not-write poems” (P 179). Here Agamben explains the key point of Aristotle’s peculiar understanding of potentiality. According to Aristotle, potentiality cannot be understood properly without the potential to not-do, or potential to not-be. Therefore “[t]o be potential means: to be one’s own lack, to be in relation to one’s own incapacity” (Agamben, P 182). The potentiality not to is also important since without it all potentiality would pass to actuality. However, Agamben also mentions the difficulty of considering the actuality of potentiality to not-be: “The actuality of the potentiality to play the piano is the performance of a piece for the piano; but what is the actuality of the potentiality to not-play?” (P 183). To answer this question Agamben turns again to Aristotle to quote from *Metaphysics* a passage which reappears in his other works: “A thing is said to be potential if, when the act of which it is said to be potential is realized, there will be nothing impotential” (qtd. in Agamben, P 183). Agamben believes that this statement has almost always been misinterpreted and misunderstood. He underlines that the statement does not say

anything like nothing will be impossible when the potential thing is realized. Here Agamben provides a formulation that is very difficult to comprehend:

What Aristotle then says is: if a potentiality to not-be originally belongs to all potentiality, then there is truly potentiality only where the potentiality to not-be does not lag behind actuality but passes fully into it as such. This does not mean that it disappears in actuality; on the contrary, it preserves itself as such in actuality. What is truly potential is thus what has exhausted all its impotentiality in bringing it wholly into the act as such... Contrary to the traditional idea of potentiality that is annulled in actuality, here we are confronted with a potentiality that conserves itself and saves itself in actuality. (*P* 183-84)

Although this formula seems highly contradictory, it comes to make sense when we think of it in terms of the form of sovereign law. In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben quotes the same passage again and explains the formula as the following: “What is potential can pass over into actuality only at the point at which it sets aside its own potential not to be (its *adynamia*). To set im-potentiality aside is not to destroy it but, on the contrary, to fulfill it, to turn potentiality back upon itself in order to give itself to itself” (*HS* 46). Moreover Agamben also underlines the point that in Aristotle’s philosophy “potentiality and actuality are simply the two faces of Being” (*HS* 47). “At the limit,” Agamben argues, “pure potentiality and pure actuality are indistinguishable, and the sovereign is precisely this zone of indistinction” (*HS* 47). Agamben believes that the only alternative is to make the sovereign leave its privileged position: “[t]he troublemaker is precisely the one who tries to force sovereign power to translate itself into actuality” (*HS* 47). Agamben introduces the protagonist of Kafka’s “Before the Law” as an example for this special type of troublemaker.

As opposed to the readings of Derrida and many other critics who believe that the story has a pessimistic ending, Agamben develops a criticism that interprets the ending as optimistic. The story of Kafka is about a man from the country who wants to be admitted to the Law, before which a doorkeeper stands. Whenever the man comes and asks for permission to get in, the doorkeeper tells him that he cannot admit him for the time being. Therefore the man from the country keeps trying until he grows very old. The two-page story ends with the answer doorkeeper gives to the man’s last question:

“Everyone strives to reach the Law,” says the man, “so how does it happen that for all these many years no one but myself has ever begged for admittance?” The doorkeeper recognizes that the man has reached his end, and, to let his failing senses catch the words, roars in his ear: “No one else could ever be admitted here, since this gate was made only for you. I am now going to shut it.” (Kafka 175)

Agamben seems to agree with Massimo Cacciari in his claim that “the power of the Law lies precisely in the impossibility of entering into what is already open” (*HS* 49). Agamben’s main argument can be summarized in the following way: Since the door always remains open, the only thing to be done is to close it. Only by closing it the man from the country can render possible what is ontologically impossible, that is; “entering into what is already open” (*HS* 49). “If it is true the door’s very openness constituted, as we saw, the invisible power and specific ‘force’ of the Law,” Agamben claims, “then we can imagine that all the behavior of the man from the country is nothing other than a complicated and patient strategy to have the door closed in order to interrupt the Law’s being in force” (*HS* 55). The man from country is a troublemaker due to his “strategy that compels the potentiality of Law to translate itself into actuality” (*HS* 56). Such a reading turns the passive figure of the man from the country into a highly subversive one.¹ In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben’s position with respect to Bartleby is in parallel with his ideas about Kafka’s protagonist. Even though he believes that Bartleby brings an extraordinary challenge to the Law, he cannot escape its ban. Along with the philosophies of Schelling, Nietzsche and Heidegger, Agamben places Bartleby at the top of the list of the challengers of the Law since he believes that Bartleby comes up with the strongest objection. However, he also believes that they are all doomed to failure: “These figures push the aporia of sovereignty to the limit but still do not completely free themselves from its ban” (*HS* 48). There appears to be a change in Agamben’s thought in the two years following his article “Bartleby, or on Contingency”. His reading of “Bartleby” in that article interprets the scrivener as a highly powerful figure who can be said to create a new ontology (*P* 259). In her article Jessica Whyte touches on this issue in a footnote claiming that “Agamben’s characterisation of Bartleby seems to become slightly less enthusiastic as he becomes more concerned with the concrete aspects of sovereign power and the state of exception” (314). However, the change of thought here may not be a mere attenuation of enthusiasm. The change may indeed underlie a radical transformation. By returning to the story and Agamben’s article on Bartleby, we will try to clarify this issue, which is all the more important for our purposes since it is closely related to the degree of subversion Bartleby embodies.

¹ Although Agamben does not mention Bartleby in his reading of Kafka’s parable, Bartleby can also be seen as a figure who forces the Law to translate itself into actuality through a patient strategy that he maintains throughout the story. (see Passavant 159)

In “Bartleby, or On Contingency” Agamben places Bartleby in the same constellation of Gogol’s Akaky Akakievich, Dostoyevsky’s Prince Myshkin and Kafka’s clerks. However, he claims that Bartleby also belongs to a philosophical constellation which dates back to Aristotle. This philosophical constellation is the tradition of potentiality that we explained above. In this article Agamben underlines the importance of the figure of the scribe for the peculiar understanding of potentiality that Aristotle develops. Avicenna, who is one of the leading interpreters of Aristotle in Arab tradition, counts three kinds of potentiality. He gives the example of a scribe “who is in full possession of the art of writing in the moment in which he does not write” to the third kind of potentiality which is perfect potentiality (Agamben, *P* 247). As a scrivener who “would prefer not to” write, Agamben regards Bartleby as the utmost figure of potentiality. With his absolute potentiality, Bartleby “exceeds will (his own and that of others)” and “succeeds in being able (and not being able) absolutely without wanting it” (*P* 255). In other words; Agamben maintains that Bartleby comes to destroy the supposed supremacy of will over potentiality. When the wit of Bartleby’s employer proves inadequate to deal with the eccentricities of the scrivener, the attorney decides to turn to other sources. He reads “Edwards on Will” and “Priestly on Necessity”, but these are the very sources that are challenged by Bartleby. In her article “Bartleby or a Loose Existence: Melville with Jonathan Edwards” Branka Arsic points out the “key intervention” of Edwards concerning the issue of will: “The will, says Edwards is the power of acting, the power of actualization of the potentiality to act. ‘Willing’ is the act of will because it is the act of choosing. The will is always faced with at least two possibilities but prefers one” (38). As opposed to Agamben, Arsic claims that “‘I would prefer’ is the formula of the pure power of the will, the performance of its ‘pure’ act” (38). However, it is very difficult to side with Arsic due to the total inaction of Bartleby. Bartleby’s formula leads to no act, indeed it is the rejection of action as such. Bartleby has to go so far as to deny, to put it more properly, to destroy his will in order to establish his full potentiality and the way that leads to his aim passes through utter inaction. This is the reason why his employer associates him with immobile and irremovable figures like columns. Bartleby’s preference does not specify any kind of action or thing. His formula does not necessarily imply a refusal or an affirmation. Agamben argues that “nothing is farther from him than the heroic pathos of negation” (*P* 256). The insistence of Bartleby on his formula can be interpreted as his insistence on inaction. When the attorney asks Bartleby to go to the Post Office due to the absence

of Ginger Nut, he gets an answer which is not unexpected: "I would prefer not to." The employer replies with, "You *will* not?" However, Bartleby insists on his formula: "I *prefer* not" (Melville 38) Agamben interprets this passage as the irreducibility of Bartleby's formula to will or necessity, but we can also read it as his insistence on inaction which is the direct result of the abandonment of will.

According to Agamben, the challenge of Bartleby depends on the ontological alternative he presents. This alternative appears as the third one in addition to the other two brought by Hamlet. Bartleby adds the term "rather (or no more than)" to the duality of Being and Non-Being (P 259). Agamben maintains that from this alternative the scrivener brings a new ontology of potentiality, which exceeds both Being and non-Being (P 259). Agamben notes that Bartleby creates this new ontology through the principal of contingency. He claims that Melville is conducting an experiment which seeks an answer to the question "Under what conditions can something occur *and* (that is, at the same time) not occur, *be true no more than not be true*?" (P 260). Agamben defines contingency as the particular situation of "a being that can both be and not be" (P 261). One obstacle among others that may prevent an experiment such as Bartleby's is the principle of the irrevocability of the past. Bartleby's experiment assumes a potentiality that is conserved within the past. However, Aristotle, who is the genius to come up with the theory of potentiality, says that "there is no potentiality of what was, but only of Being and Becoming" (Agamben, P 262). Nevertheless Agamben does not give up and he finds the answer in his favorite passage where Aristotle points out the preservation of potentiality in actuality (see pp. 60). Since Bartleby's experiment cannot be conducted without challenging the principal of the irrevocability of the past, Bartleby has to come up with a new term and Agamben names that new term as "past contingent" (P 267). By drawing a parallel between Benjamin's idea of remembrance and Bartleby's experiment, Agamben claims that "Bartleby calls the past into question, re-calling it not simply to redeem what was, to make it exist again but, more precisely, to consign it once again to potentiality" (P 267). Agamben regards Bartleby's formula as one step beyond Nietzsche's eternal return. Eternal return is Nietzsche's alternative to the man of resentment who cannot do away with his past. It transforms every "thus it was" which is the obsession of the man of resentment into "thus I willed it" (P 267). However, Agamben believes that in this transformation a great deal is repressed: "Solely concerned with repressing the spirit of revenge, Nietzsche completely forgets the laments of what was not or could have been otherwise" (P 267). But these are the very

laments that Bartleby's experiment discovers. Agamben believes that Bartleby clings to the formula of eternal return until he gives up copying permanently, yet he has to quit copying in order to hear the voice of the potential not to be, which is muffled by the "infinite repetition of what was" (P 268). As a reaction to Deleuze who announces Bartleby as a "new Christ", Agamben observes that "If Bartleby is a new Messiah, he comes not, like Jesus, to redeem what was, but to save what was not" (P 270). He arrives at this conclusion by referring to the rumor that is related at the end of the story. A few months after the death of Bartleby, the attorney learns from a source that is barely dependable that "Bartleby had been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington, from which he had been suddenly removed by a change in the administration" (Melville 68). Agamben claims that, as a former clerk in the Dead Letter Office, Bartleby comes to the law office, having witnessed the "intolerable truth" dead letters reveal (P 269). Dead letters are the utmost examples of the "joyous events that could have been, but never took place" and Bartleby draws our attention to these potentialities that never pass into actuality (Agamben, P 269). Even though Bartleby is put in jail and dies there with his eyes open since he refuses to eat anything, Agamben believes that the "walled courtyard" where Bartleby meets his end "is not a sad place" (P 271). He maintains that Bartleby is "saved in being irredeemable" (P 271).

Some important contradictions appear when the two accounts of Agamben concerning Bartleby are compared. As it has already been mentioned above, in *Homo Sacer* Agamben argues that Bartleby, along with Schelling, Nietzsche and Heidegger, fails to escape from the ban of sovereignty. However, in "Bartleby, or on Contingency" Agamben attributes an extraordinary power to Bartleby's formula strong enough to create its own ontology and revive the potentiality within the past. This is a contradiction that can hardly be seen as a simple attenuation of enthusiasm on Agamben's part concerning Bartleby. The differences between the two accounts are not as insignificant as they may seem. Such a comparison will also enable us to see to what degree Bartleby can be seen as a subversive figure.

The main conflict between the approaches of Agamben in the article and in *Homo Sacer* stems from the two different parties that apply the principle of potentiality. In the article about Bartleby, Agamben refers to the scrivener as the ultimate example of perfect potentiality. However, in *Homo Sacer*, he points out the exact correspondence between the form of sovereign law and the principle of potentiality. Moreover, in *Homo Sacer* he maintains that Bartleby's challenge is not powerful enough to escape from the

ban of the law. The reason for the inevitability of the law's ban is closely related to the potential to not-be which is preserved even when the law passes to actuality (*HS* 46- *P* 183, 264). The problem is that in "Bartleby, or on Contingency" Agamben claims that Bartleby also makes use of the same formula of potentiality. He regards Bartleby as the new Messiah since he believes that the scrivener's formula enables him to reveal the potential to not-be within the actuality. In other words, Bartleby appears as a figure that draws our attention to what could have been but was not. The indistinct position of the scrivener between Being and non-Being makes such an impossible task possible. While for the sovereign the same principle serves as a means of ultimate control, for Bartleby it acts as a strategy to overcome the Law:

Bartleby is a "law copyist," a scribe in the evangelical sense of the term, and his renunciation of copying is also a reference to the Law, a liberation from the "oldness of the letter." Critics have viewed Bartleby, like Joseph K., as a Christ figure (Deleuze calls him "a new Christ") who comes to abolish the old Law and to inaugurate a new mandate... But if Bartleby is a new Messiah, he comes not, like Jesus, to redeem what was, but to save what was not... And Bartleby comes not to bring a new table of the Law, but as in the Cabalistic speculations on the messianic kingdom, to fulfill the Torah by destroying it from top to the bottom. (*P* 270)

In the article which is published two years before *Homo Sacer* we have Bartleby—a highly subversive figure to bring down the Law from top to the bottom—whereas in *Homo Sacer* Bartleby appears as one of the strong objections never to be able to break free from the Law's ban. The same ambiguity appears also in Deleuze's account in which the shadow of nihilism falls onto the subversion of the scrivener.

2. Bartleby: Is he a Nihilist or the Overman?

In his article "Bartleby; or, the Formula" Deleuze claims that "'Bartleby' is neither a metaphor for the writer nor the symbol of anything whatsoever. It is a violently comical text, and the comical is always literal" (*ECC* 68). He places "Bartleby" within the same lineage of the novellas of Kleist, Dostoyevsky, Kafka and Beckett. In line with the heroes of these novellas, Deleuze believes that "Bartleby" "means only what it says, literally" (*ECC* 68). Since Bartleby utters very little apart from his formula "I would

prefer not to”, Deleuze begins the article with a deep analysis of the meaning of Bartleby’s formula.

According to Deleuze, the formula gains its force from its agrammaticality. He believes that the formula’s agrammaticality is similar to the masterpieces of literature which “always form a kind of foreign language within the language in which they are written” (ECC 71). This is a very pertinent analysis in that when Bartleby utters his formula for the first time no one seems to understand it. It is as if the scrivener speaks a foreign language. The formula occurs the first time when the attorney who hired Bartleby asks for the scrivener’s help to proofread a copy.

Imagine my surprise, nay, my consternation, when, without moving from his privacy, Bartleby, in a singularly mild, firm voice, replied, “I would prefer not to.”

I sat awhile in perfect silence, rallying my stunned faculties. Immediately it occurred to me that my ears had deceived me, or Bartleby had entirely misunderstood my meaning. I repeated my request in the clearest tone I could assume; but in quite as clear a one came the previous reply, “I would prefer not to.”

“Prefer not to,” echoed I, rising in high excitement, and crossing the room with a stride. “What do you mean? Are you moon-struck? I want you to help me compare this sheet here—take it,” (Melville 32)

Moreover Deleuze also addresses the issue of the contagiousness of the formula which can also be seen as an element that increases its strength. The word “prefer” soon spreads among all the clerks and the attorney. They all begin to use it involuntarily in their daily dialogues. “Somehow, of late” the attorney who is the narrator of the story says that “I had got into the way of involuntarily using this word ‘prefer’ upon all sorts of not exactly suitable occasions” (Melville 47). Turkey, who is another copyist in the office also catches it and uses it involuntarily. When the attorney tells him that “So you have got the word too” Turkey does not understand what he means. When he understands that attorney is referring to the word “prefer” he replies: “Oh, *prefer*? Oh yes—queer word. I never use it myself. But, sir, as I was saying, if he would but prefer—” (Melville 48). However, Deleuze emphasizes that the “essential point” concerning the formula which is “ravaging, devastating, and leaves nothing standing in its wake” is not the contamination but “its effect on Bartleby” (ECC 70). “The formula is devastating” Deleuze says “because it eliminates the preferable just as mercilessly as any nonpreferred” (ECC 71). Hence Bartleby has to cease copying too which is not a nonpreferred act such as proofreading or going to the post office. Nothing is spared by the devastation of the formula and it does not stop until it turns Bartleby into a figure of

total inaction. Deleuze maintains that the total devastation of the formula abolishes all particularity and all reference. When there is no particularity, the words become indistinguishable. Hence the formula “creates a vacuum within language” (*ECC* 73). It is due to this vacuum that Deleuze cannot see Bartleby as a rebel: “The formula stymies all speech acts, and at the same time, it makes Bartleby a pure outsider [*exclu*] to whom no social position can be attributed” (*ECC* 73). This extreme isolation is one of the definitive elements his employer uses while recounting his first confrontation with Bartleby: “I can see the figure now—pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurable forlorn! It was Bartleby” (Melville 30). Although his solitude is incurable and his formula is devastating, Deleuze believes that Bartleby can be the “Man of the Future or New World Man” which nineteenth century messianism seeks (*ECC* 74). As a character who seems more like a psychotic or lunatic than a hero of his own age, Bartleby’s position with regard to society is highly ambiguous. Can a character, who, by saying “I would prefer not to be a little reasonable,” explicitly denies reason altogether, be thought of as a messiah?

Even though Bartleby seems like “a little *lunny*” as Ginger Nut says, what can be said about the behaviors of his employer who always invites Bartleby to reason? The attorney always emphasizes the unreasonableness of Bartleby’s reply. “But what reasonable objection can you have to speak to me?” the attorney asks Bartleby, “I feel friendly towards you” (Melville 45). He also explains his inability to react properly to Bartleby’s formula with the extreme unreasonableness of the scrivener: “It is not seldom the case that, when a man is browbeaten in some unprecedented and violently unreasonable way, he begins to stagger in his own plainest faith. He begins, as it were, vaguely to surmise that, wonderful as it may be, all the justice and all the reason is on the other side” (Melville 34). Whenever he is exposed to the formula, the attorney tries to see the reason behind it, but the last time he asks Bartleby the reason for his decision to quit copying permanently, the scrivener replies: “Do you not see the reason for yourself?” (Melville 48)? Deleuze draws our attention to the question of to what extent the decisions and behaviors of the attorney, who sees himself as a perfectly reasonable man, can be regarded as reasonable. Unlike Bartleby who is in full control of his temper, the attorney is always restless, constantly trying to find a way to deal with the scrivener. As a reasonable man, the attorney cannot bear the tranquility of Bartleby while he is full of anger: “The passiveness of Bartleby sometimes irritated me. I felt strangely goaded on to encounter him in new opposition, to elicit some angry spark

from him answerable to my own” (Melville 37). However, he never manages to cause even a little change in the utmost serenity of Bartleby’s character. Bartleby seems to cause paranoid reactions in his employer. When the attorney finally tells Bartleby that he does not want to see the scrivener in the office the day after, he sinks into a pensive mood. In the morning before he goes to the office, the attorney is still under to pressure of the possibility to find Bartleby in the office like any other day. On his way to the office the following dialogue takes place when the attorney is passing near to a group of people who are discussing something with all seriousness:

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

“Doesn’t go?—done!” said I, “put up your money.” (Melville 52)

However, the people were, of course, not betting on Bartleby’s decision. They were discussing about possibility of a candidate’s victory in the mayoral elections. “In my intent frame of mind,” the attorney says “I had, as it were, imagined that all Broadway shared my excitement, and were debating the same question with me” (Melville 52). Nevertheless the event that pushes Bartleby’s employer to an almost total delirium happens when the attorney finds Bartleby in the office. “I was thunderstruck” the attorney says. Although the attorney tries to elicit the reason for Bartleby’s insistence on staying in the office without doing anything as he always does, he gradually loses his temper. “I would prefer *not* to quit you” is the only reply Bartleby gives “gently emphasizing the *not*” and he leaves the other questions unanswered (Melville 54). It is at this point when Bartleby returns to his table that the attorney becomes mad. In order to do the least harm to his reasonableness the attorney says that the event would never have taken place if the two were not alone in the building before he tells what happened. “When this old Adam of resentment rose in me and tempted me concerning Bartleby, I grappled him and threw him” (Melville 55). He was on the verge of committing a murder, but remembering the “divine injunction: ‘A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another’” he pulls himself together. Then a short period of peace comes. The attorney decides not to disturb Bartleby and he regards the scrivener as a blessing sent for his own good: “Bartleby was billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an all-wise Providence” (Melville 56). However, the attorney cannot bear with the pressure of his colleagues who cannot make sense of the presence of a man who does nothing in an office which is full busy people. Since he feels that his professional reputation is under threat the attorney settles on a radical resolution which can be seen as the most unreasonable thing that he does. He decides to move his office

to a new place. However, this also does not solve the problem. The new tenant of his former office visits the attorney and tells him to take care of the man who refuses to do anything. Although he gets rid of the tenant easily by saying that he has no relationship with the man whatsoever, the tenant comes back after several days, this time with the landlord of the former office. The landlord asks the attorney to do something quickly since Bartleby, displaced from the office, now makes the banisters of the stairs his new home. Upon hearing this, the attorney goes to talk to Bartleby. He offers the scrivener other jobs, but Bartleby does not find any of them preferable. When the attorney gets the same reply from the scrivener to his last suggestion of going home together for the time being, he leaves the building in a rush. In order not to be disturbed later by the new tenant or the landlord he leaves the city for a few days. When Deleuze questions the sanity of the attorney, he mentions these instances that do not comply with a man of reason: “From the initial arrangement to this irrepressible, Cain-like flight, everything is bizarre, and the attorney behaves like a madman” (*ECC* 75). The “indiscernibility and indetermination” of Bartleby’s formula which eradicates all particularity also destabilizes the categories of reasonable and unreasonable. “The attorney” Deleuze argues, “starts to vagabond while Bartleby remain tranquil, but it is precisely because he remains tranquil and immobile that Bartleby is treated like a vagabond” (*ECC* 75).

Deleuze claims that the vacuum of language and the zone of indiscernibility that devour everything are two important features of Melville’s art. By destroying the mimetic structure, they also abolish the image of the father which dominates the bildungsroman (*ECC* 77). This eradication of the image of the father, Deleuze maintains, is realized by the two types of characters that appear in Melville’s works. The first type is categorized as *hypochondriacs*, who—like Bartleby and Billy Budd—are saintly figures

almost stupid, creatures of innocence and purity, stricken with a constitutive weakness but also with a strange beauty. Petrified by nature, they prefer... no will at all, a nothingness of the will rather than a will to nothingness (hypochondrical ‘negativism’). They can only survive by becoming stone, by denying the will and sanctifying themselves in this suspension. (*ECC* 80)

Deleuze calls the second type monomaniacs “who, driven by the will to nothingness, make a monstrous choice” (*ECC* 79). He puts Ahab and Claggart into this category. Although these two types are polar opposites, they still share one commonality. They both belong to *Primary Nature*. Deleuze takes the theory that attributes duality to nature from Sade: “secondary, sensible Nature is governed by the Law (or laws), while

innately deprived beings participate in a terrible supersensible Primary Nature, original and oceanic, which knowing no Law, pursues its own aim through them” (*ECC* 79). In addition to these two types which Deleuze refers to as “Originals”, there is a third one: “the one on the side of the Law, the guardian of the divine and human laws of secondary nature: the prophet” (*ECC* 80). The attorney in “Bartleby” and Captain Vere in “Billy Budd” belong to the third type.

The ambiguity concerning Bartleby’s subversion stems first and foremost from the position of the third type. Deleuze maintains that those who belong to the third type “bear the paternal image” (*ECC* 80). Although they assume the role of benevolent father, “they cannot ward off the demons [monomaniacs], because the latter are too quick for the law, too surprising. Nor can they save the innocent, the irresponsible [beyond all responsibility]: they immolate them in the name of the Law” (*ECC* 80). Like captain Vere who connived at the execution of Billy Budd, the attorney also betrays Bartleby by forsaking him. The question is that if Bartleby, as a *hypochondriac*, is doomed to be sacrificed by the Law, what remains of his devastating formula that destroys everything especially the reified codes of the Law? Deleuze argues that the Originals cannot be separated from the world since it is only within the world, that is, in the secondary nature, that “they exert their effect: they reveal its emptiness, the imperfection of its laws” (*ECC* 83). However, the challenge of Bartleby cannot be considered as effective if he is immolated in the name of the Law, which is the very target of his challenge. Moreover the concepts “will to nothingness” and “nothingness of the will,” which Deleuze uses to define the Originals belong to nihilist jargon. In his book *Nietzsche and Philosophy* Deleuze refers to these concepts in his discussion of nihilism and in that discussion they seem to have no positive connotation. Likewise, these concepts also have negative meanings in Nietzschean terminology.

In the chapter about the Overman, Deleuze defines three types of nihilism: negative, reactive and passive. The first type is based on the concept of the will to nothingness. Life is devalued in the name of higher values and the will is turned towards nothingness. This will to nothingness serves as the motor for reactive forces: “In its enterprise of denying life the will to nothingness on the one hand merely tolerates the reactive life but on the other hand has need of it” (Deleuze, *NP* 148-9). The will to nothingness is like a leader to the reactive forces, but they want to get rid of this will once they become

victorious over active forces². The result is that “[t]he reactive life breaks its alliance with the negative will, it wants to rule alone” (Deleuze, *NP* 149). This denial of the will to nothingness marks the beginning of the second type which is reactive nihilism. However, when reactive forces dismiss the will to nothingness, they have to change their way of existence. The change involves rejecting the will altogether: “It is better to have no ‘will’ at all than this over-powerful, over-lively will. It is better to have stagnant herds than the shepherd who persists in leading us too far. It is better to have only our own strength than a will which we no longer need” (Deleuze, *NP* 149). Passive nihilism, which is the third type, appears when reactive nihilism goes as far as it can without will. “Passive nihilism” Deleuze observes, “is the final outcome of reactive nihilism: fading away passively rather than being led from outside” (*NP* 149).

Therefore nihilism follows a structure that proceeds through transformations. The last type of nihilism announces both the peak point and the end of nihilism. In Nietzschean formulation nihilism can only be destroyed by going through all these phases. Since the last phase is passive nihilism, those who are at that phase is considered as better than the others. Although according to Nietzsche the nihilism of Christianity belongs to the second type; that is, reactive, he regards Christ as a passive nihilist. Nietzsche’s thought concerning Christianity is that if it had not been for St Paul, Christianity would have already passed to the third phase. Deleuze summarizes Nietzsche’s ideas as the following:

If the falsifications which begin with the Gospels and which find their definitive form in St Paul are taken into account what is left of Christ, what is his *personal type*, what is the sense of his death? [...] It is easy to see what Nietzsche is getting at: Christ was the opposite of what St Paul made of him, the true Christ was a kind of Buddha, “a Buddha on a soil very little like that of India”. Given his surroundings he was too far ahead of his time, he had already taught the reactive life to die serenely, to fade away passively... (*NP* 155)

For Nietzsche, Buddhism is at the third stage of nihilism, therefore it has a higher status than Christianity: “Buddhism is a religion for the end and fatigue of a civilization; Christianity does not even find civilization in existence – it establishes civilization if need be” (qtd. in Deleuze, *NP* 155). The position of Christ in the eyes of Nietzsche turns him into a figure of passive nihilism rather than reactive nihilism.

If we return to Deleuze’s article on Bartleby, which was published twenty-seven years after the book on Nietzsche, we see that he defines Bartleby with messianic

² For a detailed discussion of how reactive forces become triumphant over active forces see Chapter One: Nietzschean Ressentiment

images and he refers to the scrivener as the “new Christ”. This parallelism established between Bartleby and Christ can be interpreted as an indication of the former’s passive nihilism. But above all, the concept nothingness of the will, which is used to define passive nihilism, is also used to define the type which Bartleby belongs. Moreover the ultimate lesson of passive nihilism which is “fading away passively” can also be said to define Bartleby. When the attorney flees to New Jersey in order not to be disturbed any further by the demands of either the new tenant or the former landlord, the two call the police as the last resort to get rid of Bartleby who has been haunting the banisters of the stairs. When the police officers come to take Bartleby to the Tombs, he does not resist: “[T]he poor scrivener, when told that he must be conducted to the Tombs, offered not the slightest obstacle, but in his pale unmoving way, silently acquiesced” (Melville 64). Preferring not to eat anything during the time he is in prison, Bartleby is found dead by the wall of the prison. “Strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side, his head touching the cold stones, I saw the wasted Bartleby” the attorney says (Melville 67). This death can easily be interpreted as “fading away passively”.

We can find more commonalities between passive nihilism and Bartleby if we compare the last man, who is the figure of passive nihilism in Nietzsche, with the scrivener. While describing the transformation from the second stage of nihilism to the third, Deleuze notes that the reactive man takes the place of God. “We know what the result of this is” Deleuze says, “the last man, the one who *prefers* a nothingness of will, who *prefers* to fade away passively, rather than a will to nothingness” (*NP* 174 italics mine). Deleuze places special emphasis on the difference between “last man” and “the man who wants to perish”.

We must not confuse, in Nietzsche’s terms, “the last man” and “the man who wants to perish”. One is the final product of becoming reactive, the final way in which the reactive man who is tired of willing, preserves himself. The other is the product of a selection which undoubtedly passes through the last men but does not stop there. Zarathustra praises the man of active destruction: he wants to be overcome, he goes beyond the human, already on the path of overman, “crossing the bridge”, father and ancestor of overman. (*NP* 174)

This acute separation between the “last man” who prefers a nothingness of will and “the man who wants to perish” prevents us from seeing Bartleby as a figure closer to the latter. As Deleuze maintains in the article, Bartleby is a figure “petrified by nature”. He can in no way be thought as an active figure. He is the sign of immobility: “I like to be stationary” (Melville 62). Apart from his immobility, Bartleby cannot be seen as the

ancestor of Overman because according to Deleuze he is the embodiment of pure negation, “a negativism beyond all negation” (*ECC* 71). However, the man who wants to perish celebrates active affirmation. “In the man who wants to perish, the man who wants to be overcome” Deleuze notes, “negation changes sense, it becomes a power of affirming, a preliminary condition of the development of the affirmative, a premonitory sign and a zealous servant of affirmation as such” (*NP* 176).

The results of the comparison between the article and the book can be interpreted in various ways. The first one would be to conclude that since in the book Deleuze was explaining the concept of the nothingness of the will within the context of Nietzschean thought, we cannot expect him to give a positive account of it. Then we would be led to think that in the book Deleuze was only bringing his own explanations to some of the ambiguous concepts of Nietzsche. However, this approach would not account for Deleuze’s choice to use the exactly the same concept for a literary character who is highly subversive in his eyes. Therefore, we may think that in time (27 years) Deleuze’s ideas concerning nihilism and nothingness of the will have changed and assumed a more neutral form instead of a fully negative one. This approach seems to be more consistent since Deleuze never uses the word nihilism in the article, but he uses words such as will to nothingness and nothingness of the will. If Deleuze considers a character that practically suffers from passive nihilism as “the doctor of a sick America” and “the new Christ,” his thoughts about nihilism must have undergone a change. Moreover the two types of Melville’s characters which Deleuze refers to as Originals are both nihilists. The monomaniacs with their will to nothingness and the hypochondriacs with their nothingness of the will give rise to a new kind of logic that “grasps the innermost depths of life and death” (*ECC* 82). Referring to another novel by Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, Deleuze points out the importance of the Originals for Melville who as the author emphasizes their significance in a novel: “Each original is a powerful, solitary Figure that exceeds any explicable form: it projects flamboyant traits of expression that mark the stubbornness of a thought without image, a question without response, an extreme nonrational logic” (qtd. in Deleuze, *ECC* 82-83). Since these Originals have some deeper knowledge that is inexpressible and denied to those characters that belong to a secondary nature, they must have a positive meaning for Deleuze in spite of the nihilism intrinsic to them. Nevertheless as a character who embodies both the leading characteristics of the worst type of nihilism and a subversive formula which devastates not only language, but also the father figure which haunts

nineteenth century European novel, *Bartleby's* the subversion becomes highly questionable within Deleuzian framework. Although the same ambiguity is observed in Agamben's analysis, there are various perspectives that embrace *Bartleby* as a figure of pure subversion.

3. *Bartleby*: The Point of Indistinction between Subversion and Submission

As it has been mentioned above, Agamben in "Bartleby, or on Contingency" argues that *Bartleby* comes as the new messiah who comes to "save what was not" and brings down the Law in the Cabalistic sense by fulfilling it (P 270). This subversive image of *Bartleby* is also observed in his book *The Coming Community*, where Agamben implies that the scrivener has indeed "supreme power" as the ultimate point of potentiality. However, in *Homo Sacer* he seems to have changed this view because the principle of potentiality does not define *Bartleby's* challenge any more. Instead it defines the underlying principal of the Law's extreme power. Therefore the challenge of *Bartleby* has no other option than succumbing to the "supreme power" which now belongs to the Law. We have a similar case in Deleuze's interpretation too. Although Deleuze celebrates the Originals as vessels of a higher form of knowledge, their challenge seems to be contaminated by a strong nihilism that directs their (in)action. However, there are other accounts which celebrate *Bartleby* as a figure of pure subversion and one of them belongs to Slavoj Žižek.

In his book *Parallax View* Žižek approaches the story of the scrivener from the perspective of *political parallax*. He maintains that there is a "parallax gap between the "Bartleby" attitude of withdrawal from social engagement and collective social action" (Žižek 10). Žižek uses the term parallax to refer to the identity of two phenomena that appear as polar opposites. He believes in the necessity of such an approach to gain an insight into the relations that link various cultural phenomena which seem to be unrelated on the surface. Another reason for the importance of parallax view for Žižek is that he sees this view as a way to save "the basic law of dialectical materialism, the struggle of the opposites" from the colonization of the "New Age notion of the polarity of opposites (*yin-yang*, and so on)" (7). As opposed to the interpretation which

emphasizes the passivity of Bartleby, for Žižek, the scrivener appears as an image of pure violence.

By applying the same logic of symmetry between the two opposite modes of the concept of “living dead” to the opposition between violence and nonviolence, Žižek reveals a parallax gap.

We all know the pop-psychological notion of “passive-aggressive behavior,” usually applied to a housewife who, instead of actively opposing her husband, passively sabotages him. And this brings us back to where we began: perhaps we should assert this attitude of passive aggression as a proper radical political gesture, in contrast to aggressive passivity, the standard “interpassive” mode of our participation in socio-ideological life in which we are active all the time in order to make sure that nothing will happen, that nothing will really change. In such a constellation, the first truly critical (“aggressive,” violent) step is to withdraw into passivity, to refuse to participate—Bartleby’s “I would prefer not to” is the necessary first step which, as it were, clears the ground, opens up the place, for true activity, for an act that will actually change the coordinates of the constellation. (342)

Žižek, therefore considers Bartleby’s gesture as the true act of violence that actually leads to change in contrast to the violent activities which take place, but do not change anything. As opposed “Bartleby politics”, such acts of violence, Žižek believes, are no more than indications of impotency. He defines these outbursts of violence which change nothing as *passage à l’acte* and he claims that it is this kind of violence which characterizes Fascist thought: “in a Fascist display of violence, something spectacular should happen all the time so that, precisely, nothing will really happen” (Žižek 381). However the pure act of violence cannot take place within the existing categories of culture and politics. It has to create its own space in order to present a true alternative: “*this very place should be opened up* through a gesture which is thoroughly violent in its impassive refusal, through a gesture of pure withdrawal in which—to quote Mallarmé—*rien n’aura eu lieu que le lieu*, nothing will have taken place but the place itself” (Žižek 381).

According to Žižek, due to the new place that he opens up with his “I would prefer not to” Bartleby comes up with an affirmative judgment rather than a negative one. This issue of negation is important for Žižek because only through such gestures as Bartleby’s which are based not on negation, but on the affirmation of a non-predicate (“he does not say that he *doesn’t want to do it*; he says that *he prefers (wants) not to do it*”) that a truly original position can be assumed instead of a negative one that

“parasitizes upon what it negates” (381). Žižek then, turns to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s book *Empire* to criticize their interpretation of Bartleby’s gesture.

In *Empire* Hardt and Negri refer to Bartleby to ascertain the role refusal plays in politics of resistance. Hardt and Negri believe that the absolute refusal of Bartleby makes him a *mere man*: “His refusal is so absolute that Bartleby appears completely blank, a man without qualities, or, as Renaissance philosophers would say, *homo tantum*, mere man and nothing more” (203). However, they claim that the absolute refusal of “voluntary servitude” is merely the first stage of a more encompassing project.

This refusal certainly is the beginning of a liberatory politics, but it is only a beginning. The refusal is itself empty. Bartleby and Michael K may be beautiful souls, but their being in its absolute purity hangs on the edge of an abyss. Their lines of flight from authority are completely solitary, and they continuously tread on the verge of suicide. In political terms, too, refusal in itself (of work, authority, and voluntary servitude) leads only to a kind of social suicide. As Spinoza says, if we simply cut the tyrannical head off the social body, we will be left with the deformed corpse of society. What we need is to create a new social body, which is a project that goes well beyond refusal. Our lines of flight, our exodus must be constituent and create a real alternative. Beyond simple refusal, or as part of that refusal, we need also to construct a new mode of life and above all a new community. (Hardt, Negri 204)

Žižek, on the other hand, opposes Hardt and Negri in that according to him, Bartleby’s refusal cannot be thought as the first step of a more comprehensive project. He claims that Bartleby’s “I would prefer not to” does not merely mark a rupture that has to be forgotten in order to build a new society on the blank page it leaves. On the contrary, he argues that it is “a kind of *arche*, the underlying principle that sustains the entire movement” (Žižek 382). It is a gesture that has to be sustained in order not fall into the position of the parasitizing negation. The strength of “I would prefer not to” comes from its ability to rule out the pseudo-resistances, which Žižek calls “rumspringa of resistance”. Žižek uses that term for “all the forms of resisting which help the system to reproduce itself by ensuring our participation in it” (383). Hence “today” Žižek says,

“I would prefer not to” is not primarily “I would prefer not to participate in the market economy, in capitalist competition and profiteering,” but—much more problematically for some—“I would prefer not to give to charity to support a Black orphan in Africa, engage in the struggle to prevent oil-drilling in a wildlife swamp, send books to educate our liberal-feminist-spirited women in Afghanistan. . . .” A distance toward the direct hegemonic interpellation “Involve yourself in market competition, be active and productive!”—is the very mode of operation of today’s ideology: today’s ideal subject says to himself: “I am well aware that the whole business of social competition and material success

is just an empty game, that my true Self is elsewhere!” If anything, “I would prefer not to” expresses, rather, a refusal to play the “Western Buddhist” game of “social reality is just an illusory game.” (383)

Although Žižek’s interpretation of Bartleby’s formula as the only possible true alternative can be considered to be in the same line with Agamben’s and Deleuze’s interpretations, the differences are greater in number. First of all, Žižek’s views Bartleby as a highly active figure of pure violence. He seems to believe in the possibility of a “Bartleby-politics” which is highly difficult to conceive, but still remains as the only option against the capitalist ideology. Even though the ambiguity in the readings of Agamben and Deleuze concerning Bartleby’s subversion seems contradictory, Žižek’s view which regards the scrivener as a figure of pure subversion has its own problems. Let us turn back to Hardt and Negri who touch upon an important issue in their discussion of refusal, but do not elaborate on it. Hardt and Negri argue that “in the course of the story” the scrivener “strips down so much—approximating ever more closely naked humanity, naked life, naked being—that eventually he withers away, evaporates in the bowels of the infamous Manhattan prison, the Tombs” (203). Even though Bartleby’s formula has an enormous subversive power, it cannot be thought separately from the pathetic death of the scrivener. Therefore it is not possible to think Bartleby as purely subversive or purely submissive.

One of the well-known articles about Bartleby is Leo Marx’s which is published in 1953. In this article Marx argues that although society can be held responsible for the miserable death of the scrivener, Bartleby also shares that responsibility. According to Marx, in the story Melville is criticizing not only the society but also the position of the artist who turns his back on the society. Marx interprets the “dead-wall reveries” of Bartleby as a symbol for the artist who is obsessed with the limitations society places upon his work. However, Marx maintains that Bartleby is wrong because he takes the walls as indestructible and this leads to his utter passivity. “He has forgotten” Marx says, “to take account of the fact that these particular walls which surround the office are, after all, man-made” (251). Therefore Marx’s conclusion is that “[w]hat ultimately killed this writer was not the walls themselves, but the fact that he confused the walls built by men with the wall of human morality” (253). Along with Hardt and Negri, Marx can also be said to point out the vulnerability of the scrivener despite being “the only real” threat to society (Marx 252). However, the idea that both society and the scrivener are equally responsible for the death of Bartleby does not clarify the

ambiguous nature of Bartleby's subversion. Although Marx is careful enough to discern the parts of the story that refer to the unjustifiable aspects of Bartleby's withdrawal, his conclusion that renders both parts as equally guilty seems a bit too far. Bartleby's subversion cannot be understood without contradictions, but Marx's interpretation renders the scrivener's challenge totally ineffective by calling it a mere hallucination.

As it has been mentioned above Agamben's and Deleuze's interpretations also consist of contradictory statements, however they are different in their contradictions. Although we can only make sense of Bartleby's subversion through its contradictions, the contradiction that arises from the comparison of Agamben's two interpretations does not serve for our ends. As Paul A. Passavant claims there seems to be a logical contradiction between Agamben's earlier works and his later works such as *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception*: "Although his earlier work provides a more coherent narrative of how it is possible to move from contemporary society to ideal community, it does not provide the theory of political action necessary to overcome the power of the state he describes when he theorizes the state in *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception*" (147). However, Passavant does not include the article "Bartleby, or On Contingency" in his discussion even in the part titled "Bartleby". Nevertheless his analysis seems to be valid for the contradiction that has already been pointed out between the article and *Homo Sacer*. The contradiction arises from Agamben's attribution of the same principal first to Bartleby as a subversive figure and then to the form of sovereign law which is the very institution challenged by Bartleby. Moreover, his argument in *Homo Sacer*, which posits Bartleby's challenge as an attempt doomed to failure, aggravates the confusion further. However the contradiction in Deleuze's analysis seems to be more informative than confusing.

As it has been mentioned above, the subversion which Deleuze attributes to Bartleby's formula becomes ambiguous when he defines the scrivener with the same concept which defines passive nihilism, as a character that has "nothingness of will". Even though a positive understanding can be inferred from this connection with passive nihilism since it is the ultimate stage of nihilism that marks the point just before its destruction, the similarities between "last man" and Bartleby foreclose such interpretations. However, this latent connection that Deleuze establishes between the devastating formula of Bartleby and the last man who "prefers to fade away passively" helps us to understand the gesture of the scrivener. Bartleby's indistinct position between purely subversive and purely submissive can only be understood via such

connections between polar opposites which the scrivener embodies. As opposed to the interpretations that consider Bartleby as a purely subversive character, he always remains vulnerable throughout the story. The total compliance that he displays when the police come to take him to prison can be seen as an evidence of his submissive aspect. Therefore to see Bartleby as a subversive character is as difficult as arguing that he is a submissive figure. It is only through such implications as Deleuze comes up with in his analysis that Bartleby's subversion makes sense.

4. CONCLUSION

Both *Underground Man* and *Bartleby* appear as figures that have pushed the limits of inaction to the farthest extent. It seems difficult to compare these two characters who do not appear to have anything in common other than their inaction at the first look, but there are more elements that link them. Although these elements are also closely related to their inaction, they are significant in that they help us discover the importance of inaction from various perspectives. The first common point that links *Bartleby* and *Underground Man* other than their inaction is their ability to embody strictly opposite things. As it has been mentioned above, *Underground Man* is hailed as one of the best examples of the true representation of the idea by Bakhtin and he is also celebrated as one of the rare characters that truly pictures the fallacy of metaphysical autonomy, which is the common problem of modern man by Girard. However, he is also categorized as a highly threatening character that is more dangerous than a monster figure and put into the same group with murderers like Charles Manson by Michael André Bernstein. As for *Bartleby*, he is regarded as the character who brings the strongest challenge to the Law by Agamben, but the Italian philosopher thinks that the scrivener cannot escape the absolute ban of the Law. By the same token, Deleuze announces *Bartleby* as the “New World’s Man” and the doctor who will cure America, but by putting him to the category of hypochondriacs who prefer “nothingness of the will,” he attributes a principle of nihilism to the scrivener. Although the analyses of these critics appear highly contradictory on the surface, the contradictory remarks that populate the criticisms of both works stem necessarily from their structure. There is a smooth parallelism between the theme and structure of both works which prevents the readers and critics from coming up with non-contradictory conclusions. And this is another element that links the two short novels. The theme of inaction which haunts the heroes of the novels continues to haunt the readers and critics via this perfect correspondence between their theme and structure. Even though the structure of both works force the reader and critic to an inert position that mirrors *Bartleby*’s and *Underground Man*’s, each work does that in a different way.

In “Notes from *Underground*” *Underground Man* anticipates all the possible positions the reader or the critic might assume for him/herself. He constructs all his arguments with a particular audience in his mind. In fact, the construction of all his

arguments together with all his ideas depends upon this imaginary audience. He bases his own image on the reactions of others. He would not be able to continue if it were not for his imaginary interlocutors. The contradictory part in this situation is that Underground Man spends all his energy in order to prove his individuality. All his claims in favour of human volition and his ruthless criticisms of nineteenth century intellectual, social, political and aesthetic trends signify his need for an independent personality. However, the more he tries to assert his independence, the more dependent he becomes on the others. He is obsessed with anticipating the possible reactions of his imaginary readers. He cannot write without assuming imaginary readers even though he frequently claims that he does not care about their reactions. His extraordinary effort to truly anticipate the reactions of his imaginary readers brings not only himself, but also his readers to a standstill. It is exactly at this point that the leap from the thematic to the structural level takes place. "Notes from Underground" appears as a text whose theme and structure are essentially tied to each other. Underground Man frames his account, which is mainly about the inability to take action, in a way that makes it impossible for both the reader and the critic to take action. Although Underground Man cannot take action, he never gives up. Although each time he is absolutely sure that he will not be able to fulfill his revenge, he does not stop trying.

The same energy is conveyed to the readers and critics. Even though they try hard to come up with explanations for the ambiguities that surround the texts, they cannot reach a conclusion. However, like Underground Man, they never give up; the novel does not let them give up. This is the same aporia Underground Man mentions when he is talking about walls: "I won't capitulate simply because I'm confronted with a stone wall and don't have the strength to break through" (Dostoyevsky 12). The structure of the text expects the same from the reader and especially from the critic. The attempts of the critics also mirror Underground Man's desperate attempts to assert his individuality. Each critic tries to come up with a theory that will surpass the others in its ability to explain the ambiguities within the text. They generally choose to begin their analysis with discrediting the previous criticisms. Bakhtin's, Girard's and Bernstein's analyses are perfect examples for this general inclination to prove other criticisms wrong. This inclination of the critics and Underground Man's claims of independence can be said to derive from the same source. Like Underground Man, the critics try to establish their independence by refuting the previous criticisms. Another common point that critics and Underground Man share is that they also try to anticipate possible reactions to their

theories and discard them as Underground Man does. However, since they use all their energy as Underground Man does by investing some part of it in reactions of others and the rest in finding an individual position for themselves, they find themselves in the same inert position with the hero. Underground Man's great effort to exhaust all the possibilities to keep the last word for himself leads to his self destruction. As Bakhtin claims, Underground Man makes use of loopholes to secure the last word concerning him for himself, but we may also say that these loopholes help him to ward off potential threats. By adopting ideas and giving up on them through loopholes Underground Man exhausts the potential definitions of himself. He always maintains that he cannot be defined and he tries to refute possible definitions by anticipating them one by one. In this way he plans to enjoy his own potentiality, but the extreme effort spent to anticipate all the possible reactions and to discard them leaves Underground Man with no potentiality at all. Unlike Bartleby who maximizes his potentiality through not writing, Underground Man uses up all his potentiality through an excess of writing.

If we turn to "Bartleby, the Scrivener", we see that this short novel pushes the reader and the critic into inaction in a different fashion. We can also talk about a perfect correspondence between the theme and the structure of Melville's story, but this correspondence works in a different way from that in "Notes from Underground". As opposed to Dostoyevsky's first person narrative through which we witness all the inner conflicts and the deepest feelings of Underground Man, Melville's third person narrative prevents us from penetrating into the inner dynamics of Bartleby. Unlike Underground Man, about whom we know almost everything thanks to his constant blabber, we know almost nothing about Bartleby. Since the scrivener is a man without particularities and reference, the account of his employer, who is the narrator, is the only source that we have. Bartleby's silence can be said to be the most important point that separates him from Underground Man. In contrast to Dostoyevsky's garrulous hero, Bartleby rarely breaks his silence. And when he speaks, he utters hardly anything other than his formula "I would prefer not to". Through his silence and later with his complete inaction Bartleby chooses to maximize his potentiality, which can be said to be the inversion of Underground Man's strategy. This difference stems from a more fundamental distinction between the two characters. As opposed to Underground Man, who, by investing all his energy in exhausting all the possible reifications of his personality falls prey to utter inertia, Bartleby prefers to remain silent as he has no claims of individuality. Instead, Bartleby appears as a figure that tries to get rid of any

kind individuality. Deleuze emphasizes that Bartleby is the man without particularities, for whom nineteenth century literature has been searching. He strips himself of all his individual and particular traits by preferring silence and inaction. Even before he prefers not to do anything, Bartleby does the kind of writing which bears no particularity or individuality. He only does copying. However, by quitting copying, he completely denies his individuality. In this way, Bartleby seems to be aiming to reach his full potential, but his strategy too leads to self-destruction. The absence of particularities and the total denial of individuality make it hard for both the reader and the critic to find the trails of a message.

The total absence of any direction for the reader makes it as difficult for him/her to secure a position with regard to the text as the inability to find a position that has not been anticipated by Underground Man does. Consequently, the potentiality of the reader and the critic is also maximized together with Bartleby's. The same correspondence between theme and structure in "Notes from Underground" is at work in "Bartleby, the Scrivener", but it is turned upside down. While the short novel of the Russian novelist pushes the reader into inaction by leaving him/her no choice since all the possible reactions have been anticipated, Melville forces the reader to inaction by leaving all the possibilities open for all kinds of interpretation. The readers and critics of "Bartleby, the Scrivener" confront a wall that is similar to the one that stands before those who engage with "Notes from Underground".

The two inert characters seem to share an interest in walls. The story of Melville is indeed full of walls, but only the scrivener seems to be aware of these walls. He seems to be drawing attention to the existence of these walls throughout the story with his dead wall reveries not only at the law office, but also at Tombs, during his days of prison. Like Underground Man, Bartleby also does not give up when he is faced with a wall, but he cannot do anything to destroy it, either. The readers and critics engaged with "Bartleby, the Scrivener" also confront walls throughout the story, but do not give up, either. The full potentiality that has been conferred upon them by the story can be said to be the strongest wall before them. Although the abundance of options intimidates the reader, s/he tries to come up with new interpretations to destroy that wall, but the structure does not allow this. Like Bartleby, who dies with his eyes open in front of the prison wall, the reader of "Bartleby, the Scrivener" is doomed to face the wall the story places before them. However, as the narrator says and Agamben agrees, it may not be "so sad a place as one might think. Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass"

(Melville 65). It may not be a sad place because it at least reminds us of the wall that we all face in various disguises (political, social, theoretical, religious, psychological).

As it has been repeated throughout this study, both *Underground Man* and *Bartleby* embody bipolarities. The co-existence of polar opposites without any kind of synthesis creates a huge problem for the modern urge to categorize through fragmentation. These two characters are challenges to modernity primarily because of these double binds they embody. They point out the relationships between conflicting phenomena. However, they also bear witness to the impossibility of both reaching a synthesis and a complete separation. It is this impossibility that underlies their inaction.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Eds. Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- . *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- . *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. Trans. Ronald L. Martinez.. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- . *The Coming Community*. Trans. Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Aristotle. Book XXX. *Aristotle Problems II*. Trans. W. S. Hett. London: Harvard University Press, 1957.
- Arsic, Branka. "Bartleby or a Loose Existence: Melville with Jonathan Edwards" *Janus Head* 9.1 (2006): 35-60.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ed. & Trans. Carly Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Bernstein, Micheal André. *Bitter Carnival: Ressentiment and the Abject Hero*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Trans. John Osborne. London: Verso, 1998.
- Beverungen, Armin and Stephen Dunne. "I'd Prefer Not To". "Bartleby and the Excesses of Interpretation" *Culture and Organization*. 13.2 (2007): 171–183.

- Deleuze, Gilles. "Bartleby; or, the Formula" in *Essays Critical and Clinical*. Trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco. London: Verso, 1998.
- . *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson. London: Athlone Press, 2002.
- Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from Underground and The Double*. Trans. Ronald Wilks. London: Penguin, 2009.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Trans. & Ed. James Strachey. London: The Hogarth, 1995.
- Frings, Manfred S. Introduction. *Ressentiment*. By Max Scheler. Trans. Lewis B. Coser and William W. Holdheim. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1998.
- Girard, René. *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. Trans. Yvonne Freccero. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.
- Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Kafka, Franz. "Before the Law" in *Collected Stories*. Ed. Gabriel Josipovici. Trans. Willa and Edwin Muir. New York: Everyman's Library, 1993.
- Marx, Leo. "Melville's Parable of the Walls" in *Melville's Short Novels : Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*. Ed. Dan McCall. New York: Norton, 2002.
- Melville, Herman. *The Piazza Tales*. New York: The Modern Library, 1996.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Trans. Douglas Smith. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Passavant, Paul A. "The Contradictory State of Giorgio Agamben" *Political Theory*. 35 (2007): 147-174.

Pensky, Max. *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play Of Mourning*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001.

Radden, Jennifer, ed. *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Scheler, Max. *Ressentiment*. Trans. Lewis B. Coser and William W. Holdheim. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1998.

Whyte, Jessica. "‘I Would Prefer Not To’: Giorgio Agamben, Bartleby and the Potentiality of the Law" *Law Critique* 20 (2009): 309-324.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Parallax View*. Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006.