

Literature and Philosophy

Deleuze, Agamben and Rancière reading Melville's "Bartleby"

E.J.W.M. Maas, 3540618
UU Bachelor Thesis
Supervisor: Birgit M. Kaiser
June 2012

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
1. Deleuze and “Bartleby”	4
Deleuze, “Bartleby”, and the literary formula	7
2. Agamben, Rancière and “Bartleby”	15
Agamben, “Bartleby”, and potentiality	15
Rancière, Deleuze, and the literary formula	20
Conclusion	27
Bibliography	29

Introduction

In the last few decades Melville's enigmatic short story "Bartleby, the Scrivener. A Story of Wallstreet" (1853) has evoked extensive philosophical debate. It is the tale of the clerk Bartleby, who comes to work for a Manhattan attorney, the narrator of the story, and disrupts normal business in the office through his formulaic utterance "I would prefer not to" which serves as a response to anything the attorney demands or offers. Bartleby's formula and his strange way of being have been at the center of the attention in the philosophical discussion that has evolved around the story. What is evident from this discussion is that "Bartleby", though written many years before, has a specific relevance for contemporary philosophical questions, having lead prominent thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida to incorporate Melville's text in their philosophical endeavor.

It is important to note that this does not mean that Melville already knew what these philosophers are telling us long before they even existed, and that this information is now being uncovered. That is simply not the problem here, and I would certainly not support such an assumption. Although Melville is definitely a philosophical writer, he is not a philosopher in the strict sense of the term. Importantly, literature and philosophy are two separated disciplines, but it is exactly this difference that makes a mutual encounter so utterly interesting. Literature, as well as philosophy, is deeply engaged with thinking and the problems literature deals with are often of a philosophical nature. But literature must neither be read as a mere representation of philosophical ideas, nor as a metaphor of certain philosophical thoughts. On the contrary, literature creates its own unique line of thought and operates according to its own particularly literary strategies. Literature in a specific way challenges thinking and therefore serves as an inspiration for philosophy. Accordingly, in this thesis I would like to discuss the ways in which literature and philosophy intersect, using the particular case of Melville's "Bartleby" and three philosophical approaches to the text by respectively Deleuze, Agamben and Rancière. What are the ways in which literature is used productively in these philosophical endeavors? Where do these authors locate thinking in Melville's text? Moreover, what

are the philosophical implications of this particular case of “Bartleby”? Ultimately, the outcomes of the analyses of every individual text enable me to take on a comparative perspective.

In the first chapter I will discuss Deleuze’s conception of literature and his reading of “Bartleby” in particular, analyzing his essay “Bartleby; or, The Formula”. In the second chapter I will first discuss Agamben’s essay “Bartleby, or On Contingency” and compare it to Deleuze’s text. Secondly, I will deal with Rancière’s text “Deleuze, Bartleby, and the Literary Formula”, which is in fact a critique on Deleuze’s reading. From the discussion and comparison of these texts we will finally see a dense web of lines we can draw between philosophy and literature. However, I am lucky to know that my contribution is in no way a finishing of the web, for just as thought itself this web will never cease to expand.

Chapter 1

Deleuze and “Bartleby”

Deleuze has written extensively on the various arts and various artists and authors in his essays and books. However, he did not write as a critic, but as a philosopher, and he himself insisted that these works must be read as works of philosophy in the traditional sense of the word (Smith xii). How are we supposed to understand the important position of literary analyses in his philosophical oeuvre? In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari define philosophy as an activity that involves the formation, invention and creation of concepts (*What is Philosophy?* 2). But philosophy, Deleuze adds, enters into variable relationships with other disciplines as well, such as science and art, which are both equally creative undertakings of thought. Accordingly, Deleuze and Guattari state that “art thinks no less than philosophy, but it thinks through affects and percepts” (*What is Philosophy?* 66). In other words, great artists are also great thinkers, but they do not think in concepts but aesthetically, in affects and percepts: painters, to put it rather shortly, think in lines and colors, musicians in sounds and writers in words. However, philosophy and art are no separate islands, nor can they be synthesized. According to Deleuze and Guattari they can nevertheless enter a complex and prolific engagement with each other “in a becoming that sweeps them both up in an intensity which co-determines them” (*What is Philosophy?* 66). It is in this way that we must read Deleuze’s analyses of literary works, and “Bartleby” in particular: they are philosophical analyses in which Deleuze extracts concepts from his examinations of literary works and establishes links between literature and philosophy. In doing so, as I will momentarily argue, Deleuze proves how productive such an interdisciplinary approach to literature can be, showing literature’s possibility to think in an alternative, sensible way.

Let us now look at the role literature in particular plays in Deleuze’s philosophical endeavor. In the opening essay of his book *Essays: Critical and Clinical*, called “Literature and Life”, Deleuze in a rather elusive way sketches the fundamentals for his literary project. According to Deleuze literature and Life are closely connected to each other, as he states that writing “is a process, that is, a passage of Life that traverses both the livable and the lived” (“Literature and Life” 1). Deleuze’s concept of Life

differs from life as we experience it, in an actualized state. Instead, Life is an impersonal and nonorganic power that goes beyond any lived experience; it is connected to the virtual world of becoming that exists underneath or before every actualized state of living. However, Life as an impersonal and nonorganic power is not a static or definable Whole, it is an active and above all creative power that on the one hand invents new singularities that are constantly being placed in variation, and on the other hand is capable of creating every new relations between these singularities (Smith xiv). This is the vitalism to which Deleuze lays claim that, as Daniel Smith points out, is not at all a mystical life force, but “the abstract power of Life as a principle of creation” (xxiv). Furthermore, the two ontological powers of Life that I described above are for Deleuze the indispensable conditions of every creation: the creation of concepts by philosophy, the creation of affects and percepts by literature, and so forth. And it is in the same terms that Deleuze describes the artistic activity of the writer, stating that “the aim of writing is to carry life to the state of a non-personal power” (*Dialogues* 50).

How are we to conceive this literary aim? As Smith describes “the writer begins with the multiplicities that invented him or her as a formed subject, in an actualized world, with an organic body, in a given political order, having learned a certain language” (lii). But the Deleuzian task for the writer is to go beyond this lived experience or the livable and enter a process of becoming, where the writer attains the vitality of Life, and establishes non-preexistent relations between singularities. To get a good understanding of the latter we must be aware of the fact that Deleuze examines works of literature in terms of their function. It is important to note here that “function” should not be understood in utilitarian terms, but rather in terms of productive design or creative potential. He sees a work of literature as a machine that, by determinable produces, generates certain effects, just like Joyce described his works as machines for producing epiphanies (Smith xxii). Meaning will ultimately follow function. Deleuze argues that the way a literary work functions is according to the principles of Life: it makes certain elements part of the literary machine that in themselves are insignificant and mutually independent - the singularities that constitute our chaotic world - and then establishes a system of communication among these parts (Smith xxiii). The way in which a work combines these elements has an effect on these parts, since it is able to create novel relations between them, while they

themselves remain essentially independent. It is this constant creation of something new that connects literature to Life, and it is exactly why Deleuze argues that “writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed” (“Literature and Life” 1).

According to Deleuze the literary machine, in attaining the vitality of Life as a process, contributes to the creation of “new possibilities of life”, and it does so in the following effective ways: it can uplift lived perceptions and affections to the non-personal level of affect and percept, through style and syntax it can create new compositions of language, it can imagine new modes of existence and it can even constitute a new people (Smith lii). I will not go into all of these effects in particular here, as they will return later in my analysis of Deleuze’s text on “Bartleby”, but what is important here to note is that Deleuze explicitly averts from any representational approach to language or literature whatsoever, as he states in “Literature and Life”: “To write is certainly not to impose a form (of expression) on the matter of lived experience” (1). In fact, the process of becoming that Deleuze connects to literary creativity is the exact opposite of form: the elements of this power of Life are, as Smith points out, essentially asubjective, asyntactical, agrammatical and anorganic (Smith lii). In other words, this power is a continuous creative force that works underneath the actual and does not take on a form, neither the form of a definable subject, nor the form of referential grammatical speech.

Importantly, Deleuze’s concept of Life does not only serve an ontological purpose: it has an ethical function as well that has significant implications for his examination of literature. In fact, Deleuze’s notions of the good and the bad in life are measured against Life. A good life is an ascending form of existence, in which one is able to transform oneself depending on the forces one encounters, always opening up new possibilities of life. This is an essentially healthy life, as opposed to a bad life, a degenerative, sick mode of existence that is not a passage of life, but rather an interruption or stopping of it. It is here that literature and life come together. Literature, creating new possibilities of life, “appears as an enterprise of health”, and the writer becomes “the physician of himself and of the world” (“Literature and Life” 3). In other words, literature takes the initiative to cure while being receptive to the process of Life, offering new possibilities of life while at the same time dismissing old and insufficient configurations. What we can see here is that the ontological and creative power of Life, as Smith correctly points out, “functions as the ethical principle of Deleuze’s

philosophy” (lii). Accordingly, what establishes the health of a certain mode of existence is its capacity to affirm this power.

As we have seen so far literature as an enterprise of health does two things: it offers a symptomatology of a particular mode of existence, while at the same time attaining the twofold power of Life as a process, inventing new singularities and establishing new relationships between them. Taking this into account we can define Deleuze’s readings of literary works as attempts to evaluate, not judge, the way in which a work attains the vitality of Life. In other words: does a work carry the process of Life to this healthy state of an impersonal and non-organic power? Having introduced Deleuze’s philosophy of literature, it is now time to analyze one specific example of Deleuzian reading practice: “Bartleby; or, the Formula.”

Deleuze, “Bartleby”, and the literary formula

Deleuze’s reading of Melville’s “Bartleby” concentrates on the analysis of one particular utterance and its effects. It concerns Bartleby’s strange way of being that is constituted by the often repeated formulaic utterance “I would prefer not to”. As I will momentarily argue, the effects of this formulaic speech are significant for a number of issues, stretching from the linguistic to the political, as it poses a new logic. Now, what are the effects of Bartleby and his formula according to Deleuze?

The first step of Deleuze’s reading consists of determining the linguistic nature of Bartleby’s utterance. As the attorney’s clerk Turkey points out – “Oh prefer? Oh yes – queer word. I never use it myself (Melville 127) – “prefer” is rarely employed in this way, as the usual formula would instead be *I had rather not*. Bartleby’s formula is grammatically and syntactically correct, but its termination “not to” which leaves what it rejects undetermined, confers upon it, as Deleuze argues, “the character of a radical, a kind of limit-function” (“Bartleby; or, the Formula” 68). While the formula is in essence grammatically correct, it functions as an agrammaticality, or as Deleuze points out, “as 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..” (“Formula” 69). In other words, while becoming agrammatical in its use Bartleby’s formula escapes linguistic form.

But that is not the only thing that makes Bartleby's utterance so strange. Furthermore, it has a strong effect on Bartleby himself. As Deleuze states, following earlier analyses of the formula, *I prefer not to* is neither an affirmation nor a negation ("Formula" 70). On the one hand Bartleby does not accept, he does not affirm a preference; on the other hand, he does not refuse, but just rejects the non-preferred. This makes Bartleby's formula devastating, as it eliminates both the preferable and the non-preferred. It eliminates the possibility of what the utterance refers to in every specific situation (proofreading, the errands), and in the same way it annihilates the only reference in relation to which something might or might not be preferred – the copying: "all particularity, all reference is abolished" ("Formula" 71). Referring to Blanchot, Deleuze states that Bartleby's being reflects a state of "pure patient passivity.. Being as being, and nothing more" ("Formula" 71). And it is this suspense, this zone of indiscernibility between the preferable and the non-preferred, that is the very condition for his survival ("Formula" 71).

To explain the workings of literary language Deleuze often refers to a phrase by Proust, who once stated that literature opens up a kind of foreign language within language. Deleuze takes this a step further, arguing that this process of opening up a language within language is a "becoming-other" of language as it escapes "the dominant system" ("Literature and Life" 5). Syntactic creation or style are the literary embodiment of this becoming of language, and Bartleby's agrammatical formula, is a striking example of this. As Deleuze argues, Bartleby has invented a new logic, a logic of preference, which abolishes the attorney's logic of preassumptions and thereby undermines "the presuppositions of language as a whole" ("Formula" 73). Accordingly, Deleuze notes with reference to Mathieu Lindon:

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 ("Formula" 74).

Bartleby, in other words, is a man without references, without history, without possessions, without particularities, and it is exactly this indistinctness that qualifies his being and formula, that has such a strong effect on everyone in the office and aggravates the attorney to the point he almost becomes mad. Upon hearing Bartleby's formula for the first time, the attorney is stupefied and tries to explain it as a misunderstanding. "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"(Melville 115). But when he asks Bartleby again to examine a paper with him, Bartleby repeats the formula. In a striking way this particular scene, as well as the many that follow, shows the way in which Bartleby's new logic of preference that is suspended in his formula, and creates a zone of indiscernibility, challenges the attorney's logic of presumptions, of meaning and reference, as the very annihilation of this logic by Bartleby and his formula drive him mad.

When we link this to the general claims on literature as I described them before, we could say that Deleuze in his analysis of Bartleby's formula shows the literature's capability of composing a new language. This is one way in which Melville's text takes on the creative power of Life. But this escape from linguistic form is not the only literary effect Melville produces. As I will momentarily argue, according to Deleuze Bartleby's formula extends beyond the linguistic, while it opens up to the creation of new modes of existence. What are these new possibilities of life that Deleuze finds in Melville's Bartleby?

As I have pointed out Deleuze argues that Bartleby's formula has an indispensable complement, namely *I am not particular*. He goes on to argue that this abolition of particularity might also have an effect on the relationship between characters, as he questions whether Bartleby's relation with the attorney does not "mark the possibility of a becoming, of a new man?" ("Formula" 74). In "Literature and Life" Deleuze elaborates on this process of becoming in literature, stating that one can institute a "zone of proximity" with anything, only on the condition that one creates the literary means for doing so (2). As an example, Deleuze mentions captain Ahab who enters into a becoming whale, in which Ahab finally is not able to distinguish himself from the whale and strikes himself in striking the whale. Importantly, this process of becoming whale involves the dissolution of the subject and its personal, particular traits: here affections and perceptions become impersonal, turning into pure affects

and percepts. Taking this into account, Deleuze questions whether or not there occurs a similar process of identification between Bartleby and the attorney, which may mark the becoming of a new man.

Deleuze argues that the relationship between attorney and Bartleby started with a pact: “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” (“Formula” 76). In effect, the breaking of the pact leaves Bartleby unable to copy, and his formula sends the guilty attorney, who broke the arrangement he himself had organized, into flight. As Deleuze puts it, “it will open a zone of indetermination... in which neither words nor characters can be distinguished – the fleeing attorney and the immobile, petrified Bartleby” (“Formula” 76). However, what is behind this rather elusive analysis of the relationship between the attorney and Bartleby is that theirs is ultimately a relationship of father and son. And the power of Bartleby’s formula not only consists of escaping linguistic form, it also consists of the destruction of the paternal function: it strips the father of his exemplary speech – his acts of charity and philanthropy do not have any effect on Bartleby – just as it strips the son of his ability to reproduce or copy (“Formula” 77). It is this process of identification, in which both characters are left unable to take on a form, that constitutes a zone of indetermination between them, as Deleuze states: “It is no longer a question of Mimesis, but of becoming” (“Formula” 78). What Bartleby’s formula thus brings forth, according to Deleuze, is a dissolution of the subject. It opens up the way for a subjective becoming, in which characters enter into a zone of proximity. Ultimately, in achieving this, the paternal function is abolished.

This is where, according to Deleuze, Melville’s text contributes to the creation of a new man. In classifying the attorney and Bartleby, Deleuze makes use of Melville’s own writings on the novel. First of all, Melville claims the right to absolute irrationalism. In regard to this Deleuze states: “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?” (“Formula” 81). In other words, the novel should take itself far from the order of reason. Instead, Deleuze argues, that the novel must “give birth to characters who exist in nothingness, survive only in the void, defy logic and psychology and keep their mystery until the end” (“Formula” 81). This opposition between reason and

the irrational is exemplified in the characters of the attorney and Bartleby. The attorney is the man of the human law, the man of reason that bears the paternal function, whilst Bartleby is rather an outcast of reason. The second reflection on the novel Deleuze uses from Melville is his distinction of characters into particulars and Originals. Particular characters have characteristics that determine their form and image; they are influenced by their milieu and their actions and reactions are governed by general laws, so is their language. Obviously, this particular nature corresponds to the attorney. Bartleby, however, is an Original, that Deleuze describes as follows:

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... 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 ("Formula" 83).

This striking passage reveals the uniqueness of Bartleby's character, and it is in his originality that lies Bartleby's great effect. As a matter of fact, this originality is inseparable from the world of the particular that the attorney represents and in a non-explanatory, aesthetic way, Bartleby reveals its "emptiness, the imperfection of its laws, the mediocrity of particular creatures...the world as a masquerade" ("Formula" 83). The attorney is an example of the effect Bartleby has, leaving him in unspeakable confusion. But according to Deleuze, Melville's text does not only consists of revealing a sick mode of paternalistic being, it furthermore wants to reconcile the original with secondary humanity, creating a new man.

Here the concept of the Original proves to have its politico-philosophical implications. What does the creation of a new man mean? And what are the political consequences? For Deleuze, the

attorney demonstrates that there are no good fathers, but only monstrous fathers and petrified, fatherless sons (“Formula” 84). Ideally, the mask of the charitable father must fall in order to open the way to fraternity. Deleuze describes this process as “to liberate man from the father function, to give birth to the new man or the man without particularities, to reunite the original and humanity by constituting a society of brothers as a new universality” (“Formula” 85). Stripped from their particularities, from being the property of a father, a community of brothers and sisters opens up the possibility of a Deleuzian politics, which is essentially a politics of becoming. The potentiality for a realization of such a political society of the Original Man Deleuze finds in Melville’s mother country America. For the American revolutionary project consisted of freeing man from paternal England, and produce a community in which man creates himself (“Formula” 85-86). The metaphor Deleuze uses to describe America’s political project strikingly mirrors his concept of Life as a vitalistic power as I discussed earlier in this chapter, stating it is like “a wall of loose, uncemented stones, where every element has a value in itself but also in relation to others” (“Formula” 86). What such a community fights against are on the one hand the particularities that places man in opposition and nourishes mistrust, and on the other hand “the fusion of souls in the name of great love or charity” (“Formula” 87). What is left, when man’s soul is stripped from its particularities, Deleuze insists, is precisely their originality.

Melville’s story thus offers a new morality of life. It is a life of brotherhood, a community whose members are capable of confidence, that is, as Deleuze points out, “of a belief in themselves, in the world, and in becoming” (“Formula” 88). And according to Deleuze this is exactly what Bartleby did not get from the attorney: “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?” (“Formula” 88). It is this paternal function that Bartleby diagnoses, and it is the paternal function that caused the American revolutionary project to fail eventually, as Deleuze notes that the wall, that should have been loosely cemented, was rebuild, fortified with new cement (“Formula” 88). It is important to note here that Deleuze refers to the actual political circumstances of the United States in the 19th century when Melville wrote “Bartleby”. In 1853 when “Bartleby” appeared America was just eight years away from the Civil War, a conflict that for Deleuze “sounded the knell” and marked

the return of the father. Bartleby is both the doctor of this sick America and the preserver of a new healthy possibilities of life to come; a Christ-figure that is not the son of the Father but a brother: “Bartleby is not the patient,” Deleuze argues, “but the doctor of a sick America, the *Medicine-Man*, the new Christ or the brother to us all” (“Formula” 90).

This phrase, that forms the end of Deleuze’s reading of “Bartleby”, typifies Deleuze’s literary project as I have set it out before. It is a project of health, in which literature offers both a symptomatology of a mode of existence, while at the same time attaining the vital power of Life, creating new modes of existence: in the case of “Bartleby” this means the abolishment of the paternal function to give way to a life of brotherhood. As Deleuze’s reading shows, literature can enter into a fruitful relationship with philosophy. They complement each other here, enter – In Deleuzian terms – a zone of proximity. Literature and Bartleby in particular appear to be messengers or agents from the vital world of Life that exists underneath the actual world, and it is in the way literature disturbingly affects the forms the actual world has taken on that Deleuze locates literature’s thinking. The effects Bartleby and his formula have are numerous. By starting to show the linguistic implications of the formula, its agrammaticality, Deleuze’s reading becomes a web of connections that is as vivid as his own philosophical project. Essentially, Bartleby embodies the asubjective, anorganic, agrammatical power of Life. He is a man without particularity, without form, a true Original, and this concept of originality leads Deleuze to enter the fields of both ethics and politics. Originality finds its opposite in particularity, that which has a form, an image, and operates according to human laws. Particularity, according to Deleuze, marks the sickness of man and society, since it brings into life the paternal function that the attorney represents. Bartleby is the symptomatologist of this sickness: he does not act according to the rules the father figure sets for him – he refuses to take on a form - and instead of the politics of the paternal function Bartleby holds the promise of an alternative, pragmatic politics of brotherhood, a new moral life of confidence.

However, Deleuze’s reading leaves us with some questions. What, for instance, is the exact relationship between the literary work and the society to which its promise is directed? When discussing Rancière’s critique on Deleuze, I will come back to this question. Nevertheless, what

Deleuze's approach to literature shows is the richness of ideas that can be extracted from a literary work like Melville's "Bartleby". Ultimately, it shows how vivid a thinker literature can be.

Chapter 2

Agamben, Rancière and “Bartleby”

We have seen how Deleuze’s approach to Melville’s “Bartleby” raises ontological as well as ethical and political questions, touching upon a wide range of themes such as health, creativity, language, the possible and the New. Fortunately, Deleuze’s text is not the only philosophical endeavor that has taken Melville’s story as its primary subject, providing us with a unique opportunity to compare the ways in which “Bartleby” evokes lines of philosophical thinking. In the following chapter I will analyze texts on “Bartleby” by Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Rancière, respectively, and show how they relate to each other and Deleuze. As a result, we will see the web of connections between philosophy and literature getting even more dense than Deleuze has already shown.

Agamben, “Bartleby” and Potentiality

Agamben commences his analysis by establishing the philosophical constellation to which he suggests that Bartleby the scrivener belongs. In *De Anima* Aristotle, who was the first to elaborate on the problem of potentiality, compares the intellect or potential thought to a writing tablet on which nothing is written. What this comparison seeks to point out is that before something is thought, before the potentiality of thinking has passed into the actuality of thinking, there is a possibility to think or not to think. Or to put in terms of the scribe, there is a possibility to write and not to write, and it is exactly this potential to be actualized or not that constitutes the pure potentiality of thinking or writing. The empty writing tablet thus represents the mode in which pure potentiality - which is in itself nothing since thought does not have a determinate form - exists. “Just as the architect retains his potential to build even when he does not actualize it,” Agamben argues “so thought exists as a potential to think and not to think, as a wax writing tablet on which nothing is written.” (245). Pure potentiality thus exists in a potential to do or be (think, write) and the potential not to be or do, and it is Bartleby, according to Agamben, who is the figure of this perfect potentiality, since he is capable of writing without actually writing. Bartleby, in other words, “has become the writing tablet; he is now nothing

other than his white sheet” (254). This is, in short, the context in which Agamben places Bartleby. He comes to serve as an exemplary figure in Agamben’s investigation of the ontological concept of potentiality. Interestingly, his essay is as much an analysis of Bartleby and his formula as it is a genealogy of the concept of potentiality, swiftly establishing lines between Aristotle, medieval Arab philosophy and Leibniz, among many others. Despite this complexity, I will try to set out here the most important implications of Bartleby’s formula according to Agamben, showing the ways in which Bartleby figures in his exploration of potentiality.

According to Agamben the problem of potentiality has been avoided by Western ethical thought by reducing it to the terms of will and necessity, focusing on what one wants or must do, instead of what one can do. The way in which the attorney treats Bartleby reminds us of these categories. When the attorney asks Bartleby to go the Post Office to check if there is anything for him, and Bartleby answers with his usual “I would prefer not to”, the attorney translates it hastily into “You *will* not to?” (Melville 120). Moreover, the attorney, not knowing what to do about the situation, looks into two books, strikingly titled “Edwards on the Will” and “Priestley on Necessity” (Melville 133). But as Agamben argues, potentiality is not will and impotentiality is not necessity: these categories of human law simply do not have any power over Bartleby. Strikingly, Agamben argues that “to believe that will has power over potentiality, that the passage to actuality is the result of a decision that puts an end to the ambiguity of potentiality (which is always potentiality to do and not to do) – this is the perpetual illusion of morality” (254). The will, according to Agamben, “is the principle that makes it possible to order the undifferentiated chaos of potentiality” (254). Importantly, the idea that potentiality without will is unrealizable and cannot pass into actuality is exactly what Bartleby’s utterance calls into question. Bartleby is being able (and not being able) without wanting it: it is not that he does not want to copy or want to leave the office, he simply would prefer not to. In this way, the formula destroys the possibility of constructing a relationship between capability and willing: it is, according to Agamben, “the formula of potentiality” (255).

In analyzing the nature of Bartleby’s formula, Agamben elaborates on Deleuze’s discussion of the destructive force of the formula’s agrammaticality, severing language and therefore Bartleby from any reference. Furthermore, he takes on Deleuze’s argument that the formula opens up a zone of

indiscernibility, between yes and no, the preferable and the non-preferable, and adds that this also concerns the potential to be (or do) and the potential not to be (or do). Interestingly, Agamben draws a comparison between Bartleby's formula and a much older formula, used by the Skeptics to indicate an experience of suspension, the formula "no more than" (256). Just like Bartleby's formula, this expression - uttered neither positively nor negatively - hovers between affirmation and negation. But according to Agamben this self-referential character of the formula that we have also seen with Deleuze is not the only comparison there is between the Barbleby's formula and the Skeptics' "no more than". Agamben quotes Sextus Empiricus, who comments on this expression: "the most important thing is that, in uttering this expression, the Skeptic says the phenomenon and announces the affect without any opinion" (256). Like a messenger, while uttering the "no more than" the Skeptic simply carries a message to which he does not add anything, he just performatively announces an event. For example, he does not oppose silence to discourse, but displaces language from the register of the proposition, which predicates something of something, to that of the announcement, which, according to Agamben, predicates nothing of nothing. Language maintains itself in the suspense of the "no more than", becoming the pure announcement of its passion (Agamben 257). But this passion is not a subjective passion; rather, it is purified of all subjective appearance and "becomes the pure announcement of appearance, the intimation of Being without any predicate" (Agamben 257). It is in this way that Bartleby's formula shows its full sense, and we can immediately see the similarities with Deleuze's analysis. The formula opens up a zone of indistinction between affirmation and negation and furthermore it does not refer to anything particular, it predicates nothing, it only announces its own appearance. But if Bartleby is a messenger, what does his formula announce?

The Skeptics have described their suspension as an experience of possibility or potentiality. And this potentiality or possibility, this being able, as we have seen, is neither Being nor non-Being, it rather takes on a place somewhere in between. Leibniz argued that the potentiality of Being consisted in the principle of reason, stating that there is always a reason for which something does rather than does not exist. But Bartleby's formula, Agamben notes, is irreducible to the pole of Being or to the pole of the Nothing and therefore "the formula emancipates potentiality... from both its connection to a "reason" (*ratio*) and its subordination to Being" (258). Now potentiality is stripped from the

principle of reason, and it no longer functions to assure the supremacy of Being over Nothing but exists, autonomously, without reason in the indifference between Being and Nothing (Agamben 259). In other words, Nothing, or non-Being, is no longer annihilated by Being, as it is no longer a result of reason or will. Instead, Bartleby's formula of potentiality that exists in between, does not create an opposition between Being and non-Being (such as Hamlet's famous "to be or not to be") but rather precedes both. Accordingly, Agamben states: "to be capable, in pure potentiality, to bear the "no more than" beyond Being and Nothing, fully experiencing the impotent possibility that exceeds both – this is the trial that Bartleby announces" (259). Strikingly, this experiment of potentiality that Bartleby undertakes, as he frees potentiality of reason, shows the way in which Melville's text engages in an ontological question.

Using a concept by Walter Lüssi, Agamben describes Bartleby's experiment as an experiment without truth, and proposes that the concept "should be transformed into a paradigm for literary writing" (260). What Agamben means here is that Melville's work calls into question Being itself, before (or beyond) something is determined as true or false. The question of Melville's story Agamben therefore formulates as follows: "Under what conditions can something occur *and* (that is, at the same time) not occur, be true *no more than not be true*?" (260-261). This is also what marks the unverifiable nature of the formula: it emerges from an experiment without truth and thus it is not concerned with the actual existence or non-existence of a thing, but with its potentiality, preceding, as we have seen, actual being and non-being. To define Bartleby's experiment, Agamben makes use of the concept of contingency as the characterization of a being that can both be and not be, calling it an experiment of absolute contingency (261).

This enables Agamben to make his concluding point about Bartleby's formula, namely, that it recalls the potentiality of the past instead of viewing it as a necessary line of events. He quotes Duns Scotus, who states: "By contingent I mean not something that is not necessary or eternal, but something whose opposite could have happened in the very moment in which it happened" (Agamben 262). Taking this into account, the truth of the past is thus not the necessary occurrence or non-occurrence of a particular event; its truth rather goes beyond or before the taking place of either of the two possibilities, and consists of the occurrence of its potentiality, that is, that the event can both be

and not be. And it is exactly the truth that every actualization of potentiality means that something else was not actualized that Bartleby, according to Agamben, reminds us of. That is why he stops copying: the eternally repetitive act of copying annihilates the potential not to be (Agamben 268). Importantly, Agamben notes the attorney's gossip on Bartleby's previous occupation, proposing 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 143). These undelivered letters, Agamben strikingly points out, are the "cipher of joyous events that could have been, but never took place" (268) and this is exactly what relates these dead letters to Bartleby's formula, as it draws attention not solely to the potential to be, but also on the potential not to be, creating a zone of indistinction between what could have not been but was and what could have been but was not. The past, in this way, retains its potentiality.

Elaborating on earlier remarks by Deleuze that Bartleby is a new Christ who comes to abolish the old Law and comes to inaugurate a new mandate, Agamben adds that if Bartleby is a new Messiah, he comes not, like Jesus to redeem what was, but to save what was not (270). Bartleby is the figure of potentiality who restores the originary unity between what happened and what did not happen, and as we have seen, it is his indeterminate formula that abolishes all philosophical principles – the will, reason and necessity – that have attempted to separate the potential from the impotential. Accordingly, Agamben concludes his essay by emphasizing that Bartleby's words refute Justice, "that gives a reward or a perpetual punishment to what was" (271). Instead, they ultimately bear the promise of a new creature, that "reaches the indemonstrable center of its "occurrence-or-nonoccurrence" (Agamben 271). In others words, Bartleby, as a new creature represents a new ontology of potentiality, beyond Being and non-Being.

When we compare Agamben's analysis with Deleuze's we can see some striking similarities. Bartleby's formula for both authors creates a zone of indeterminacy, in which neither this nor that, neither affirmation nor negation, neither being nor non-being, are expressed, as they are suspended in the formula. Importantly, both analyses are in essence ontological projects in which Bartleby participates, representing Deleuze's notion of a creative Life and Agamben's ontology of potentiality. What is striking here is that Bartleby for both Deleuze and Agamben is irrevocably connected to the

New, to the possible, as both authors describe him as a new Christ figure, that for Deleuze on the one hand suggests a society of brotherhood, based on the ontological power of Life, and for Agamben on the other hand restores history to its full potential, reminding us of what did not happen. In this way, Bartleby appears in both Deleuze and Agamben as a messenger of the world preceding the actual world. However, their texts show a difference in their approach to literature and the way in which it relates to this world underneath. For Deleuze Bartleby and his formula embody the workings of the ontological force of Life, carrying out effects that have linguistic, ethical and political consequences. This power constitutes the way of literary thinking Melville's text provides us with. But here we find an essential difference with Agamben. In Agamben's reading Bartleby does not act or carry out effects according to the world that precedes ours, as Deleuze suggests, but rather reminds us of this world of potentiality through his formula. Furthermore, whereas Deleuze's analysis emphasizes the unique literary character of Bartleby and his formula, showing how the effects of the formula are very much literary effects, Agamben seems to use Bartleby and his formula rather as examples in his philosophical endeavor. As I have mentioned before, his approach is more of a genealogy of potentiality in which Bartleby takes a unique place because his formula, just as the formula of the Sceptics, show that potentiality is expressible.

Rancière, Deleuze, and the literary formula

On the contrary, Jacques Rancière, in his essay "Deleuze, Bartleby and the Literary Formula", does pay attention to the literariness of Melville's "Bartleby". As the title already suggests, it is a critical reading of Deleuze's analysis of Bartleby and his formula. While reading Deleuze, I have shown the way in which Bartleby's formula refuses any kind of form, representation or particularity, opening up to the chaos of Life as it hovers between the preferable and the non-preferable, affirmation and negation. In this zone of indiscernibility, Deleuze argues, lies the possibility of a new mode existence, an ethics and politics of brotherhood that has Bartleby as its Messiah, and which abolishes the paternal function of image and copy. Moreover, Bartleby signifies a new, brother-Christ (instead of Christ the son), in which the people exist as pure singularities, autonomous and heteronomous at the same time.

Strikingly, Deleuze's philosophical endeavor ascribes a great autonomous power to literature, and it is the way in which Deleuze constructs this autonomous power that Rancière first seeks to problematize.

According to Rancière, Deleuze's unique reading of "Bartleby" as the development of a formula, "a material operation that the materiality of a text produces," situates the work's thinking in a dual opposition: on the one hand it is opposed to the Aristotelian plot; on the other, it is opposed to the symbol, to the idea of a meaning behind the narrative (146). Instead, "Bartleby" is a performance. Going along with Deleuze, Rancière sees the implications the formula has on life: it shatters the causal order that rules the world of representation understood in the Schopenhaurian sense. Rancière compares the destructive effect of the formula to the Flaubertian principle of style as absolute way of seeing things, destroying all hierarchy of what is represented. In other words, it marks the rupture from the literary system of representation that originates in Aristotle, in which the form of representation was determined by the represented subjects: kings, farmers and shepherds all needed a specific poetic forms. Style, thus, comes to serve as the principle of a literature that has escaped from a mode of representation. But to really leave the edifice of mimesis behind, Rancière notes, it is not enough to abandon "the norms and hierarchies of *mimesis*" (148). Instead, it must abandon the metaphysics of representation and that on which it is founded: how it presents individuals and how they are connected, its modes of causality; "in short, its entire system of signification" (Rancière 148). As a result, the power of literature must be sought in the zone before or underneath the world of representation, a world of "inanimate existences, inert things that seem animal, vegetative souls, statues that dream and landscapes that think" (Rancière 149). Obviously, it is easy to translate this into Deleuze's lexicon. Opposed to the laws of mimesis are the laws of this world underneath, this virtual world, un-determined, un-individualized, before representation and reason. This, in Deleuzian terms, is the world of becomings, where expressive details emancipate and enter into a zone of indeterminacy. According to Rancière this is the metaphysics that grounds literature, and so far, this does not seem to contradict any of Deleuze's assumptions.

Rancière argues that this metaphysics of literature establishes an "infinite contradiction of autonomy and heteronomy" (150). The question becomes, in terms of poetics: how to link together in the form of the work the emancipated atoms of the world beneath representation? In other words: how

should a work be organized to make the former agree to the latter? Rancière finds a solution in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, as "it consists of accompanying the representative molar scheme, its procedures of identification and its narrative sequences, by the molecular power of emancipated expressive details" (151). There still exists a classical unity of narrative, but in Flaubert this representational scheme is reconstituted with blocks of affects and percept, atoms of "anti-representation" (Rancière 151). In other words, these freed blocks of sensation do exist in a work of literature, but they cannot escape the fact that they are arranged in a particular manner and serve in the totality of the work. Therefore, the initial contradiction between autonomy of the work and the heteronomy of sensible parts is a compromise as well. And according to Rancière, it is this contradiction or compromise that Deleuze's in his analyses tries to unmake (152).

As an example, Rancière takes Deleuze's reading of Proust. Despite the work's fracturing of the world of representation that Deleuze takes as a starting point in his analysis, these moments of fracture, Rancière argues, do not alone constitute a book. Instead, they have to be linked together "in a plot of awareness in the Aristotelian manner, producing truth without knowledge of the subject who bears it" (Rancière 152). Opposed to this image of the work as organism, Deleuze thus poses a logic of the work as a spider's web, as a schizophrenic or mad vocation. However, Rancière insists that the work is not madness. Furthermore, Rancière notes that Deleuze's problems in analyzing Proust's works explain the privilege Deleuze gives in his analyses to works that do not pose the problem of synthesis of the heterogeneous. Deleuze rather prefers short stories or tales, that are characterized by "the unity of the fable" (Rancière 153). In addition, Rancière sharply notes that Deleuze also privileges specific kinds of fables: "narratives about metamorphoses, passages onto the other side, about becoming-indiscernible, formulaic narratives...; narratives centered on a character subject to metamorphes, or on a performer of metamorphoses or indeterminacies" (153). In other words, these are works that reveal on the level of fable what literature performs in its own work.

This challenges the sharp distinction Deleuze makes between the formula on the one side and story and symbol on the other side. Bartleby's formula abandons the story on a representational level only by transporting it to the level of symbolic: his performance in the context of the tale always tells the power of its performance, that is the power of indeterminacy. Therefore, his formula is not just

literal, as Deleuze argued, it is also not literal, since it is also told in the fable. Rancière thus argues: “The tale is, from this point of view, a privileged structure. It is the magic formula that tells the story of a magic formula, that metamorphoses every story of metamorphosis into a demonstration of its metamorphic power” (Rancière 153). As an example, Rancière takes Deleuze’s assumption borrowed from Proust that a writer can create a foreign language within language, sending language into flight, which Deleuze illustrates by pointing, for example, to the murmuring in Melville’s *Pierre, or the Ambiguities*. But as Rancière critically notes, the language in the text is a transcription of murmuring, and does not create another language within language. In short, Deleuze - entrusting literature with the power that Schopenhauer once ascribed to music, that is, the ability to express the asignifying and undifferentiated world beneath the world of representation - creates a performative conception of literature, that attempts to end the contradiction between autonomy and heteronomy. But as Rancière argues, he does not end this contradiction, since his analysis of the formula ultimately returns to the givens of the story and symbolism, “givens that function as a symbol of the power unique to literature” (154). In other words, the Deleuzian canon consists of works that do not perform literature’s power, but only show the performance of literature’s power, and this is how we must conceive of Bartleby’s agrammatical formula and his non-particular being.

This leads Rancière to another important characteristic of Deleuze’s works on literature and Bartleby in particular that marks his return to Aristotelian poetics that he so eagerly tries to abandon: his focus on an operator, a character that functions as the driving force behind the fable. In the previous chapter on Deleuze we have seen how he works out the concept of the Original which he borrowed from Melville. According to Rancière, however, Deleuze’s conceptual treatment of the Original exceeds Melville’s intentions (155). For Deleuze, Rancière argues, Bartleby as Original defies the “mimetic dyad of model and copy” that comes to be the same thing as the “father/son dyad of filiation”; moreover, Bartleby is the figure of a new kind, exemplary of the power Deleuze ascribes to literature, expressing the real world sustained beneath the world of representation. The Original in Deleuze thus symbolizes the encounter between two worlds, and it is here that Rancière locates the Deleuzian difficulty. Deleuze seems to oppose the world of representation to a world of multiplicities, and similarly, he seems to oppose the literary work as a contradiction between the emancipated

expressive details and its organic totality to the text as a patchwork. Rancière dismisses this opposition just as he dismissed the seeming opposition of performance and representation I discussed above: the literary text is not a free space of the virtual, as Deleuze wants us to believe it is, and his own symbolist reading practice once again shows this contradiction in his poetics, as he presents the text not as a patchwork of multiplicities but instead “imposes a new figure of struggle between two worlds, conducted by exemplary characters” (157).

As we have seen so far, Rancière problematizes Deleuze’s philosophical approach to literature by showing the contradictions between his conception of literature and the way he analyzes literary works. Rancière seems to give Deleuze a taste of his own medicine, while challenging Deleuze’s reading practice with his own literary-ontological claims. But the problems do not only concern Deleuze’s poetics. Instead, according to Rancière, they trouble as well the political implications Deleuze assigned to literature and *Bartleby* in particular. Deleuze’s analysis of Melville’s text showed how *Bartleby* and his formula challenged all particularity that constitutes the world of representation, symbolized by the attorney. Accordingly, *Bartleby* embodies the politics of non-preference, of equality: a politics of brotherhood as opposed to the politics of the father. This is the promise of Deleuze’s conception of literature as an autonomous field where the ontological force of Life translates itself into pure singularities that enter the egalitarian mode of becoming. But as I have discussed before, Rancière points to the contradiction between heteronomy and autonomy that Deleuze wants to abandon when he sets literature with the task of destroying the world of representation but which he cannot overcome in his reading. And here, according to Rancière, we also find the problem of the politics of fraternity that Deleuze finds in Melville’s text. It concerns the following question: what relationship does there exist between the molecular equality that is at the heart of literary innovation and the equality a political community can actualize?

To pose the problem of *Bartleby*’s political relevance, Rancière considers Deleuze’s conception of *Bartleby* in the context of his striking image of the fraternal society as “a wall of loose, uncemented stones, where every element has a value in itself but also in relation to others” (161). Obviously, this image of society as a wall of loose uncemented stones conflicts with the strong hierarchical design of the community of the Father. There is, in other words, no opposition between

the whole and its consecutive parts. But Rancière is struck by the fact that this seemingly free society is characterized in the image of a wall, and here he finds a remarkable paradox. What Deleuze offers here, is on the one hand the ultimate figure of contradiction in the aesthetic mode of thinking, that is, the perfect union between its autonomy and heteronomy, but on the other hand by offering an image of a wall, he seems to “bar the road of the people to come” (Rancière 162). According to Rancière, it is this paradox that represents the aporia of his literary endeavor. Deleuze summons literature to break down the wall of the world of representation by inventing a fraternal political people based on his ontological principle of Life, in which each person is always moving everywhere without being disturbed. Bartleby embodies this people, but just as Deleuze’s own literary analysis showed that Deleuze cannot evade the connection between a text’s heteronomy and its autonomy, and that a text cannot act only on a molecular level, this people cannot exist in a free heteronymous state either. Instead, the society of fraternal liberty has to take on a form in which the heteronomy is represented. And this is exactly what Deleuze tries to ignore but in his image of the wall implicitly evokes (Rancière 162). In other words, Deleuze sends his fraternity of free singularities into the wall.

Evidently, Rancière’s analysis of Deleuze’s article on Bartleby and his formula does not only attempt to problematize Deleuze’s conception of literature and its relation to politics. Moreover it criticizes the way in which Deleuze uses literature and Bartleby in particular as a means to let his ontology enter the field of politics. This passage, Rancière argues, is blocked by Deleuze’s own image of the wall, and this leads him to an even stronger conclusion, stating: “Literature opens no passage to a Deleuzian politics. There is no Dionysian politics” (164). In view of this rather harsh critique, one would almost forget the similarities that can be found when comparing the two analyses. Both Deleuze and Rancière connect ontological principles of difference and powerful motion to the workings of literature. According to Rancière however, these principles of heteronomy do not work unmediated on the level of the work as Deleuze seems to suggest, but always function in relationship to the text’s autonomy as a whole. Therefore, literature is not able to abandon the world of representation, but rather struggles within it, driven by the innovative force of the world that resides underneath. Bartleby’s formula, in this way, does not perform the power of literature, it rather shows the performance of this power.

And it is here that the comparison between Deleuze's reading of *Bartleby* and Rancière's critique on his reading becomes crucial in terms of my literature-philosophy project. Where do these philosophers locate literature's thinking; where does the cross-pollination occur? As we have seen, Deleuze places literature's thinking in the infinite vital power of molecular play of which literature is or should be the embodiment. Writing is the passage of this creative life force, and since it is just a passage, writers will never be finished, their projects never done. Rancière, acknowledges this power, but locates literature's thinking, or as he puts it, "the aesthetic mode of thinking" (162), on a textual level, where this heteronomous power enters into a contradictory relationship with the autonomous form of the whole. Naturally, these different conceptions of literary thinking result in two different ideas on the political implications of Melville's text. Deleuze reads in *Bartleby* the possibility of a society of brothers that gives way to the creative life force he places at the center of his ontology. This society is formless, always on the move, non-particular, just as *Bartleby* is not particular and literature's power consists of embodying this ontological motion. It is the equality of such a society that Rancière seems to like, but he nevertheless disagrees with Deleuze on two points. First, he does not think that such a politics in motion would be any good; second, he thinks that Deleuze's own reading of *Bartleby* already shows this through the metaphor of the wall of loose, uncemented stones. Just as literature's expressive details in some way or another must hold together in the autonomous form of the text, so must Deleuze's equal community of brotherhood take on some consistent representative form in which this equality is guaranteed. This is Deleuze's wall, and this is why Rancière calls this image "one of the last great, strong images that Deleuze has left us" (161).

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters I have pursued to set out a variety of lines of connection between philosophy and literature and Melville's "Bartleby" in particular. What has become evident from the analysis of the approaches to "Bartleby" by Deleuze, Agamben and Rancière is that literature, although seemingly separated from philosophy, is an equally productive endeavor of thought, and as such it can serve as an essential vector for philosophical conceptualization through ways which are inherently literary. Accordingly, as these philosophical readings show, literature enters the field of ontology, ethics and politics.

Deleuze's reading of Melville's text perhaps offers us the strongest case of an intersection between philosophy and literature. According to Deleuze literature embodies the creative power of Life, an ontological concept used to denote the chaotic world of infinite motion that precedes ours. Literature's thinking consists of a performance of this power, and Bartleby and his formula serve as its performers. What is essential to Deleuze's reading of "Bartleby" is that this performance is an enterprise of health, that seeks to offer new healthy possibilities of life that work according to the concept of Life, while abolishing old and insufficient, i.e. ill modes of existence. This illness, in Deleuze's reading, is the paternal function that is represented by the attorney. His agrammatical formula makes Bartleby unparticular, without references, refusing all acts of charity and philanthropy that the attorney enacts that seek to let Bartleby take on a form. According to Deleuze, Bartleby is an Original, a figure of Primary Nature, and therefore defies the stable form or particularity that Deleuze connects to secondary nature and the paternal function. Instead, Bartleby holds the promise of the ethical and political fulfillment of this ontological principle of Life: a political society of brotherhood, and a moral life of confidence. Thus, in Deleuze's reading Bartleby becomes the actor of the ontological power of Life that through his disturbing literary formula affects existent notions of politics and ethics.

The freedom with which Life can impose itself on literature and carry out effects that abolish the world of representation - which lies at the heart of Deleuze's philosophical approach to literature -

is problematized by Rancière. He argues that these heteronomous powers are certainly at work in literature, but they are always in contradictory relationship with the work as an autonomous whole on the level of representation. Paradoxically, he finds proof for this argument in Deleuze's own reading practice. As a matter of fact, what Deleuze in his reading of *Bartleby* proves is not that *Bartleby* performs the ontological power of Life, but rather that he shows the performance of this power on a textual level. In other words, Deleuze cannot ignore the world of representation that he so eagerly wants to abolish. According to Rancière, this has consequences for the political and ethical implications of Deleuze's reading as well. In the same way that a literary work cannot exist solely of emancipated expressive details without taking on an autonomous form, a political society of brothers cannot exist in an infinite motion: it has to take on a form that represents its principles. Literature, Rancière thus argues, does not give way to a Deleuzian politics. Although both Deleuze and Rancière see a molecular power at work in the literary work, the way in which this power operates in literature differs for both writers, and this results in a disagreement on the level of ethics and politics. The problem that is at stake here is the problematic relationship between art and society, and this discussion, these texts show, is not yet to be closed.

Agamben's approach is in a way separated from Deleuze's and Rancière's, since it does not discuss Melville's text as a literary text, but rather uses *Bartleby* and his formula as an exemplary case in his philosophical endeavor, which is in fact a genealogy of the concept of potentiality. *Bartleby*'s formula, hovering between being and non-being, shows the expressibility of potentiality, reminding us that before something comes into existence there is always the possibility of not coming into existence, reconstituting the original union between potentiality and impotentiality.

But in spite of these differences in approach, it is evident that all three authors start their readings with the notion that there is something remarkable about *Bartleby* and his formula, something that defies any easy application of common principles such as reference, reason or causality. Instead, Melville's text establishes a new, non-rational logic, hence posing questions that give way to philosophy. As I have mentioned earlier, Melville's text is not a philosophical work, neither is it an exposé of a philosophical debate: it thinks in its own way. And this thinking, I would like to add at last, needs scholarly attention.

Bibliography

- Agamben, Giorgio. "Bartleby, or On Contingency". In *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999. 243-271. Print.
- Deleuze, Gilles. "Bartleby; or, The Formula." In *Essays Critical and Clinical*. Trans. Daniel W. Smith. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1997. 68-90. Print.
- , "Literature and Life." In *Essays Critical and Clinical*. Trans. Daniel W. Smith. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press. 1997. 1-6. Print.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *What is Philosophy?* Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. Print.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Claire Parnet. *Dialogues*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987. Print.
- Melville, Herman. *Billy Budd and other Tales*. New York: Signet, 1998. Print.
- Rancière, Jacques. "Deleuze, Bartleby, and the Literary Formula." In *The Flesh of Words*. Trans. Charlotte Mandell. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004. 146-164. Print.
- Smith, Daniel W. Introduction. *Essays Critical and Clinical*. By Gilles Deleuze. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1997. xi-lvi. Print.