

by Gilles Deleuze

Bartleby; or, The Formula

“Bartleby” is neither a metaphor for the writer nor the symbol of any thing whatsoever. It is a violently comical text, and the comical is always literal. It is like the novellas of Kleist, Dostoyevsky, Kafka, or Beckett, with which it forms a subterranean and prestigious lineage. It means only what it says, literally. And what it says and repeats is I would prefer not to. This is the formula of its glory, which every loving reader repeats in turn. A gaunt and pallid man has uttered the formula that drives everyone crazy. But in what does the literality of the formula consist?

We immediately notice a certain mannerism, a certain solemnity: prefer is rarely employed in this sense, and neither Bartleby's boss, the attorney, nor his clerks normally use it (“queer word, I never use it myself”). The usual formula would instead be I had rather not. But the strangeness of the formula goes beyond the word itself. Certainly it is grammatically correct, syntactically correct, but its abrupt termination, NOT TO, which leaves what it rejects undetermined, confers upon it the character of a radical, a kind of limit-function. Its repetition and its insistence render it all the more unusual, entirely so. Murmured in a soft, flat, and patient voice, it attains to the irremissible, by forming an inarticulate block, a single breath. In all these respects, it has the same force, the same role as an agrammatical formula.

Linguists have rigorously analyzed what is called “agrammaticality.” A number of very intense examples can be found in the work of the American poet e. e. cummings—for instance, “he danced his did,” as if one said in French *il dansa son mit* (“he danced his began”) instead of *il se mit à danser* (“he began to dance”). Nicolas Ruwet explains that this presupposes a series of ordinary grammatical variables, which would have an agrammatical formula as their limit: he danced his did would be a limit of the normal expressions he did his dance, he danced his dance, he danced what he did ..^[1] This would no longer be a port manteau word, like those found in Lewis Carroll, but a “portmanteau construction,” a breath-construction, a limit or tensor. Perhaps it would be better to take an example from the French, in a practical situation: someone who wants to hang something on a wall and holds a certain number of nails in his hand exclaims, *J'EN AI UN DE PAS ASSEZ* (“I have one not enough”). This is an agrammatical formula that stands as the limit of a series of correct expressions: *J'en ai de trop*, *Je n'en ai pas assez*, *Il m'en manque un* ..“I have too many,” “I don't have enough,” “I am one short” ...). Would not Bartleby's formula be of this type, at once a stereotypy of Bartleby's and a highly poetic expression of Melville's, the limit of a series such as “I would prefer this. I would prefer not to do that. That is not what I would prefer ...”? Despite its quite normal construction, it has an anomalous ring to it.

I WOULD PREFER NOT TO. The formula has several variants. Sometimes it abandons the conditional and becomes more curt: I PREFER NOT TO. Sometimes, as in its final occurrences, it seems to lose its mystery by being completed by an infinitive, and coupled with to: “I prefer to give no answer,” “I would prefer not to be a little reasonable,” “I would prefer not to take a clerkship,” “I would prefer to be doing something else” ... But even in these cases we sense the

muted presence of the strange form that continues to haunt Bartleby's language. He himself adds, "but I am not a particular case," "there is nothing particular about me," "I am not particular, in order to indicate that whatever else might be suggested to him would be yet another particularity falling under the ban of the great indeterminate formula, I PREFER NOT TO, which subsists once and for all and in all cases.

The formula occurs in ten principal circumstances, and in each case it may appear several times, whether it is repeated verbatim or with minor variations. Bartleby is a copyist in the attorney's office; he copies ceaselessly, "silently, palely, mechanically." The first instance takes place when the attorney tells him to proofread and collate the two clerks' copies: I WOULD PREFER NOT TO. The second, when the attorney tells Bartleby to come and reread his own copies. The third, when the attorney invites Bartleby to reread with him personally, tête à tête. The fourth, when the attorney wants to send him on an errand. The fifth, when he asks him to go into the next room. The sixth, when the attorney enters his study one Sunday afternoon and discovers that Bartleby has been sleeping there. The seventh, when the attorney satisfies himself by asking questions. The eighth, when Bartleby has stopped copying, has renounced all copying, and the attorney asks him to leave. The ninth, when the attorney makes a second attempt to get rid of him. The tenth, when Bartleby is forced out of the office, sits on the banister of the landing while the panic-stricken attorney proposes other, unexpected occupations to him (a clerkship in a dry goods store, bartender, bill collector, traveling companion to a young gentleman ...). The formula bourgeons and proliferates. At each occurrence, there is a stupor surrounding Bartleby, as if one had heard the Unspeakable or the Unstoppable. And there is Bartleby's silence, as if he had said every thing and exhausted language at the same time. With each instance, one has the impression that the madness is growing: not Bartleby's madness in "particular," but the madness around him, notably that of the attorney, who launches into strange propositions and even stranger behaviors.

Without a doubt, the formula is ravaging, devastating, and leaves nothing standing in its wake. Its contagious character is immediately evident: Bartleby "ties the tongues" of others. The queer words, I would prefer, steal their way into the language of the clerks and of the attorney himself ("So you have got the word, too"). But this contamination is not the essential point; the essential point is its effect on Bartleby: from the moment he says I WOULD PREFER NOT TO (collate), he is no longer able to copy either. And yet he will never say that he prefers not to (copy): he has simply passed beyond this stage. And doubtless he does not realize this immediately, since he continues copying until after the sixth instance. But when he does notice it, it seems obvious, like the delayed reaction that was already implied in the first statement of the formula: "Do you not see the reason for yourself?" he says to the attorney. The effect of the formula-block is not only to impugn what Bartleby prefers not to do, but also to render what he was doing impossible, what he was supposed to prefer to continue doing.

It has been noted that the formula, I prefer not to, is neither an affirmation nor a negation. Bartleby "does not refuse, but neither does he accept, he advances and then withdraws into this advance, barely exposing himself in a nimble retreat from speech."^[2] The attorney would be relieved if Bartleby did not want to, but Bartleby does not refuse, he simply rejects a nonpreferred (the proofreading, the errands ...). And he does not accept either, he does not affirm a preference that would consist in continuing to copy, he simply posits its impossibility. In short, the formula that successively refuses every other act has already engulfed the act of copying,

which it no longer even needs to refuse. The formula is devastating because it eliminates the preferable just as mercilessly as any nonpreferred. It not only abolishes the term it refers to, and that it rejects, but also abolishes the other term it seemed to preserve, and that becomes impossible. In fact, it renders them indistinct: it hollows out an ever expanding zone of indiscernibility or indetermination between some nonpreferred activities and a preferable activity. All particularity, all reference is abolished. The formula annihilates “copying,” the only reference in relation to which something might or might not be preferred. I would prefer nothing rather than something: not a will to nothingness, but the growth of a nothingness of the will. Bartleby has won the right to survive, that is, to remain immobile and upright before a blind wall. Pure patient passivity, as Blanchot would say. Being as being, and nothing more. He is urged to say yes or no. But if he said no (to collating, running errands ...), or if he said yes (to copying), he would quickly be defeated and judged useless, and would not survive. He can survive only by whirling in a suspense that keeps everyone at a distance. His means of survival is to prefer not to collate, but thereby also not to prefer copying. He had to refuse the former in order to render the latter impossible. The formula has two phases and continually recharges itself by passing again and again through the same states. This is why the attorney has the vertiginous impression, each time, that everything is starting over again from zero.

The formula at first seems like the bad translation of a foreign language. But once we understand it better, once we hear it more clearly, its splendor refutes this hypothesis. Perhaps it is the formula that carves out a kind of foreign language within language. It has been suggested that e. e. cummings's agrammaticalities can be considered as having issued from a dialect differing from Standard English, and whose rules of creation can be abstracted. The same goes for Bartleby: the rule would lie in this logic of negative preference, a negativism beyond all negation. But if it is true that the masterpieces of literature always form a kind of foreign language within the language in which they are written, what wind of madness, what psychotic breath thereby passes into language as a whole? Psychosis characteristically brings into play a procedure that treats an ordinary language, a standard language, in a manner that makes it “render” an original and unknown language, which would perhaps be a projection of God's language, and would carry off language as a whole. Procedures of this type appear in France in Roussel and Brisset, and in America in Wolfson. Is this not the schizophrenic vocation of American literature: to make the English language, by means of driftings, deviations, de-taxes or sur-taxes (as opposed to the standard syntax), slip in this manner? To introduce a bit of psychosis into English neurosis? To invent a new universality? If need be, other languages will be summoned into English in order to make it echo this divine language of storm and thunder. Melville invents a foreign language that runs beneath English and carries it off: it is the OUTLANDISH or Deterritorialized, the language of the Whale. Whence the interest of studies of Moby-Dick that are based on Numbers and Letters, and their cryptic meaning, to set free at least a skeleton of the inhuman or super human originary language [3] It is as if three operations were linked together: a certain treatment of language; the result of this treatment, which tends to constitute an original language within language; and the effect, which is to sweep up language in its entirety, sending it into flight, pushing it to its very limit in order to discover its Outside, silence or music. A great book is always the inverse of another book that could only be written in the soul, with silence and blood. This is the case not only with Moby-Dick but also with Pierre, in which Isabelle affects language with an incomprehensible murmur, a kind of basso continuo that carries the whole of language on the chords and tones of its guitar. And it is also the angelic

or adamic Billy Budd, who suffers from a stuttering that denatures language but also gives rise to the musical and celestial Beyond of language as a whole. It is like the “persistent horrible twittering squeak” that muddles the resonance of words, while the sister is getting the violin ready to respond to Gregor.

Bartleby also has an angelic and Adamic nature, but his case seems different because he has no general Procedure, such as stuttering, with which to treat language. He makes do with a seemingly normal, brief Formula, at best a localized tick that crops up in certain circumstances. And yet the result and the effect are the same: to carve out a kind of foreign language within language, to make the whole confront silence, make it topple into silence. Bartleby announces the long silence, broken only by the music of poems, into which Melville will enter and from which, except for Billy Budd, he will never emerge [4] Bartleby himself had no other escape than to remain silent and withdraw behind his partition every time he uttered the formula, all the way up until his final silence in prison. After the formula there is nothing left to say: it functions as a procedure, overcoming its appearance of particularity.

The attorney himself concocts a theory explaining how Bartleby's formula ravages language as a whole. All language, he suggests, has references or assumptions. These are not exactly what language designates, but what permit it to designate. A word always presupposes other words that can replace it, complete it, or form alternatives with it: it is on this condition that language is distributed in such a way as to designate things, states of things and actions, according to a set of objective, explicit conventions. But perhaps there are also other implicit and subjective conventions, other types of reference or presupposition. In speaking, I do not simply indicate things and actions; I also commit acts that assure a relation with the interlocutor, in keeping with our respective situations: I command, I interrogate, I promise, I ask, I emit “speech acts.” Speech acts are self-referential (I command by saying “I order you...”), while constative propositions refer to other things and other words. It is this double system of references that Bartleby ravages.

The formula I PREFER NOT TO excludes all alternatives, and devours what it claims to conserve no less than it distances itself from everything else. It implies that Bartleby stop copying, that is, that he stop reproducing words; it hollows out a zone of indetermination that renders words indistinguishable, that creates a vacuum within language [language]. But it also stymies the speech acts that a boss uses to command, that a kind friend uses to ask questions or a man of faith to make promises. If Bartleby had refused, he could still be seen as a rebel or insurrectionary, and as such would still have a social role. But 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. This is what the attorney glimpses with dread: all his hopes of bringing Bartleby back to reason are dashed because they rest on a logic of presuppositions according to which an employer “expects” to be obeyed, or a kind friend listened to, whereas Bartleby has invented a new logic, a logic of preference, which is enough to undermine the presuppositions of language as a whole. As Mathieu Lindon shows, the formula “disconnects” words and things, words and actions, but also speech acts and words—it severs language from all reference, in accordance with Bartleby's absolute vocation, to be a man without references, someone who appears suddenly and then disappears, without reference to himself or anything else [5] This is why, despite its conventional appearance, the formula functions as a veritable agrammaticality.

Bartleby is the Bachelor, about whom Kafka said, “He has only as much ground as his two feet take up, only as much of a hold as his two hands encompass”—someone who falls asleep in the winter snow to freeze to death like a child, someone who does nothing but take walks, yet who could take them anywhere, without moving [6] Bartleby is the man without references, without possessions, without properties, without qualities, without particularities: he is too smooth for anyone to be able to hang any particularity on him. Without past or future, he is instantaneous. I PREFER NOT TO is Bartleby's chemical or alchemical formula, but one can read inversely I AM NOT PARTICULAR as its indispensable complement. The entire nineteenth century will go through this search for the man without a name, regicide and parricide, the modern-day Ulysses (“I am No One”): the crushed and mechanized man of the great metropolises, but from which one expects, perhaps, the emergence of the Man of the Future or New World Man. And, in an identical messianism, we glimpse him, sometimes as a Proletarian, sometimes as an American. Musil's novel will also follow this quest, and will invent the new logic of which The Man without Qualities is both the thinker and the product [7] And though the derivation of Musil from Melville seems certain to us, it should be sought not in “Bartleby,” but rather in Pierre; or, the Ambiguities. The incestuous couple Ulrich-Agathe is like the return of the Pierre-Isabelle couple; in both cases, the silent sister, unknown or forgotten, is not a substitute for the mother, but on the contrary the abolition of sexual difference as particularity, in favor of an androgynous relationship in which both Pierre and Ulrich are or become woman. In Bartleby's case, might not his relation with the attorney be equally mysterious, and in turn mark the possibility of a becoming, of a new man? Will Bartleby be able to conquer the place where he takes his walks?

Perhaps Bartleby is a madman, a lunatic or a psychotic (“an innate and incurable disorder” of the soul). But how can we know, if we do not take into account the anomalies of the attorney, who continues to behave in the most bizarre ways? The attorney had just received an important professional promotion. One will recall that President Schreber unleashed his own delirium only after receiving a promotion, as if this gave him the audacity to take the risk. But what is the attorney going to risk? He already has two scribes who, much like Kafka's assistants, are inverted doubles of each other, the one normal in the morning and drunk in the afternoon, the other in a perpetual state of indigestion in the morning but almost normal in the afternoon. Since he needs an extra scribe, he hires Bartleby after a brief conversation without any references because his pallid aspect seemed to indicate a constancy that could compensate for the irregularities of the two others. But on the first day he places Bartleby in a strange arrangement: Bartleby is to sit in the attorney's own office, next to some folding doors separating it from the clerk's office, between a window that faces the side of a neighboring building and a high screen, green as a prairie, as if it were important that Bartleby be able to hear, but without being seen. Whether this was a sudden inspiration on the attorney's part or an agreement reached during the short conversation, we will never know. But the fact is that, caught in this arrangement, the invisible Bartleby does an extraordinary amount of “mechanical” work. But when the attorney tries to make him leave his retreat, Bartleby emits his formula, and at this first occurrence, as with those that follow, the attorney finds himself disarmed, bewildered, stunned, thunderstruck, without response or reply. Bartleby stops copying altogether and remains on the premises, a fixture. We know to what extremes the attorney is forced to go in order to rid himself of Bartleby: he returns home, decides to relocate his office, then takes off for several days and hides out, avoiding the new tenant's complaints. What a strange flight, with the wandering attorney living in his rockaway ... From the initial arrangement to this irrepressible, Cain-like flight,

everything is bizarre, and the attorney behaves like a madman. Murder fantasies and declarations of love for Bartleby alternate in his soul. What happened? Is it a case of shared madness, here again, another relationship between doubles, a nearly acknowledged homosexual relation (“yes, Bartleby ... I never feel so private as when I know you are here ... I penetrate to the predestinated purpose of my life ...”)?[\[8\]](#)

One might imagine that hiring Bartleby was a kind of pact, as if the attorney, following his promotion, had decided to make this person, without objective references, a man of confidence [un homme de confiance] who would owe everything to him. He wants to make him his man. The pact consists of the following: Bartleby will sit near his master and copy, listening to him but without being seen, like a night bird who cannot stand to be looked at. So there is no doubt that once the attorney wants to draw (without even doing it on purpose) Bartleby from behind his screen to correct the copies with the others, he breaks the pact. This is why Bartleby, once he “prefers not to” correct, is already unable to copy. Bartleby will expose himself to view even more than he is asked to, planted in the middle of the office, but he will no longer do any copying. The attorney has an obscure feeling about it, since he assumes that if Bartleby refuses to copy, it is because his vision is impaired. And in effect, exposed to view, Bartleby for his part no longer sees, no longer looks. He has acquired what was, in a certain fashion, already innate in him: the legendary infirmity, one-eyed and one-armed, which makes him an autochthon, someone who is born to and stays in a particular place, while the attorney necessarily fills the function of the traitor condemned to flight. Whenever the attorney invokes philanthropy, charity, or friendship, his protestations are shot through with an obscure guilt. In fact, it is the attorney who broke the arrangement he himself had organized, and from the debris Bartleby pulls a trait of expression, I PREFER NOT TO, which will proliferate around him and contaminate the others, sending the attorney fleeing. But it will also send language itself into flight, it will open up a zone of indetermination or indiscernibility in which neither words nor characters can be distinguished—the fleeing attorney and the immobile, petrified Bartleby. The attorney starts to vagabond while Bartleby remains tranquil, but it is precisely because he remains tranquil and immobile that Bartleby is treated like a vagabond.

Is there a relation of identification between the attorney and Bartleby? But what is this relation? In what direction does it move? Most often, an identification seems to bring into play three elements, which are able to interchange or permutate: a form, image, or representation, a portrait, a model; a subject (or at least a virtual subject); and the subject's efforts to assume a form, to appropriate the image, to adapt itself to this image and the image to itself. It is a complex operation that passes through all of the adventures of resemblance, and that always risks falling into neurosis or turning into narcissism. A “mimetic rivalry,” as it is sometimes called. It mobilizes a paternal function in general: an image of the father par excellence, and the subject is a son, even if the determinations are interchangeable. The bildungsroman [roman de formation], or one could just as easily say the reference novel [roman de reference], provides numerous examples.

Certainly, many of Melville's novels begin with images or portraits, and seem to tell the story of an upbringing under a paternal function: Redburn, for instance. Pierre; or, The Ambiguities begins with an image of the father, with a statue and a painting. Even Moby Dick begins by amassing information at the beginning in order to give the whale a form and sketch out its image, right down to the dark painting hanging in the inn. “Bartleby” is no exception to the rule. The

two clerks are like paper images, symmetrical opposites, and the attorney fills the paternal function so well that one can hardly believe the story is taking place in New York. Everything starts off as in an English novel, in Dickens's London. But in each case, something strange happens, something that blurs the image, marks it with an essential uncertainty, keeps the form from "taking," but also undoes the subject, sets it adrift and abolishes any paternal function. It is only here that things begin to get interesting. The statue of the father gives way to his much more ambiguous portrait, and then to yet another portrait that could be of anybody or nobody. All referents are lost, and the formation [formation] of man gives way to a new, unknown element, to the mystery of a formless, nonhuman life, a Squid. Everything began à l'anglaise but continues à l'américaine, following an irresistible line of flight. Ahab can say with good reason that he is fleeing from every where. The paternal function is dropped in favor of even more obscure and ambiguous forces. The subject loses its texture in favor of an infinitely proliferating patchwork: the American patchwork becomes the law of Melville's oeuvre, devoid of a center, of an upside down or right side up. It is as if the traits of expression escaped form, like the abstract lines of an unknown writing, or the furrows that twist from Ahab's brow to that of the Whale, or the "horrible contortions" of the flapping lanyards that pass through the fixed rigging and can easily drag a sailor into the sea, a subject into death [9] In *Pierre*; or, *The Ambiguities*, the disquieting smile of the unknown young man in the painting, which so resembles the father's, functions as a trait of expression that emancipates itself, and is just as capable of undoing resemblance as it is of making the subject vacillate. I PREFER NOT TO is also a trait expression that contaminates everything, escaping linguistic form and stripping the father of his exemplary speech, just as it strips the son of his ability to reproduce copy.

It is still a process of identification, but rather than following the adventures of the neurotic, it has now become psychotic. A little bit of schizophrenia escapes the neurosis of the Old World. We can bring together three distinctive characteristics. In the first place, the formless trait of expression is opposed to the image or to the expressed form. In the second place, there is no longer a subject that tries to conform to the image, and either succeeds or fails. Rather, a zone of indistinction, of indiscernibility, or of ambiguity seems to be established between two terms, as if they had reached the point immediately preceding their respective differentiation: not a similitude, but a slippage, an extreme proximity, an absolute contiguity; not a natural filiation, but an unnatural alliance. It is a "hyperborean," "arctic" zone. It is no longer a question of Mimesis, but of becoming. Ahab does not imitate the whale, he becomes Moby-Dick, he enters into the zone of proximity [zone de voisinage] where he can no longer be distinguished from Moby-Dick, and strikes himself in striking the whale. Moby-Dick is the "wall, shoved near" with which he merges. Redburn renounces the image of the father in favor of the ambiguous traits of the mysterious brother. *Pierre* does not imitate his father, but reaches the zone of proximity where he can no longer be distinguished from his half sister, Isabelle, and becomes woman. While neurosis flounders in the nets of maternal incest in order to identify more closely with the father, psychosis liberates incest with the sister as a becoming, a free identification of man and woman: in the same way Kleist emits atypical, almost animal traits of expression—stutterings, grindings, grimaces—that feed his passionate conversation with his sister. This is because, in the third place, psychosis pursues its dream of establishing a function of universal fraternity that no longer passes through the father, but is built on the ruins of the paternal function, a function that presupposes the dissolution of all images of the father, following an autonomous line of alliance or proximity that makes the woman a sister, and the other man, a brother, like the terrible

“monkey-rope” uniting Ishmael and Queequeg as a married couple. These are the three characteristics of the American Dream, which together make up the new identification, the New World: the Trait, the Zone, and the Function.

We are in the process of melding together characters as different as Ahab and Bartleby. Yet does not everything instead set them in opposition to each other? Melvillian psychiatry constantly invokes two poles: monomaniacs and hypochondriacs, demons and angels, torturers and victims, the Swift and the Slow, the Thundering and the Petrified, the Unpunishable (beyond all punishment) and the Irresponsible (beyond all responsibility). What is Ahab doing when he lets loose his harpoons of fire and madness? He is breaking a pact. He is betraying the Whalers' Law, which says that any healthy whale encountered must be hunted, without choosing one over another. But Ahab, thrown into his indiscernible becoming, makes a choice—he pursues his identification with Moby-Dick, putting his crew in mortal danger. This is the monstrous preference that Lieutenant Starbuck bitterly objects to, to the point where he even dreams of killing the treacherous captain. Choosing is the Promethean sin par excellence [10] This was the case with Kleist's Penthesilea, an Ahab-woman who, like her indiscernible double Achilles, had chosen her enemy, in defiance of the law of the Amazons forbidding the preference of one enemy over another. The priestess and the Amazons consider this a betrayal that madness sanctions in a cannibal identification. In his last novel, Billy Budd, Melville himself brings another monomaniacal demon into the picture with Claggart: the master-at-arms. We should have no illusions about Claggart's subordinate function: his is no more a case of psychological wickedness than Captain Ahab's. It is a case of metaphysical perversion that consists in choosing one's prey, preferring a chosen victim with a kind of love rather than observing the maritime law that requires him to apply the same discipline to everyone. This is what the narrator suggests when he recalls an ancient and mysterious theory, an expose of which is found in Sade: secondary, sensible Nature is governed by the Law (or laws), while innately depraved beings participate in a terrible supersensible Primary Nature, original and oceanic, which, knowing no Law, pursues its own irrational aim through them. Nothingness, Nothingness [11] Ahab will break through the wall, even if there is nothing behind it, and will make nothingness the object of his will: “To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough.” [12] Melville says that only the eye of a prophet, and not a psychologist, is capable of discerning or diagnosing such obscure beings as these creatures of the abyss, without being able to prevent their mad enterprise, the “mystery of iniquity” ...

We are now in a position to classify Melville's great characters. At one pole, there are those monomaniacs or demons who, driven by the will to nothingness, make a monstrous choice: Ahab, Claggart, Babo ... But at the other pole are those angels or saintly hypochondriacs, 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 (hypochondriacal “negativism”). They can only survive by becoming stone, by denying the will and sanctifying themselves in this suspension [13] Such are Cereno, Billy Budd, and above all Bartleby. And although the two types are opposed in every way—the former innate traitors and the latter betrayed in their very essence; the former monstrous fathers who devour their children, the latter abandoned sons without fathers—they haunt one and the same world, forming alternations within it, just as Melville's writing, like Kleist's, alternates between stationary, fixed processes and mad-paced procedures: style, with its succession of

catatonias and accelerations ... This is because both poles, both types of characters, Ahab and Bartleby, belong to this Primary Nature, they inhabit it, they constitute it. Everything sets them in opposition, and yet they are perhaps the same creature—primary, original, stubborn, seized from both sides, marked merely with a “plus” or a “minus” sign: Ahab and Bartleby. Or in Kleist, the terrible Penthesilea and the sweet little Catherine, the first beyond conscience, the second before conscience: she who chooses and she who does not choose, she who howls like a she-wolf and she who would prefer-not-to speak [\[14\]](#)

There exists, finally, a third type of character in Melville, the one on the side of the Law, the guardian of the divine and human laws of secondary nature: the prophet. Captain Delano lacks the prophet's eye, but Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*, Captain Vere in *Billy Budd*, and the attorney in *Bartleby* all have this power to “See”: they are capable of grasping and understanding, as much as is possible, the beings of Primary Nature, the great monomaniacal demons or the saintly innocents, and sometimes both. Yet they themselves are not lacking in ambiguity, each in his own way. Though they are able to see into the Primary Nature that so fascinates them, they are nonetheless representatives of secondary nature and its laws. They bear the paternal image—they seem like good fathers, benevolent fathers (or at least protective big brothers, as Ishmael is toward Queequeg). But they cannot ward off the demons, because the latter are too quick for the law, too surprising. Nor can they save the innocent, the irresponsible: they immolate them in the name of the Law, they make the sacrifice of Abraham. Behind their paternal mask, they have a kind of double identification: with the innocent, toward whom they feel a genuine love, but also with the demon, since they break their pact with the innocent they love, each in his own manner. They betray, then, but in a different way than does Ahab or Claggart: the latter broke the law, whereas Vere or the attorney, in the name of the law, break an implicit and almost unavowable agreement (even Ishmael seems to turn away from his savage brother Queequeg). They continue to cherish the innocent they have condemned: Captain Vere will die muttering the name of Billy Budd, and the final words of the attorney's narrative will be, “Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!” which does not indicate a connection, but rather an alternative in which he has had to choose the all-too-human law over Bartleby. Torn between the two Natures, with all their contradictions, these characters are extremely important, but do not have the stature of the two others. Rather, they are Witnesses, narrators, interpreters. There is a problem that escapes this third type of character, a very important problem that is settled between the other two.

The Confidence-Man (much as one says the Medicine-Man) is sprinkled with Melville's reflections on the novel. The first of these reflections consists in claiming the rights of a superior irrationalism (chapter 14). Why should the novelist believe he is obligated to explain the behavior of his characters, and to supply them with reasons, whereas life for its part never explains anything and leaves in its creatures so many indeterminate, obscure, indiscernible zones that defy any attempt at clarification? It is life that justifies; it has no need of being justified. The English novel, and even more so the French novel, feels the need to rationalize, even if only in the final pages, and psychology is no doubt the last form of rationalism: the Western reader awaits the final word. In this regard, psychoanalysis has revived the claims of reason. But even if it has hardly spared the great novelistic works, no great novelist contemporaneous with psychoanalysis has taken much interest in it. The founding act of the American novel, like that of the Russian novel, was to take the novel far from the order of reasons, and to give birth to characters who exist in nothingness, survive only in the void, defy logic and psychology and

keep their mystery until the end. Even their soul, says Melville, is “an immense and terrifying void,” and Ahab's body is an “empty shell.” If they have a formula, it is certainly not explanatory. I PREFER NOT TO remains just as much a cabalistic formula as that of the Underground Man, who can not keep two and two from making four, but who will not RESIGN himself to it either (he prefers that two and two not make four). What counts for a great novelist—Melville, Dostoyevsky, Kafka, or Musil—is that things remain enigmatic yet nonarbitrary: in short, a new logic, definitely a logic, but one that grasps the innermost depths of life and death without leading us back to reason. The novelist has the eye of a prophet, not the gaze of a psychologist. For Melville, the three great categories of characters belong to this new logic, just as much as this logic belongs to them. Once it has reached that sought-after Zone, the hyperborean zone, far from the temperate regions, the novel, like life, needs no justification [15] And in truth, there is no such thing as reason; it exists only in bits and pieces. In Billy Budd, Melville defines monomaniacs as the Masters of reason, which is why they are so difficult to surprise; but this is because theirs is a delirium of action, because they make use of reason, make it serve their own sovereign ends, which in truth are highly unreasonable. Hypochondriacs are the Outcasts of reason, without our being able to know if they have excluded themselves from it in order to obtain something reason can not give them—the indiscernible, the unnameable with which they will be able to merge. In the end, even prophets are only the Castaways of reason: if Vere, Ishmael, or the attorney clings so tightly to the debris of reason, whose integrity they try so hard to restore, it is because they have seen so much, and because what they have seen has marked them forever.

But a second remark by Melville (chapter 44) introduces an essential distinction between the characters in a novel. Melville says that we must above all avoid confusing true Originals with characters that are simply remarkable or singular, particular. This is because the particulars, who tend to be quite populous in a novel, have characteristics that determine their form, properties that make up their image; they are influenced by their milieu and by each other, so that their actions and reactions are governed by general laws, though in each case they retain a particular value. Similarly, the sentences they utter are their own, but they are nonetheless governed by the general laws of language. By contrast we do not even know if an original exists in an absolute sense, apart from the primordial God, and it is already something extraordinary when we encounter one. Melville admits that it is difficult to imagine how a novel might include several of them. 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 and nonrational logic. Figures of life and knowledge, they know something inexpressible, live something unfathomable. They have nothing general about them, and are not particular—they escape knowledge, defy psychology. Even the words they utter surpass the general laws of language (presuppositions) as well as the simple particularities of speech, since they are like the vestiges or projections of a unique, original language [langue], and bring all of language [langage] to the limit of silence and music. There is nothing particular or general about Bartleby: he is an Original.

Originals are beings of Primary Nature, but they are inseparable from the world or from secondary nature, where they exert their effect: they reveal its emptiness, the imperfection of its laws, the mediocrity of particular creatures ... the world as masquerade (this is what Musil, for his part, will call “parallel action”). The role of prophets, who are not originals, is to be the only

ones who can recognize the wake that originals leave in the world, and the unspeakable confusion and trouble they cause in it. The original, says Melville, is not subject to the influence of his milieu; on the contrary, he throws a livid white light on his surroundings, much like the light that “accompanies the beginning of things in Genesis.” Originals are sometimes the immobile source of this light—like the foretopman high up on the mast, Billy Budd the bound, hanged man who “ascends” with the glimmering of the dawn, or Bartleby standing in the attorney's office—and sometimes its dazzling passage, a movement too rapid for the ordinary eye to follow, the lightning of Ahab or Claggart. These are the two great original Figures that one finds throughout Melville, the panoramic shot and the tracking shot, stationary process and infinite speed. And even though these are the two elements of music, though stops give rhythm to movement and lightning springs from immobility, is it not this contradiction that separates the originals, their two types? What does Jean-Luc Godard mean when, in the name of cinema, he asserts that between a tracking shot and a panoramic shot there lies a “moral problem”? Perhaps it is this difference that explains why a great novel cannot, it seems, include more than a single original. Mediocre novels have never been able to create the slightest original character. But how could even the greatest novel create more than one at a time? Ahab or Bartleby ... It is like the great Figures of the painter Francis Bacon, who admits that he has not yet found a way of bringing together two figures in a single painting [16] And yet Melville will find a way. If he finally broke his silence in the end to write Billy Budd, it is because this last novel, under the penetrating eye of Captain Vere, brings together two originals, the demonic and the petrified. The problem was not to link them together through a plot—an easy and inconsequential thing to do, since it would be enough for one to be the victim of the other—but to make them work together in the picture (if Benito Cereno was already an attempt in this direction, it was a flawed one, under the myopic and blurred gaze of Delano).

What then is the biggest problem haunting Melville's oeuvre? To recover the already-sensed identity? No doubt, it lies in reconciling the two originals but thereby also in reconciling the original with secondary humanity, the inhuman with the human. Now what Captain Vere and the attorney demonstrate is that there are no good fathers. There are only monstrous, devouring fathers, and petrified, fatherless sons. If humanity can be saved, and the originals reconciled, it will only be through the dissolution or decomposition of the paternal function. So it is a great moment when Ahab, invoking Saint Elmo's fire, discovers that the father is himself a lost son, an orphan, whereas the son is the son of nothing, or of everyone, a brother [17] As Joyce will say, paternity does not exist, it is an emptiness, a nothingness—or rather, a zone of uncertainty haunted by brothers, by the brother and sister. The mask of the charitable father must fall in order for Primary Nature to be appeased, and for Ahab and Claggart to recognize Bartleby and Billy Budd, releasing through the violence of the former and the stupor of the latter the fruit with which they were laden: the fraternal relation pure and simple. Melville will never cease to elaborate on the radical opposition between fraternity and Christian “charity” or paternal “philanthropy.” To liberate man from the father function, to give birth to a new man or the man without particularities, to reunite the original and humanity by constituting a society of brothers as a new universality. In the society of brothers, alliance replaces filiation and the blood pact replaces consanguinity. Man is indeed the blood brother of his fellow man, and woman, his blood sister: according to Melville, this is the community of celibates, drawing its members into an unlimited becoming. A brother, a sister all the more true for no longer being “his” or “hers,” since all “property,” all “proprietorship,” has disappeared. A burning passion deeper than love,

since it no longer has either substance or qualities, but traces a zone of indiscernibility in which it passes through all intensities in every direction, extending all the way to the homosexual relation between brothers, and passing through the incestuous relation between brother and sister. This is the most mysterious relation, the one in which Pierre and Isabelle are swept up, the one that draws Heathcliff and Catherine along in *Wuthering Heights*, each one becoming Ahab and *Moby-Dick* by turns: “What ever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same. ... My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath—a source of little visible delight, but necessary. ... I am Heathcliff—he's always always in my mind—not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself—but as my own being ...”[\[18\]](#)

How can this community be realized? How can the biggest problem be resolved? But is it not already resolved, by itself, precisely because it is not a personal problem, but a historical, geographic, or political one? It is not an individual or particular affair, but a collective one, the affair of a people, or rather, of all peoples. It is not an Oedipal phantasm but a political program. Melville's bachelor, *Bartleby*, like Kafka's, must “find the place where he can take his walks”... America [\[19\]](#) The American is one who is freed from the English paternal function, the son of a crumbled father, the son of all nations. Even before their independence, Americans were thinking about the combination of States, the State-form most compatible with their vocation. But their vocation was not to reconstitute an “old State secret,” a nation, a family, a heritage, or a father. It was above all to constitute a universe, a society of brothers, a federation of men and goods, a community of anarchist individuals, inspired by Jefferson, by Thoreau, by Melville. Such is the declaration in *Moby-Dick* (chapter 26): if man is the brother of his fellow man, if he is worthy of trust or “confidence,” it is not because he belongs to a nation or because he is a proprietor or shareholder, but only insofar as he is Man, when he has lost those characteristics that constitute his “violence,” his “idiocy,” his “villainy,” when he has no consciousness of himself apart from the proprieties of a “democratic dignity” that considers all particularities as so many ignominious stains that arouse anguish or pity. America is the potential of the man without particularities, the Original Man. Already in *Redburn*:

You can not spill a drop of American blood without spilling the blood of the whole world. Be he Englishman, Frenchman, German, Dane, or Scot; the European who scoffs at an American, calls his own brother Raca, and stands in danger of the judgment. We are not a narrow tribe of men, with a bigoted Hebrew nationality—whose blood has been debased in the attempt to enoble it, by maintaining an exclusive succession among ourselves. ... We are not a nation, so much as a world; for unless we may claim all the world for our sire, like Melchisedec, we are without father or mother. ... We are the heirs of aU time, and with all nations we divide our inheritance ... [\[20\]](#)

The picture of the nineteenth-century proletarian looks like this: the advent of the communist man or the society of comrades, the future Soviet, being without property, family, or nation, has no other determination than that of being man, *Homo tantum*. But this is also the picture of the American, executed by other means, and the traits of the former often intermingle with or are superimposed over those of the latter. America sought to create a revolution whose strength would lie in a universal immigration, emigres of the world, just as Bolshevik Russia would seek to make a revolution whose strength would lie in a universal proletarianization, “Proletarians of the world” ... the two forms of the class struggle. So that the messianism of the nineteenth century

has two heads and is expressed no less in American pragmatism than in the ultimately Russian form of socialism.

Pragmatism is misunderstood when it is seen as a summary philosophical theory fabricated by Americans. On the other hand, we understand the novelty of American thought when we see pragmatism as an attempt to transform the world, to think a new world or new man insofar as they create themselves. Western philosophy was the skull, or the paternal Spirit that realized itself in the world as totality, and in a knowing subject as proprietor. Is it against Western philosophy that Melville directs his insult, “metaphysical villain”? A contemporary of American transcendentalism (Emerson, Thoreau), Melville is already sketching out the traits of the pragmatism that will be its continuation. It is first of all the affirmation of a world in process, an archipelago. Not even a puzzle, whose pieces when fitted together would constitute a whole, but rather a wall of loose, uncemented stones, where every element has a value in itself but also in relation to others: isolated and floating relations, islands and straits, immobile points and sinuous lines—for Truth always has “jagged edges.” Not a skull but the vertebral column, a spinal cord; not a uniform piece of clothing but a Harlequin's coat, even white on white, an infinite patchwork with multiple joinings, like the jacket of Redburn, White Jacket or the Great Cosmopolitan: the American invention par excellence, for the Americans invented patchwork, just as the Swiss are said to have invented the cuckoo clock. But to reach this point, it was also necessary for the knowing subject, the sole proprietor, to give way to a community of explorers, the brothers of the archipelago, who replace knowledge with belief, or rather with “confidence”—not belief in another world, but confidence in this one, and in man as much as in God (“I am going to attempt the ascent of Ofo with hope, not with faith. ... I will follow my own path. ...”).

Pragmatism is this double principle of archipelago and hope [21] And what must the community of men consist of in order for truth to be possible? Truth and trust [22] Like Melville before it, pragmatism will fight ceaselessly on two fronts: against the particularities that pit man against man and nourish an irremediable mistrust; but also against the Universal or the Whole, the fusion of souls in the name of great love or charity. Yet, what remains of souls once they are no longer attached to particularities, what keeps them from melting into a whole? What remains is precisely their “originality,” that is, a sound that each one produces, like a ritornello at the limit of language, but that it produces only when it takes to the open road (or to the open sea) with its body, when it leads its life without seeking salvation, when it embarks upon its incarnate voyage, without any particular aim, and then encounters other voyagers, whom it recognizes by their sound. This is how Lawrence described the new messianism, or the democratic contribution of American literature: against the European morality of salvation and charity, a morality of life in which the soul is fulfilled only by taking to the road, with no other aim, open to all contacts, never trying to save other souls, turning away from those that produce an overly authoritarian or groaning sound, forming even fleeting and unresolved chords and accords with its equals, with freedom as its sole accomplishment, always ready to free itself so as to complete itself [23] According to Melville or Lawrence, brotherhood is a matter for original souls: perhaps it begins only with the death of the father or God, but it does not derive from this death, it is a whole other matter—“all the subtle sympathizings of the incalculable soul, from the bitterest hate to passionate love.”

This requires a new perspective, an archipelago-perspectivism that conjugates the panoramic shot and the tracking shot, as in *The Encantadas*. It requires an acute perception, both visual and auditory, as Benito Cereno shows, and must replace the concept with the “percept,” that is, with a perception in becoming. It requires a new community, whose members are capable of trust or “confidence,” that is, of a belief in themselves, in the world, and in becoming. Bartleby the bachelor must embark upon his voyage and find his sister, with whom he will consume the ginger nut, the new host. Bartleby lives cloistered in the office and never goes out, but when the attorney suggests new occupations to him, he is not joking when he responds, “There is too much confinement ...” And if he is prevented from making his voyage, then the only place left for him is prison, where he dies of “civil disobedience,” as Thoreau says, “the only place where a free man can stay with honor.”^[24] William and Henry James are indeed brothers, and Daisy Miller, the new American maiden, asks for nothing more than a little confidence, and allows herself to die because even this meager request remains unfulfilled. And what was Bartleby asking for if not a little confidence from the attorney, who instead responds to him with charity and philanthropy—all the masks of the paternal function? The attorney's only excuse is that he draws back from the becoming into which Bartleby, through his lonely existence, threatens to drag him: rumors are already spreading ... The hero of pragmatism is not the successful businessman, it is Bartleby, and it is Daisy Miller, it is Pierre and Isabelle, the brother and sister.

The dangers of a “society without fathers” have often been pointed out, but the only real danger is the return of the father ^[25] In this respect, it is difficult to separate the failure of the two revolutions, the American and the Soviet, the pragmatic and the dialectical. Universal emigration was no more successful than universal proletarianization. The Civil War already sounded the knell, as would the liquidation of the Soviets later on. The birth of a nation, the restoration of the nation-state—and the monstrous fathers come galloping back in, while the sons without fathers start dying off again. Paper images—this is the fate of the American as well as the Proletarian. But just as many Bolsheviks could hear the diabolical powers knocking at the door in 1917, the pragmatists, like Melville before them, could see the masquerade that the society of brothers would lead to. Long before Lawrence, Melville and Thoreau were diagnosing the American evil, the new cement that would rebuild the wall: paternal authority and filthy charity. Bartleby therefore lets himself die in prison. In the beginning, it was Benjamin Franklin, the hypocritical lightning-rod Merchant, who instituted the magnetic American prison. The city-ship reconstitutes the most oppressive law, and brotherhood exists among the topmen only when they remain immobile, high up on the masts (*White Jacket*). The great community of celibates is nothing more than a company of *bons vivants*, which certainly does not keep the rich bachelor from exploiting the poor and pallid workers, by reconstituting the two unreconciled figures of the monstrous father and the orphaned daughters (*The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids*). The American confidence-man appears everywhere in Melville's work. What malignant power has turned the trust into a company as cruel as the abominable “universal nation” founded by the Dog-Man in *The Encantadas*? *The Confidence-Man*, in which Melville's critique of charity and philanthropy culminates, brings into play a series of devious characters who seem to emanate from a “great Cosmopolitan” in patchwork clothing, and who ask for no more than ... a little human confidence, in order to pull off a multiple and rebounding confidence game. Are these false brothers sent by a diabolical father to restore his power over overly credulous Americans? But the novel is so complex that one could just as easily say the opposite: this long procession [théorie] of con men would be a comic version of authentic brothers, such as overly

suspicious Americans see them, or rather have already become incapable of seeing them. This cohort of characters, including the mysterious child at the end, is perhaps the society of Philanthropists who dissimulate their demonic project, but perhaps it is also the community of brothers that the Misanthropes are no longer able to recognize in passing. For even in the midst of its failure, the American Revolution continues to send out its fragments, always making something take flight on the horizon, even sending itself to the moon, always trying to break through the wall, to take up the experiment once again, to find a brotherhood in this enterprise, a sister in this becoming, a music in its stuttering language, a pure sound and unknown chords in language itself. What Kafka would say about “small nations” is what Melville had already said about the great American nation: it must become a patchwork of all small nations. What Kafka would say about minor literatures is what Melville had already said about the American literature of his time: because there are so few authors in America, and because its people are so indifferent, the writer is not in a position to succeed as a recognized master. Even in his failure, the writer remains all the more the bearer of a collective enunciation which no longer forms part of literary history and preserves the right of a people to come, or of a human becoming [26] A schizophrenic vocation: even in his catatonic or anorexic state, Bartleby is not the patient but the doctor of a sick America, the Medicine-Man, the new Christ or the brother to us all.

This essay appeared in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp. 68-90.

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Notes

1 Nicolas Ruwet, “Parallélismes et déviations en poésie,” in *Langue, discours, société*, ed. Julia Kristeva and Nicholas Ruwer. Seuil, Paris, 1975, pp. 334–44 (on “portmanteau-constructions”).

2 Philippe Jaworski, *Melville, le désert et l’empire*. Presses de l’Ecole Normale, Paris, 1986, p. 19.

3 See Viola Sachs, *La contre-Bible de Melville*. Mouton, Paris, 1975.

4 On Bartleby and Melville’s silence, see Armand Farrachi, *La part du silence*. Barrault, Paris, 1984, pp. 40–45.

5 Mathieu Lindon, “Bartleby,” *Delta* 6 (May 1978), 22.

6 Kafka’s great text almost reads like another version of “Bartleby.” See Franz Kafka, *The Diaries of Franz Kafka: 1910-1913*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Joseph Kresh. Schocken, New York, 1948, p. 26.

7 Blanchot demonstrates that Musil’s character is not only without qualities, but “without particularities,” since he has no more substance than he does qualities. See *Le livre à venir*. Gallimard/Folio, Paris, 1963, pp. 202–3. This theme of the man without particularities, the

modern-day Ulysses, arises early in the nineteenth century, and in France appears in the rather strange book of Ballanche, a friend of Chateaubriant; see Pierre Simon Ballanche, *Essais de palingénésie sociale*, notably “La ville des expiations” (1827, in *Oeuvres complètes*. Slatkine Reprints, Geneva, 1967).

8 Herman Melville, “Bartleby the Scrivener,” in *Billy Budd, Sailor and Other Stories*, ed. Harold Beaver. Penguin Classics, London, 1967, p. 89.

9 Régis Durand, in his *Melville, signes et métaphores*. Paris, L’Age d’Homme, 1980, pp. 103–7, has pointed out the role played by loose lines aboard a whaler, as opposed to the formalized riggings. Both Durand’s and Jaworski’s books are among the most profound analyses of Melville to have appeared recently.

10 George Dumézil, preface to Georges Charachidzé, *Prométhée ou le Caucase: Essai de mythologie contrastive*. Paris, Flammarion 1986): “The Greek myth of Prometheus has remained, through the ages, an object of reflection and reference. The god who does not take part in his brothers’ dynastic struggle against their cousin Zeus, but who, on personal grounds, defies and ridicules this same Zeus ... this *anarchist*, affects and stirs up dark and sensitive zones in us.”

11 On this conception of the two Natures in Sade (the theory of the pope in the *New Justine*), see Pierre Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbor*, trans. Alphonso Lingis. Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Ill., 1991, pp. 99 ff.

12 Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale*, chapter 36. Penguin Classics, New York, 1920, p. 178.

13 See Schopenhauer’s conception of sainthood as the act by which the Will denies itself in the suppression of all particularity. Pierre Leyris, in his second preface to the French translation of *Billy Budd* (Gallimard, Paris, 1980), recalls Melville’s profound interest in Schopenhauer. Nietzsche saw Parsifal as a type of Schopenhauerian saint, a kind of Bartleby. But after Nietzsche, man still preferred being a demon to being a saint: “man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. Random House, New York, 1967, third essay, third essay, § 28, p. 163.

14 See Heinrich Kleist’s letter to H.K. von Collin, December 1808, in *An Abyss Deep Enough: The Letters of Heinrich Von Kleist*, ed. Philip B. Miller. Dutton, New York, 1982. Catherine Heilbronn had her own formula, close to that of Bartleby’s: “I don’t know” or simply “Don’t know.”

15 The comparison between Musil and Melville would pertain to the following four points: the critique of reason (“Principle of insufficient reason”), the denunciation of psychology (“the great hole we call the soul”), the new logic (“the other state”), and the hyperborean Zone (the “Possible”).

16 See Francis Bacon and David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon*. Thames and Hudson, New York, 1975, p. 22. And Melville said: “For the same reason that there is but one planet to one orbit, so can there be but one such original character to one work or invention. Two would conflict to chaos.” Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, ed. Stephen Matterson. Penguin Classics, London, 1990, p. 282.

17 See R. Durand, p. 153. Mayoux writes: “On the personal plane, the question of the father is momentarily postponed, if not settled. ... But it is not only a question of the father. We are all orphans. Now is the age of fraternity.” Jean-Jacques Mayoux, *Melville*, trans. John Ashbery. Grove, New York, 1960, p. 109, translation modified.

18 Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*. Penguin, London, 1985, p. 122.

19 Kafka, *Diaries 1910-1913*, p. 28.

20 Herman Melville, *Redburn: His Maiden Voyage*. Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, Evanston and Chicago, 1969, p. 169.

21 Jaworski has analyzed this world-as-archipelago or this patchwork experiment. These themes are to be found throughout Pragmatism, and notably among William James’s most beautiful pages: the world as “shot point blank with a pistol.” This is inseparable from the search for a new human community. In *Pierre; or The Ambiguities*, Plotinus Plinlimmon’s mysterious tract already seems like the manifestation of an absolute pragmatism. On the history of pragmatism in general, philosophical and political, see Gérard Deledalle, *La philosophie américaine (L’Age d’Homme, Paris, 1983)*: Royce is particularly important, with his “absolute pragmatism” and his “great community of Interpretation” that unites individuals. There are many Melvillian echoes in Royce’s work. His strange trio of the Adventurer, the Beneficiary, and the Insurer seems in certain ways to derive from Melville’s trio of the Monomaniac, the Hypochondriac, and the Prophet, or even to refer to characters in *The Confidence-Man*, who would already prefigure the trio’s comic version.

22 [In English in the original.–Trans.]

23 D.H. Lawrence, “Whitman,” in *Studies in Classic American Literature*. Viking, New York, 1953. This book also includes two famous studies on Melville. Lawrence criticizes both Melville and Whitman for having succumbed to the very things they denounced; nonetheless, he says, it was American literature that, thanks to them, marked out the path.

24 [See Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, ed. Owen Thomas. Norton, New York, 1966, p. 233: “Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison.”Trans.]

25 See Alexander Mitscherlich’s *Society without the Father: A Contribution to Social Psychology*, trans. Eric Musbacher (J. Aronson, New York, 1974), which is written from a psychoanalytic point of view that remains indifferent to the movements of History and invokes the benefits of the paternal English Constitution.

26 See Melville's text on American literature, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," in *The Portable Melville*, ed. Jay Leyda, Viking, New York, 1952, pp. 411–14, which should be compared with Kafka's text on "the literature of small peoples," in *The Diaries of Franz Kafka: 1910-1913*, entry for December 25, 1911, pp. 210 ff.