NOTES

PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE EDITION: READING AND THE RIGHT TO DEATH

1. The opportunity for such a rereading was granted me recently by Richard Rand, whom I would like to thank here. With his typical subtlety and carefulness, he indicated to me a few mistakes in the French version of *Prophecies*. I had wanted to translate myself the passages from *Moby-Dick* that I cite, since Jean Giono's translation (the only one available at the time) is more or less useless, as I explain a number of times. Armel Guerne's 1954 translation had been out of print until it was finally republished in 2005, whereas the faithful, if less creative, version by Philippe Jaworski was supposed to be published only in 2006, in the La Pléiade collection. As Rand explained to me, I had simply mistranslated the lines I comment on at the beginning of the chapter entitled "Backfire." Fortunately, this error of translation is without consequence for the argument I am trying to elaborate. Moreover, since one does not translate a translation, the English-language reader of *Prophecies*, who reads Melville in the original, will know nothing about it. Why, then, do I point out here that one note was corrected, in which I discuss Guerne's proposed translation of this passage? It is because my error of translation (as well as Guerne's) is no doubt a symptom: what was at stake for me, in interpreting these so very difficult lines, was the sovereignty *of the text*, insofar as it is "unconditional" and "integral." I cannot reconstitute the entirety of Rand's brilliant demonstration as he reconstructed the chain of occurrences of this signifier ("integral") in Melville's novel. I do hope Rand will let us read one day his unique way of reading Melville's oeuvre, as he has begun to do in a recent article ("Melville et l'Amérique," in *Po&sie* 120). However, I can and must say that the present preface to my *Prophecies* is an attempt to elaborate anew, out of an error, this question of the sovereignty of the text. Which is to say, of its life and of its death.