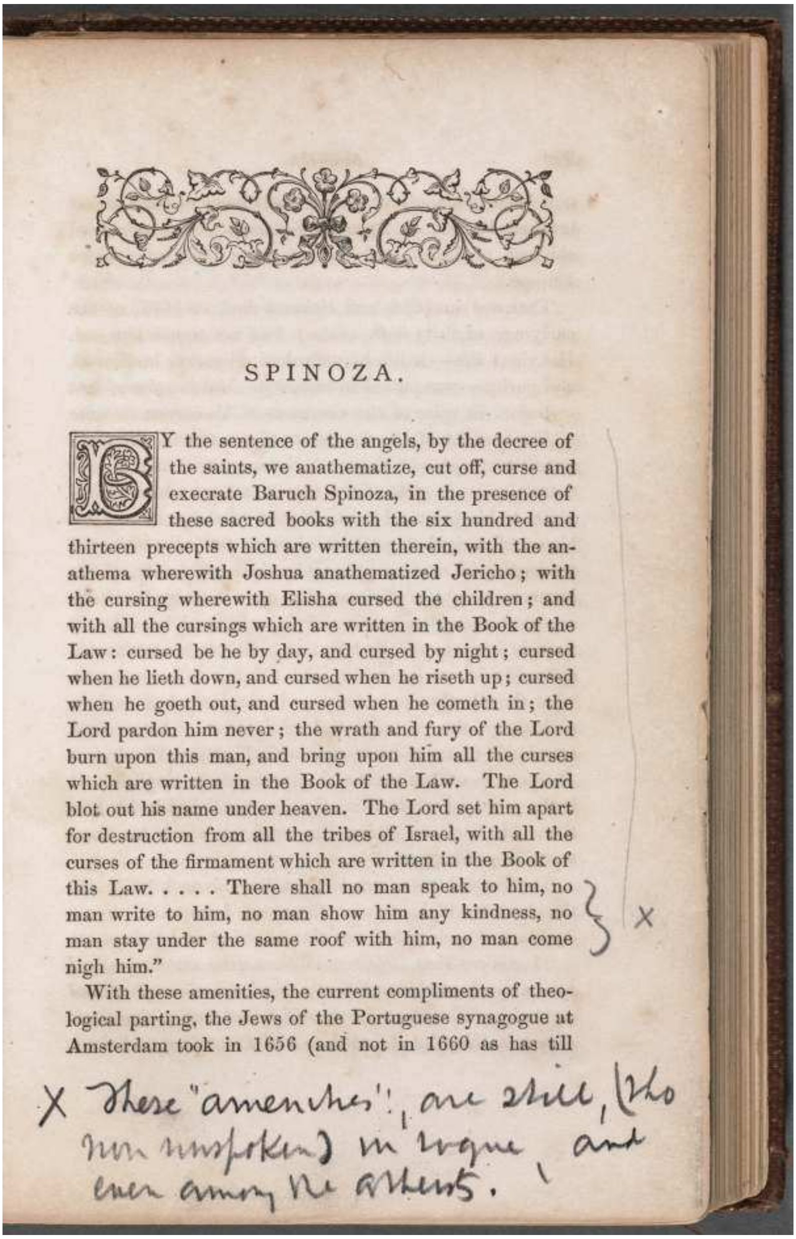
Introduction
Melville's Inhumanities

> By the sentence of the angels, by the decree of the saints, we anathematize, cut off, curse and execrate Baruch Spinoza, in the presence of these sacred books with the six hundred and thirteen precepts which are written therein, with the anathema wherewith Joshua anathematized Jericho; with the cursing wherewith Elisha cursed the children; and with all the cursings which are written in the Book of the Law: cursed be he by day, and cursed by night; cursed when he lieth down, and cursed when he riseth up; cursed when he goeth out, and cursed when he cometh in; the Lord pardon him never; the wrath and fury of the Lord burn upon this man, and bring upon him all the curses which are written in the Book of Law. The Lord blot out his name under heaven. The Lord set him apart for destruction from all the tribes of Israel, with all the curses of the firmament which are written in the Book of this Law … There shall no man speak to him, no man write to him, no man show him any kindness, no man stay under the same roof with him, no man come nigh him.[1]

At the outset of his essay "Spinoza" from the first edition of his *Essays in Criticism* (1865), Matthew Arnold thus cites the vehement condemnation and excommunication of Spinoza by the rabbis of Amsterdam. Commenting on the passage, Arnold writes: "With these amenities, the current compliments of theological parting, the Jews of the Portuguese synagogue at Amsterdam took in 1656 (and not in 1660 as has till now been commonly supposed) their leave of their erring brother, Baruch or Benedict Spinoza. They remained children of Israel, and he became a child of modern Europe."[2]

In his own edition of Arnold's *Essays*, Herman Melville marks this whole citation, putting a curly bracket and an "X" in the margin next to the final set of curses or, as Arnold then calls them, "amenities." (See Figure 1.) In his related note in the lower margin, Melville surmises: "These 'amenities', are still, (tho now unspoken) in vogue, and even among the atheists." As such, Melville subtly acknowledges that Spinoza – a dangerous heretic in his own time, a figure of the radical enlightenment whose name became synonymous with atheism, and with whom any association



SPINOZA.

BY the sentence of the angels, by the decree of the saints, we anathematize, cut off, curse and execrate Baruch Spinoza, in the presence of these sacred books with the six hundred and thirteen precepts which are written therein, with the anathema wherewith Joshua anathematized Jericho; with the cursing wherewith Elisha cursed the children; and with all the cursings which are written in the Book of the Law: cursed be he by day, and cursed by night; cursed when he lieth down, and cursed when he riseth up; cursed when he goeth out, and cursed when he cometh in; the Lord pardon him never; the wrath and fury of the Lord burn upon this man, and bring upon him all the curses which are written in the Book of the Law. The Lord blot out his name under heaven. The Lord set him apart for destruction from all the tribes of Israel, with all the curses of the firmament which are written in the Book of this Law. . . . . There shall no man speak to him, no man write to him, no man show him any kindness, no man stay under the same roof with him, no man come nigh him." X

With these amenities, the current compliments of theological parting, the Jews of the Portuguese synagogue at Amsterdam took in 1656 (and not in 1660 as has till

X These "amenities", are still, (tho' now unspoken) in vogue, and even among the atheists.

Figure 1 Herman Melville, annotation on Matthew Arnold's poem "Spinoza" from *Essays in Criticism* (1865), *AC85.M4977.Zz865a. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

sparked intellectual controversy – implicitly remained a subversive figure in nineteenth-century thought. Melville is aware that associating with Spinoza is a risky philosophical position, one that might invite condemnation: after all, it is still "in vogue" to hold open a special place of derogation for Spinoza, "even among the atheists."

Melville had been reading Arnold's essays in the early 1870s as he was preparing his verse-epic *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876). But Melville found in Arnold not only a new stylistic model for his developing role as a poet, but also confirmation, as he had earlier in Goethe's works, of the continued force of Spinoza's thought. Melville would agree with Arnold that, despite the "disparagement and detraction" of Voltaire and Bayle, or the "disfavor cast upon him by the repeated charge of atheism," Spinoza's importance is still steadily rising; that his "name and work … bid fair to become what they deserve to become, – in the history of modern philosophy the central point of interest."[3] Arnold's citation of the Amsterdam rabbis' fierce denunciation of Spinoza is thus not the only instance of Melville's marginalia that evinces his incipient interest in – or knowledge of – Spinoza's thought. A little further on, Melville notes that, in the time since Arnold published his essay in 1865, a new English translation of Spinoza's *Ethics* appeared in 1871.[4] He underlines key Spinozan concepts discussed by Arnold, such as the *conatus*, the *amor intellectualis Dei*, and the joyful and sad passions (Melville marks the lines "Joy is man's passage to a greater perfection … Sorrow is man's passage to a lesser perfection").[5] Melville pays special attention to Arnold's argument concerning what had attracted Goethe to Spinoza: "I mean his denial of final causes, and his stoicism, a stoicism not passive, but active. For a mind like Goethe's – a mind profoundly impartial and passionately aspiring after the science, not of men only, but of universal nature – the popular philosophy, which explains all things by reference to man, and even of certain classes of men, was utterly repulsive" [Melville's underlining].[6] To bolster his point, Arnold quotes two passages from Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, passages that Melville again marks. Firstly, "God directs nature, according as the universal laws of nature, but not according as the particular laws of human nature require; and so God has regard, not of the human race only, but of entire nature."[7] Second, regarding Spinoza's Stoicism, which for Arnold is "as a pendant" to his denial of final causes (in a passage indeed *triple* marked in the margin of Melville's own edition): "*Non studemus, ut natura nobis, sed contra ut nos naturae pareamus* (Our desire is not that nature may obey us, but, on the contrary, that we may obey nature)."[8] Melville recognized key elements

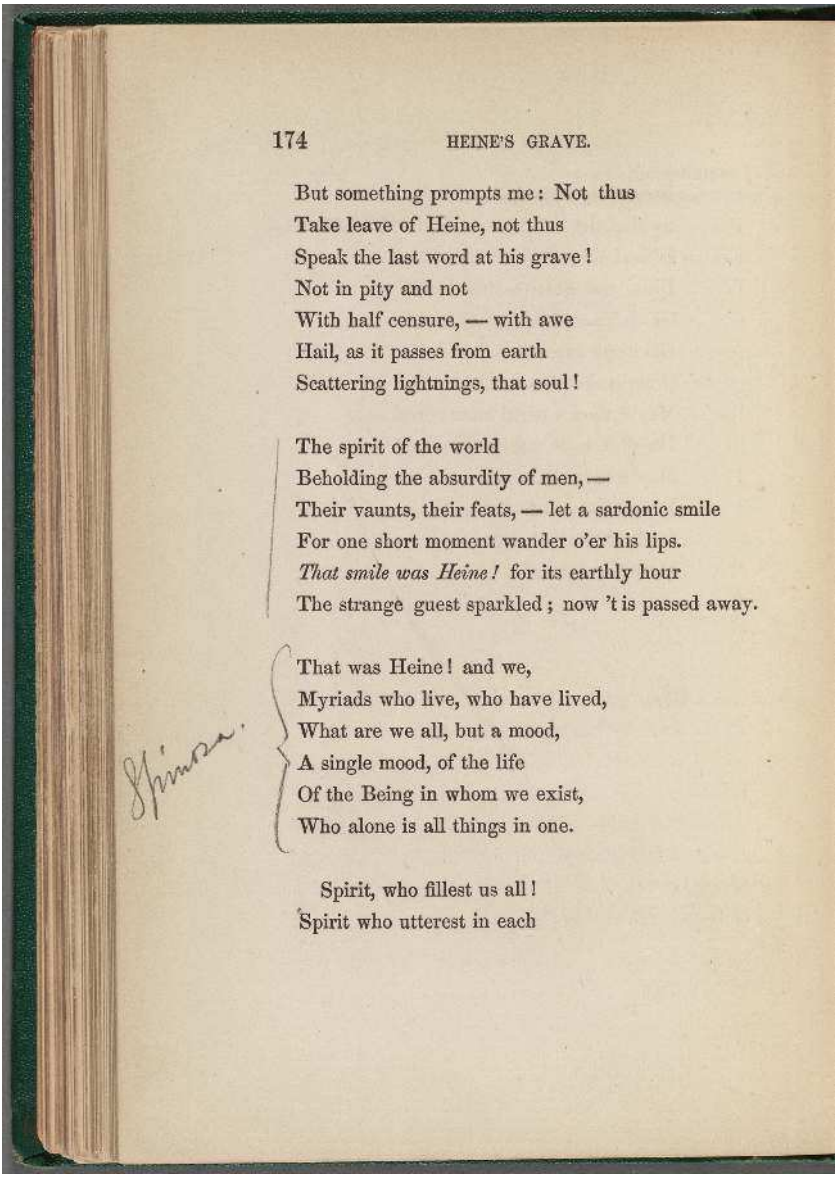
of Spinoza's philosophy in other works of Arnold, as well, as in the poem "Heine's Grave" from his 1867 *New Poems:*

> That was Heine! and we
> Myriads who live, who have lived,
> What are we all, but a mood,
> A single mood, of the life
> Of the Being in whom we exist,
> Who alone is all things in one. (See Figure 2.)[9]

Next to a large bracket adjacent to these lines from the poem, Melville pencils "Spinoza" thus registering how Arnold, via Heine, reproduces Spinoza's monistic ontology. The infinitude of modes expresses a univocal substance: "the Being in whom we exist/ Who is all things in one."

Marginal markings do not necessarily indicate a reader's philosophical propensities. Nevertheless, they can bring into initial focus the key investments of *Herman Melville and the Politics of the Inhuman*, investments shaped by Spinoza's influence on Melville. First, in general terms, we get a glimpse of how Melville approached philosophy as an invested thinker-writer and a creative reader. Like Emerson, Melville was an extensive and eclectic reader of philosophy, even if his reading was often mediated through second-hand sources: Melville reading Arnold reading Spinoza. What is more, it was not in Arnold that Melville had first encountered Spinoza. It is not clear whether Melville had read Spinoza directly, even in the Willis translation of the *Ethics* he cites in his marginal note. But Melville had found him, if indirectly, in a variety of sources such as Pierre Bayle's *Historical and Philosophical Dictionary* (whose chapter on Spinoza is infamously misleading), reference works like the *Penny Cyclopedia for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge*,[10] as well as, perhaps most compellingly for Melville, in Goethe's autobiography, *Poetry and Truth.* In another indicative instance of marginalia, Melville makes a checkmark next to Goethe's comment that Spinoza's "name even at this day, seems to mark the limit of all speculative efforts."[11]

Second, and more specifically, Spinoza comes to signify for Melville a profoundly nonanthropocentric philosophy, one founded on the resolute inhumanness and impersonality of "God, or Nature." It is a thought, as Melville underlined, "not of men only, but of universal nature," and that does not "explain all things by reference to man, and even of certain classes of men." Rather, as Spinoza writes, we do not seek that "nature may obey us, but, on the contrary, that we may obey nature." This is furthered through Spinoza's denial of final causes, a denial of the Aristotelian



174 HEINE'S GRAVE.

But something prompts me: Not thus
Take leave of Heine, not thus
Speak the last word at his grave!
Not in pity and not
With half censure, — with awe
Hail, as it passes from earth
Scattering lightnings, that soul!

The spirit of the world
Beholding the absurdity of men, —
Their vaunts, their feats, — let a sardonic smile
For one short moment wander o'er his lips.
That smile was Heine! for its earthly hour
The strange guest sparkled; now 't is passed away.

That was Heine! and we,
Myriads who live, who have lived,
What are we all, but a mood,
A single mood, of the life
Of the Being in whom we exist,
Who alone is all things in one.

Spirit, who fillest us all!
Spirit who utterest in each

Figure 2 Herman Melville, markings and annotation on Matthew Arnold's poem "Heine's Grave," from *New Poems* (1867), *AC85. M4977. Z867a. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

teleological system of nature in which causes (including human agency) are end-directed. For Spinoza, causes are immanent to their effects, such that the infinitude of bodies that comprise modal life are given only to constant movement and new compositions of forces and aggregate bodies. Spinoza therefore understands the human body as a changing collectivity of materials and forces: "The human body is composed of very many individuals of a diverse nature, each of which is highly composite."[12] The human body, that is, is a composite of different inhuman organic or inorganic bodies – of minerals, microorganisms, elements, affects, energies and forces that have their own imperatives to persevere apart from what we perceive to be our own. The human body is an assemblage of various individuals with their own conatus. The human is thus always already multiple, in process, relational, and, indeed, *inhuman*.

Third, Melville, in ways strikingly akin to Spinoza's relational ontology, develops his characters as emerging composite bodies or collectivities. In so doing, Melville decouples them from an individual human personhood, such that they serve instead as ciphers for compounds of "transindividual" relations with inhuman and impersonal forces. In some cases, responding to a strain of Romantic pantheism that takes up Spinoza as its philosophical precedent, Melville casts the dissolutions of individuality his characters undergo directly in terms of a "one" permeated by the "all." This is apparent as early as *Mardi*, in which Melville's narrator speaks of the "subtle workings of Spinoza's [soul]"[13] and has Taji recall "the Jew that rejected the Talmud, and his all-permeating principle, to which Goethe and others have subscribed" (*M*, 176).[14] It is memorably rearticulated in an 1851 letter to Hawthorne in which Melville discusses his flirtation with Goethe's "all feeling." In *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael whimsically evinces from the severed head of a Sperm whale that it must have been a reader of Plato who'd taken to Spinoza in his latter years due to its "speculative indifference as to death"; he describes how "sunken-eyed" idealists staring from the masthead at the Pacific can become lost in ontological reveries.[15]

Yet, as I will argue in Chapter 1, Spinoza's relational ontology also informs *Moby-Dick's* manifold inquiries of composite bodies and immanent forms of materiality in terms of more nuanced interweavings of matter and affect. Neither human characters nor whales are presented as discrete individuals who move through a setting, but are given to persistent processes of instantiating transindividual relations. In turn, Melville's engagement with Spinoza's "all-permeating principle" becomes further complicated in *Pierre*, as I will examine in Chapter 2. This might seem strange insofar as Spinoza and Goethe are caricatured in passages often

taken to be indicative of Melville's own philosophical position in relation to them, as well as to Platonism and neo-Platonism, German Idealism and Romanticism, and American Transcendentalism – if not to philosophical speculation more generally. *Pierre's* narrator labels Spinoza as among a philosophical procession of "self-imposters" and casts Pierre's childhood friend and latter-day Spinozist, Charles Millthorpe, as one of the "seedy-coated Apostles" in New York City ambitiously "pursuing some crude, transcendental Philosophy."[16] Or, as Millthorpe himself boasts: "Why, lad, I have received propositions from the Editors of the Spinozaist to contribute a weekly column to their paper, and you know how very few can understand the Spinozaist; nothing is admitted there but the Ultimate Transcendentals" (*P*, 280). But given the disparate set of philosophical voices ventriloquized in the novel, it would be too hasty to ascribe any one of them as Melville's own position. We might rather think of *Pierre* as a multifarious literary experiment with the varieties of Spinozist experience, from a series of "inhuman transformations"[17] that blur categorical distinctions between humans and stones, to the drama of sad passions in which Pierre's affinities to the Spinozistic/pantheistic "all feeling" are tested through a series of destructive encounters. Melville's exploration of Spinozism continues in his later work, from his development in *Clarel* of a strikingly nonanthropocentric poetic philosophy in which Spinoza is recast as "Pan's Atheist,"[18] to late poems such as "Venice" or "The Parthenon" in which Spinoza reemerges as a cipher for the monistic expression of substance or for a vital materialist force of nonhuman agency as a "Pantheist energy of will."[19] It perhaps culminates in the dissolutions of individuality and impulsive compositions of forces Melville renders in *Billy Budd.* Indeed much of Melville's late work seems scrawled across Spinoza's "starry brow" (2.22.110).

Lastly, the "subversive genealogy" of Spinoza's nonanthropocentric, relational philosophy, as it becomes legible to Melville via Goethe, Arnold and others, inflects Melville's representations of materiality and, in turn, animates his incipient inhuman politics. *Herman Melville and the Politics of the Inhuman* thus offers a reading of Melville as positioned at the intersection of the material and the political. Central to this is how Melville reveals the two to be engaged ontologically, and not merely analogically. To pose questions about human political relations, Melville turns to their inhuman qualities and physical and material relations. Melville's materialist political ontology might be thought of in terms of the concept of "transindividuality" which Étienne Balibar, adapting the term from Gilbert Simondon, develops in his reading of Spinoza. Balibar asserts that Spinoza "discovered

that it is impossible strictly speaking to have a strong notion of singularity without at the same time having a notion of the interaction and interdependence of individuals."[20] Yet the transindividual does not just repeat traditional part/whole or individual/collective antinomies. Instead, it proposes a complex ontology of relations that interweaves incomplete and ongoing processes of individuation, multiple causalities, and plural temporalities.[21] The transindividual relations Melville charts do not respect the boundaries of discrete individualities or bodies, but rather become manifest through material flows, in tenuous corporeities, and across dynamic terraqueous milieus. Melville's politics of the inhuman becomes realized through these transindividual relations. It is a politics of encounters and exchanges, of immersions and entanglements. It is a politics of the materiality of embodiment, and of indeterminate processes of disintegration. It is a politics of mutual becomings and collective strivings to persevere.

Given the heterogeneous yet, mutual striving of Melville's human and nonhuman figures, it is not surprising that many recent theorists, especially those in who locate themselves in the Spinozan–Deleuzian conceptual lineage, have unfolded through Melville's work a politics of the "common." Following Deleuze's influential essay "Bartleby; or the Formula," Giorgio Agamben, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, and Cesare Casarino (among others) have invoked Melville's characters as modeling the common[22] as the inventive, nonhomogenizing activity of producing not a community of individuals who group themselves along the lines of a unified identity, but a "composition of singularities in a common relationship."[23] The common becomes distanced from any nostalgic *Gemeinschaft* whose constitution is based on a continual reinscription of timeless mythoi into its own self-identity. Like Balibar's transindividuality, the common is based not on individuals who share identities (of which the nation-state is the prime example) but on transindividual singularities who enact an indeterminate, processual sharing of differences. The constitution of the common presupposes active, open-ended cooperation as its logical condition of possibility and at once its outcome. Thus, the heterotopic collective of desubjectified subjects aboard *The Pequod*, deparcticularized Bartleby or, as I will add, the riotocrats and pirate-utopians of the "The Encantadas," could serve as conceptual personae for thinking the common. Further, Roberto Esposito posits a politics severed from the "idolatry of the person" and the governing distinctions between the human and the inhuman. In his *Third Person,* Esposito detects a "becoming-animal" at the center of the impersonal that constellates "completely heterogeneous terms – like a human being,

animal, and micro-organism."[24] The impersonal comes into contact with the inhuman, one example of which is how Melville "insinuates the foreign, even inhuman language of the whale into English."[25] Thus Melville's characters, as they are shorn of identities of nation, class, race, personhood, or even humanness, enter into new configurations of inhuman and impersonal political bodies. As I will unfold in greater depth in the text that follows, Melville's politics of the inhuman becomes realized variously across his corpus: in what I will call *Moby-Dick's* "ethopolitics," *Pierre's* material-affective relationality, "The Encantadas' " outlandish politics, *The Confidence Man's* misanthropology, or his later poetry's politics of dissolution and disappearance.

Despite the persistence of Spinoza's thought for Melville as both an ontological and metaphorical *point de capiton*, Melville is by no means a straightforward Spinozist. His encounter with Spinoza, of course, is just one of the many philosophical encounters into which his writing enters. Throughout *Herman Melville and the Politics of the Inhuman*, I reconfigure his work as a series of such encounters, from his meditations on indigeneity after Rousseau in *Typee*; his cartography of neo-Platonic forms across the seascapes of *Mardi*; the creative use of Cartesian vortices of *Moby-Dick*; his repurposing of Goethe, Carlyle, or German Idealism in *Pierre*; his rewriting of Darwin in "The Encantadas"; his satirical countering of Emerson and reanimation of Cynicism in *The Confidence-Man*; his relation to Hegel in *Clarel,* all the way to his late interest in Schopenhauer in *Billy Budd.* One of the broad tasks of this book is to offer detailed examinations of how Melville responds to, reanimates, if not recreates his philosophical precursors. As such, I will often unfold my arguments through the open-ended *agon* of the bibliographic and the philosophical, taking a keen interest in Melville's reading, but also endeavoring to put it into its wider literary, intellectual, historical, or political contexts. One of the difficulties but also one of the joys of reading Melville is to find his writing as enmeshed in networks of reference and concepts, networks that point less to an anxiety of influence than to an excess of influence. Given the relational form of his thinking-writing, Melville stages a series of asystematic, dialogical, or even conflicting politico-philosophical positions and imaginative trajectories. But the often-quiet presence of Spinoza, as if standing just offstage behind the ontological curtain, and far from functioning in any exclusionary way, rather shapes the radical complementarity of Melville's thought. Schopenhauer's assertion, in a passage marked by Melville in his copy of *World as Will and Idea*, could therefore serve as an axiom for his thinking: "For opposites throw light upon each other, and

the day at once reveals both itself and the night, as Spinoza admirably remarks."[26]

Character and the Inhuman

> But if the acutest sage be often at his wits' end to understand living character, shall those who are not sages expect to run and read character in those mere phantoms which flit along the page like shadows along a wall? Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man*[27]

The passages Melville marks in Arnold's "Spinoza" can provide a provisional point of entry into the key philosophical question this book will engage: namely, how Melville draws on Spinoza's radically nonanthropocentric relational ontology to dramatize his own politics of the inhuman. In what follows, however, my enquiries into the politics of the inhuman in Melville's work often take as their initial premise that, for him, literary "character" is not about the development of a fictional individual's personal interiority or subjectivity. Rather, from Ahab to Bartleby, or Isabel to Billy Budd, Melville's characters seem unmoored from personhood, cast into the "whelming sea" of the impersonal or the inhuman (*Clarel*, 4.35.33). For Melville, character is not the site of the suturing of the affective to the embodied, but a process of entering into material-affective relationships that do not abide by interior–exterior, subject–object, human–inhuman, person–thing, or even immaterial–material distinctions. Melville's idea of character, then, fundamentally differs from German Romantic ideas such as those of Friedrich Schlegel, for whom characterization is a presentation of the development [*Bildung*] of the passions of an individual,[28] or, similarly, from that of Hegel who, in his *Aesthetics*, shows how world-historical subjectivity unfolds through the pathos of the individual character's person.[29] Melville would also depart from other novelists such as Henry James. As James writes in his preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, the "germ of his idea" did not begin with "any flash, upon the fancy, of a set of relations, or in any one of those situations that, by a logic of their own, immediately fall, for the fabulist, into movement, into a march or a rush, a patter of quick step; but altogether in the sense of a single character, the character and aspect of a particular engaging young woman, to which all the usual elements of a 'subject,' certainly of a setting, were need to be superadded."[30] James, at least in this instance, by finding ways to "superadd" the elements of a "subject," reorganizes inhuman imperatives or contingencies to fit a centralizing "single" human character, no matter how nuanced, attenuated or diminutive his representations of the character's consciousness become.