Melville's Untimely History: "Benito Cereno" as Counter-Monumental Narrative

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The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are ‘still’ possible . . . is not philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge—unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.

—Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”

At the cornerstone ceremony for the Revolutionary War memorial atop Boston’s Bunker Hill, Daniel Webster predicted in 1825 that the planned monument would “proclaim the magnitude and importance of [the American Revolution] to every class and every age” (Webster 6). Herman Melville, characteristically, decided to talk back. Melville dedicated Israel Potter (1855) to that monument, offering his fictional revision of the life of a forgotten Revolutionary War veteran, which he equates to a “dilapidated old tombstone retouched,” (1349) as a birthday gift to the obelisk. He deferentially addresses the war monument as the “Great Biographer” of Bunker Hill’s soldiers, but the sustained attention to Potter’s tribulations in his own novel suggests the insufficiency of the one-note marble biography. The dedication’s parodic tribute situates a small, individual monument at the foot of a large, impersonal one, making clear what the taller structure is built upon: the under-remarked lives and deaths of many men like Potter, each of whom has a story that the official monument effaces in its drive to legitimize the Revolution. By “restoring” one of these erased individual stories, Israel Potter cuts the abstract obelisk down to size.
During the final months of *Israel Potter*’s serial run in *Putnam’s Monthly*, Melville experimented a second time with “retouching” a text from the post-Revolutionary archive.¹ Reworking, in “Benito Cereno,” the story of a slave rebellion aboard a Spanish ship, which he had come across in Amasa Delano’s 1817 *Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres*, Melville again highlighted the elisions brought about by the hardening of historical narratives into official, monumental forms. However, while *Israel Potter* challenges the substance of official/monumental history, the later narrative shifts modes to question its structure as well. Interrogating not only what but also how historical memory signifies, “Benito Cereno” poses challenges that can best be understood in light of the cultural work performed by the contemporary counter-monument, which Melville’s narrative anticipates and elucidates. The unstable, often transient allegorical structures of the counter-monument challenge the traditional monument’s claim to embody “timeless truth” by revealing their own commemorative narratives as narratives, as attempts to put together meaning in time. “Benito Cereno” performs similar work, insisting on the reparative possibilities of an understanding of history that sees time as discontinuous and fragmented. This vision of reparation, as distinct from the teleology of redemption, is not a utopic attempt to “cure” the injuries of the past through the activation of an audience’s sympathy within the unifying framework of memorial.² Rather, in order to address the melancholic gaps created by monumental history, it deploys melancholic narrative form, which understands the past as suspended within the present but not reconciled to it. This temporal consciousness enables “Benito Cereno” to appear, as H. Bruce Franklin has written of another of Melville’s historical novellas, as “an epiphany of the interlocked history of the late eighteenth century, the . . . nineteenth century, and the late twentieth [and early twenty-first] century[ies]” (209). Yet while the condensation of time offered by the traditional monument extends the confident assumption that the work of recollection will lead to redemption, the type of epiphany framed in the counter-monument can offer no such guarantee. It can only attempt, as does “Benito Cereno,” to restructure its readers’ investments in the past, in the hope that critical history will have a regenerative effect on our damaged times.
I. HOW THE COUNTER-MONUMENT TELLS TIME

The antebellum inclination to monumentalism developed, as Russ Castronovo has demonstrated, as a way to address the need for historical memory in the search for a distinctively American cultural identity. Operating not only in official memorial structures, but also within historical narrative and the visual arts, monumentalism supports the work of nation-building by creating, through the manipulation of a mythical past, a feeling of national belonging (Castronovo 109–10). The sacred space of memorial places the monument’s audience at once within its own historical moment, highly conscious of its temporal distance from the events commemorated, and dissolved into what Benedict Anderson calls the “simultaneity” of the nation (24–25). Yet while monumentality is one solution to the problem of historical memory, this solution is ironic in two respects; it is not especially historical, and it depends as much upon forgetting as it does upon remembering. The monument’s pedagogy of self-consolidation is facilitated by reductive, monologic and imprecise versions of historical events. The task of the monument is not to teach history but to instruct people how to feel about it: inspired, reverent and moved to appropriate action in their own historical moments. In this sense, as Frederick Nietzsche observes, “monumental history, since it disregards causes as much as possible, could without much exaggeration be called a collection of effects in themselves” (17). Emphasizing effect and eliding cause, the monument functions as an ahistorical sign of history, a string tied around the finger of the public to remind it of its own self-image.

The “approximate” nature of the monumental (Nietzsche 17) not only creates a deliberate imprecision about the dynamics of history, but induces other kinds of forgetting as well. Variant inscriptions of history and dialogic engagement with the past are alike foreclosed as the monument, in its effort to transmit a completed narrative, attempts to stop time, enshrining a located and particular interpretation of an event’s or individual’s significance as universal and timeless. Even as it speaks to the necessity of remembering the past, then, monumentality severs the past from the present. Naturalizing the power exercised through political domination by deflecting it onto aesthetics, the monument imposes
closure on historical events by declaring for all time what they mean. Hence Nietzsche's insistence that "whenever the monumental vision of the past rules over the other ways of looking at the past... the past itself suffers damage" (17). Monumentalism damages its object, the past, by enclosing it in a space of sacred significance that insulates it against critical re-examination; this enclosure inflicts corollary damage on contemporary publics by limiting the forms that relations to the past can take.

Monumentalism's tendency to stop time leads many to discard the monumental project altogether. Melville's Pierre echoes this dismissal as he announces:

> Hitherto I have hoarded up mementoes and monuments of the past... but it is forever over now! If to me any memory shall henceforth be dear, I will not mummy it in a visible memorial for every passing beggar's dust to gather on... never more will I play the vile pigmy, and by small memorials after death, attempt to reverse the decree of death, by essaying the poor perpetuating of the image of the original. (Pierre 197)

Pierre's disillusionment with the past (or, more precisely, with his father's history) leads him to view the project of memorialization as a "primitive" attempt to deny the passage of time. Believing he cannot find any "visible" form that will preserve memory without "mummifying" it, Pierre chooses instead to burn his mementos and declares himself to be "ever present," without past or future. This idealization of the present in place of the past is replicated in Lewis Mumford's well-known modernist critique of the monument in The Culture of Cities. Mumford declares the monument to be aligned with "death and fixity" and insists that the modern world, in contrast, is "oriented to the cycle of life" (438). Like Pierre, he derides the monumental impulse as primitive and childish, and announces that the modern world has outgrown it. Mumford's refusal of the monument defies the authority of its "timeless" projections, repudiating the past's power to dictate the terms of the present. In its most severe form, however, this refusal to give space to public memorial does not fully liberate the present from the tyranny of the past. Rather, it tends to disperse and atomize memory, making critical dialogue about the past impossible. Anti-monumental refusal
does not erase, but merely displaces monumental history; rather than desacralizing the power of the past, it melancholically denies it.

The counter-monument, however, deploys the critique of the monument differently, resisting both monumental amnesia and anti-monumental melancholia. Described by James Young as “brazen, painfully self-conscious memorial spaces . . . conceived to challenge the very premises of their being” (Texture of Memory 27), counter-monuments refuse to “tell people what they ought to think” about the past and thus to relieve them of the burden of thinking it (Shalev-Gerz and Gerz, qtd. in Young, Memory’s Edge 130).5 Instead of orienting the viewer to an already-agreed upon understanding of the past and its significance, the counter-monument disorients its audience, disallowing the self-consolidating security of standing outside a completed history tidily packaged for mass consumption and emphasizing the observer’s implication in an historical narrative that remains unresolved. In its effort to restructure the terms of audience response, the counter-monument seeks forms that allow a certain liveness in memorial depictions of the past. It supplants the symbolic appeal of the traditional monument, which severs present from past on the quotidian level in order to unite them on the transcendent level of timeless truth, with the destabilizing effects of allegory, which links past and present without collapsing them and disperses meaning across time rather than gathering it in a single transcendental instant. Recent European Holocaust counter-monuments, for example, project the working of memory against the passage of time, emphasizing displacement and/or evanescence in order to highlight the damaged intersections of space and time sustained during and after the event.6 The narrativity of the forms employed in these installations suggests that traumatic history is most effectively engaged not in the transcendence of a single symbolic image but from moment to moment, as one struggles to move through the memorial site or watches its appearance and disappearance.7

The turn to allegory in Holocaust counter-monuments reflects a desire to find ways of negotiating the relationship between past and present that depend neither on linear emplotments of time nor on its collapse into timelessness. Because allegory always stresses the temporality of the relationships it enfolds, referring insistently to a prior set of meanings with which it can never fully coincide but without which it
loses its significance, it has proven a powerful tool at moments in history when the question of history itself engenders a temporal crisis. The use of allegory tends to arise, as Bainard Cowan has argued, whenever a people or group finds itself unable either to accept the past or to abandon it. This experience of being "called in two opposing directions, by an allegiance to its history and by an allegiance to truth" (Cowan 11) is expressed in allegory's gestures toward a referential relationship that is both arbitrary and necessary. The tension between history and truth is explored in Walter Benjamin's writings on allegory, which highlight the ways that allegory resists the symbol's flight from time: "Whereas in the symbol destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly realized in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the facies hippocratica of history as a petrified, primordial landscape. Everything about history that . . . has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face—or rather in a death's head" (Origin 166). Allegory, in Benjamin's reading, is a "powerful" pleasure because it exposes the incompleteness of objects. The functional instability of allegory's semiotic reveals history as a "script," as a set of meanings superimposed over the debris of human existence; as in the ruin, in the allegory "history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay" (Origin 177).

It is, in particular, allegory's resistance to idealization and redemption that counter-monumentalism, in its desire to engage with the way past traumas continue to shape the present, attempts to harness. The resultant emphasis on death, decay and transience does not mean that its desire to engage history and truth are wholly nihilistic. Rather, the broken and uncertain forms of counter-monumentalism express, while not a blithe optimism, something like a hesistant faith in the possibility of the engaged critical dialogue it hopes its allegorical gestures will provoke. For if allegory is a mode in which, as Benjamin notes, "any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else" (Origin 175), then it emphasizes the necessity of making meaning of (rather than receiving meaning from) the counter-monument, a process that will, like allegory itself, necessarily be dispersed across time. Counter-monumentalism resists the liberal/sentimental fantasy of the public as a boundless and timeless totality, merged in a unanimity of automatic response. Instead, drawing on dispersed and disruptive allegorical forms to seek disparate, dissenting reactions, it conceives of its au-


dience as a space of interpretation: a space in which something like a critical public might continue to inform, reform and reinvent itself and its relations without subsuming dissent to the demand for reverence and unity emphasized in monumental history.

Melville's skepticism, in 1855, about the capacity for critical thought present in his own historical moment is well known. "Benito Cereno," as a product of that skepticism, is a kind of shock treatment—an attempt to jolt the reader out of received thought patterns. It is in this sense—in the formal and structural dimensions of its critique and its non-directive but indisputable intervention in the construction of futurity—that Melville's "Benito Cereno" can be understood as a counter-monumental narrative. For although the self-consciously postmodern counter-monument may be a recent cultural development, the counter-monumental vision—the assurance that past, present and future are linked not in a single linear narrative but in an ever-evolving multiplicity of ways—and the counter-monumental impulse—the demand for historical memory to make sense of this linkage without relying on amnesia or subscribing to a redemptionist teleology—have much longer histories. This vision and this impulse form the core of "Benito Cereno." Rejecting both the redemptive pedagogy of monumentalism and the melancholy silences of anti-monumentalism, "Benito Cereno" intervenes in history by fragmenting it—by breaking it apart and rearranging the pieces so that the very limitations and possibilities of time become visible in its narrative spaces.

II. ILL-TIMED PERSPECTIVES

"Benito Cereno's" counter-monumentalism appears in its critique of the flawed interpretive practices of both ships' captains, the American, Amasa Delano, and the Spaniard, Benito Cereno. The narrative positions the Spaniard and the American alike as seeking ways of asserting a sense of absolute control in a world of flux, a world in which signs are never simply self-evident and time acts to aggravate, rather than ameliorate, their tendency to disseminate multiple meanings. Neither captain, however, can cope with this multiplicity, and this incapacity is revealed as an effect of the limited and unproductive temporal orientations associated with each character. Delano's monumental amnesia and Cerenos anti-monumental melancholy are alike represented as, in
Nietzsche's terms, doing damage to the past, a damage that is linked to the historical violence the tale condemns.

Critics of "Benito Cereno" have long since identified Amasa Delano's interpretive dysfunction as central to Melville's purpose in the narrative. I want to suggest that Delano's inability to recognize the slave rebellion aboard the San Dominick should be understood as a temporal disability—an effect of what Nietzsche terms the historical "damage" sustained in the monumental mode of history. The past, as Delano knows it, is never very complex, its lessons are self-evident, its separation from the present is anchored by a few, select timeless truths, and its proper use is always self-consolidation. Accordingly, Delano approaches the story he hears aboard the San Dominick as one would understand a monumental narrative—the representation of an event that has already happened, whose significance is self-evident and timeless, and to the aftermath of which he responds, as a good citizen should, with benevolent action. Both Delano's mistaken belief in his own distance from the catastrophe that has befallen the San Dominick and his attendant insistence on a romantic-racialist (mis)understanding of the relation between race and power are reinforced throughout the narrative by the dual temporal gestures he adapts from monumentalism: its simultaneous promulgation of "timeless truth" and its assurance that, as Delano argues in the tale's final pages, "the past is passed" (101).

This dual construction of time is emphasized in Delano's first view of the San Dominick. This vessel, a Spanish ship once belonging to the Royal Navy, but now in use as a merchant-ship transporting "negro slaves, amongst other valuable freight" (36), appears to him as a floating ruin, laden with "relic[s] of faded grandeur . . . left to decay" (37). Ruins are of the class of monuments that Alois Riegl designates "unintentional monuments": artifacts that were not originally intended as commemorative but have become so over time. The ruin commemorates time itself, or, more precisely, the passage of time, which creates what Riegl calls the "age-value" of the monument. The cultural significance of the passage of time indexed by the ruin is, however, not timeless; it changes according to the understanding of the past favored in each era. While, as Riegl points out, the ruin spoke to the Baroque viewer of the pain of loss, bearing witness to present decline from some bygone era of glory (631), by the nineteenth century viewers were inclined to see ruins in accordance with their own sense of history,
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framed by a progressive view of civilization in which the cyclical rise and fall of great powers drove humanity ever upward. Delano, as we see later in the story, shares this perspective, and is inclined to interpret whatever he sees as evidence of the “natural laws” on which this theory of history is based. Accordingly, the ruined Spanish ship, for Delano, testifies to the natural and inevitable decline of European imperial power and, concomitantly, his own ascendancy, as a hard-working American, on the world-historical stage.

In line with this view of the Spanish ship as a ruin, Delano understands what he sees aboard the San Dominick as fundamentally other to him in a temporal sense. Hence he believes the “common tale of suffering” that the San Dominick’s passengers offer “in one language, and as with one voice” (38), to be effectively over once he arrives to hear it. Though he is called upon to assist in the aftermath of the unfortunate events that have befallen the San Dominick (supposedly, a long, immobilizing calm coupled with a plague that killed many of the crew members) he is not himself implicated in those events; he attends and reacts to the story, but believes he bears no responsibility for it. To say that Delano understands himself only to bear witness to the story aboard the San Dominick, however, is not to say that he doesn’t think, on one level, that it’s all about him. His compassionate response to the San Dominick’s distress confirms, for him, the already-agreed upon version of what it means to be a good citizen-sailor. And though Cereño seems hardly to appreciate his charity, Delano’s approval of himself makes up for the Spanish captain’s indifference: “a sort of saddened satisfaction stole over Captain Delano at thinking of the kindly offices he had that day discharged for a stranger. Ah, thought he, after good actions one’s conscience is never ungrateful, however much so the benefited party may be” (83). The American’s sympathy-inspired good works operate as the means for his own self-consolidation across the temporal gap separating him from the Spaniard’s ruined world.

Delano’s “appropriate” response to the spectacle before him is, however, disrupted by the repeated intrusion into his consciousness of a shadow-story, one that represents the San Dominick’s history as unfinished. In this story, Delano functions not as a solicitous and self-satisfied witness to past events, but as an anxious guardian of his own uncertain future. Observing a number of details that he cannot quite interpret, yet which appear to him to have possess a “lurking signifi-
cance” (54), Delano begins to suspect a “sinister scheme” (55) aboard the ship. The paranoid suspicion that Delano cannot quite abandon suggests another way in which the San Dominick’s story is really all about him—except that in this version, he is the object of some kind of conspiracy. In the shadow-story, the history of the San Dominick no longer appears as an explained and contained fact but as a series of multiple possibilities bent upon perpetuating themselves in his own moment. Thus instead of contemplating the ruins of the ship from a safe (temporal) distance, Delano suddenly finds himself engulfed by them. Gazing at a mossy balustrade that “seemed the charred ruin of some summerhouse in a grand garden long running to waste,” he imagines that he is “in some far inland country, prisoner in some deserted chateau, left to stare at empty grounds and peer out at vague roads where never wagon or wayfarer passed” (61–62). This paranoid fantasy inverts his sentimental self-consolidation, situating him as vulnerable to the latent possibilities of the inconclusive narrative. The constant slippage between his initial self-satisfied sense of closure and the suspicion of an ongoing plot so disorients Delano that he compares his distress to a sort of mental “sea-sickness” (64), suggesting that the inability to maintain monumental orientation threatens to pull the (historical) ground out from under him.

In an effort to ward off these suspicions and reorient himself to his initial position of distanced observation, Delano uses the racial spectacles before him to prop up his customary sense of time. Worrying that the Captain before him might be an imposter, he is calmed by catching sight of Cerenõ’s profile, “whose clearness of cut was refined by the thinness incident to ill-health, as well as ennobled about the chin by the beard. Away with suspicion. He was a true offshoot of a true hidalgo Cerenõ” (52–53). Cerenõ’s “typical” physiognomy is part of the repertoire of uncomplicated visual signs through which Delano naturalizes social space. The hidalgo profile is a cause-less effect that explains Cerenõ entirely, essentializing the nobility of the nobleman and erasing the history of power and domination that constructed it as nobility in the first place. Delano’s naturalization of nobility is matched, in the attentions he gives to the black characters, by his nobilization of nature. Confused by the strange behavior of one of the Spaniards, Delano stabilizes his sense of self by taking in the “pleasant sort of sunny sight” (60) of a young Negress breast-feeding a child, which he reads as
“naked nature . . . pure tenderness and love” (61). Under Delano’s gaze, the black woman becomes a monument to the “natural,” relegated to the indefinite anteriority of the timeless noble savage. Reading race as nature, Delano is also enabled to naturalize historical positions, looking away from signs that confuse him and idealizing the spectacle of “the black upholding the white” (45) as a beautiful and natural relationship. The purported timelessness of these racial characteristics, in Delano’s ethnography, provides him with a sense of closure that underwrites his own timely sense of self.11

These (monumental) readings of racial spectacle as reflecting the timeless “natural” order of things are ironically inverted in Delano’s vision of Atufal, the “colossal” rebel who plays the part of a shackled slave, taking monumental form. Having decided to take charge of the hull, Delano is startled, as he walks on deck, by “the unexpected figure of Atufal, monumentally fixed at the threshold, like one of those sculptured porters of black marble guarding the porches of Egyptian tombs” (78). This fleeting glimpse of a sculpted, rather than “natural,” monument, which follows soon after Delano’s vision of Babo as a “Nubian sculptor” (74), here signifies both artifice and truth; that is, it suggests simultaneously the (historical) constructedness of the scene that Delano misunderstands as the natural order of things and the (historical) reality of the violence that has turned the ship into a floating tomb. After a moment of disorientation, however, Delano decides to read Atufal’s monumental presence not as a trace revealing the artifice of the social forms that surround him, but as a sign proclaiming that all is still in order upon the ship; the shackled slave confirms, for him, the image of Cereno’s command, upon which his own sense of security depends.

The centrality of monumentalism to Delano’s identity is emphasized as he maintains, toward the end of the narrative, that although his initial reading of the ship was proved utterly wrong, it was still the best one, because it ended up saving his own life, allowing him “to get the better of momentary distrust, at times when acuteness might have cost me my life” (101). A certain monumental ignorance allows the American to frame his own survival as the inevitable and necessary result of history. Delano insists on enforcing a recollection of the rebellion that emphasizes the victory of the whites—advising Cereno to forget the rest. This survival strategy is supported by Delano’s facility in the kind
of unconflicted mourning demanded by the monument, which imposes closure rapidly in order to transmit that resolution to the ages. His advice to Cereno—"The past is passed. Why moralize upon it? Forget it" (101)—is based on this kind of mourning, which averts the complications, painful contradictions and lingering attachments that would come with working through the experience. In support of his view, Delano once again calls upon nature, illustrating the process of forgetting by pointing to the bright sun, blue sea and blue sky, which, he asserts, "have turned over new leaves" (101). The awkward twist of phrase in the middle of Delano’s sentence ironically highlights artifice that underlies his conception of the natural. His appeal to the “naturalness” of forgetting, that is, conflates several distinct nature-based temporal modes—the “eternal” time of the sea, the constant alterations of the sky, and the diurnal rhythms of the sun—within the implicitly narrative structure of page-turning, imposing upon them a linear structure that enforces a clear separation between past and present.

The significance of this conflation escapes Delano, who, the narrator reminds us, is “incapable of satire or irony” (51), unable to grasp more than one level of meaning or mode of temporality at a time. Cereno, however, feels the pain in Delano’s sentence acutely, and responds by insisting on the continued presence of the past in the form of human memory. Cereno’s insistent juxtaposition of “now” with “then” emphasizes his consciousness of his own temporal dislocation. Like his ruined ship, Cereno appears as a remnant of the imperial past, recalling, for Delano, “his imperial countryman Charles V” (41). Along with this located historical referentiality, Cereno also embodies an indefinite temporal alterity, which situates him as somehow apart from the present. His responses to Delano’s questions are muted and delayed, he appears to suffer flashbacks, and he reacts to Delano’s presence “like some somnambulist suddenly interfered with” (43). Cereno’s apparent inability to coincide fully with the present he inhabits marks him as melancholic, suspending the past within the present, powerless to complete the work of mourning that would put an end to this suspension. This resistance to abandoning the past counters the blithe violence of Delano’s forgetting, but Cereno can make no more use of history than Delano, because his melancholic silence provides no way for past and present to enter into generative dialogue. While the Spanish captain, at the end of the tale, speaks unreservedly about his past suffering, he
refuses consolation, countering Delano’s suggestion that he think of the trade-winds as “human-like healing . . . friends” with the response, “With their steadfastness they but waft me to my tomb” (101). Cereno’s dismissal of Delano’s gesture toward “healing” repudiates the American’s sentimental personification of these natural forces and the parallel naturalization of economic history implied in the very notion of the trade-wind, renouncing the romanticized vision of the (slave) trader working in harmony with nature.

Yet the only thing the Spaniard can put in place of this romantic vision is his imminent demise. Cereno’s melancholy rejection of Delano’s monumental forgetting replaces his appeal to eternity with an insistence on decay, as in the Baroque allegory. But instead of using this revision of history as a means of intervention, Cereno flees into the security of his own allegory; identifying himself as the corpse of the untimely, he collapses the temporal distance that allows allegory to speak as such. In this way, he converts melancholic insight into depressive fatalism. Looking (back) on himself as a ruin, Cereno cannot reconceive his own place in time as having anything to do with a future; instead, his melancholy ends in his own mute death. In this sense, we can see Cereno, no less than Delano, working not to elucidate but to damage his own relationship to the remembered past. Delano manages to do so by purging the troublesome parts of history from his own memory; Cereno, in contrast, abandons himself to the past and so removes himself from history. The limitations of the two captains’ temporal perspectives deny interpretation the ability to move toward a vitalized but indefinite future, pointing, instead, only in the direction of self-consolidation or self-annihilation.

III. UNTIMELY REMAINS

In marked contrast to the temporal tidiness of Delano’s amnesiac perspective, “Benito Cereno,” like its namesake, makes a mess of time. This disorder begins with the narrative, which is, as its narrator acknowledges, not “set down in the order of occurrence” but “retrospectively or irregularly given” (100). Even the signs marking the regular progression of clock-time in Benito Cereno—the ritualized parading of Atufal in chains and the sounding of the ship’s bell, which rings “with a dreary graveyard toll, betokening a flaw” (49)—register their own
wounded limitations. The narrative's resistance to the dominance of either linear-historical or simultaneous-monumental time suggests that the past can only be effectively engaged if one is able to work with a notion of time as discontinuous and fragmentary. This refusal of orderly progression enables the texture of time to fluctuate throughout the tale: now slowed to a trance-like near emptiness, now suspended in moments overstuffed with significance and quivering with multiple possibilities. Indeed, these two temporal states are frequently mapped onto an identical narrative space, as the "retrospective" perspective, adopted once the rebellion has been revealed, locates in precisely those passages where Delano saw nothing much happening, a tangle of intensely present possibilities. In this sense, the space of the story, as Philip Fisher has observed, "suffers from simultaneity," a temporal condition Fisher associates with damaged democratic social space (97). The sheer painfulness of this kind of simultaneity marks it as distinct from the "simultaneity" of the nation enfolded in the timelessness of monumentalism. It is within this kind of simultaneity, which registers the erasures, elisions and approximations of monumental time, that history can be understood not as the means of (national or personal) self-consolidating but rather as, in Frederic Jameson's phrase, "what hurts"—that which resists, opposes and dissolves individual and aggregate attempts at transcendence (102).

Melville's awareness of this damage accounts for his approach to Amasa Delano’s 1817 narrative, which attempts neither to confirm Delano's original text nor to refute it, but to fragment it, breaking apart the earlier document to reveal its contradictions and to multiply the historical referents behind its allegorical gestures. This multiplicity emphasizes the purpose of counter-monumental allegory, which is not to rewrite history by substituting one story for another but to make known the partiality of the substitutions that pass as official history. The allegorist, as Benjamin maintains, works with fragments in order to refute the myth of totality in historical expression and negate the fantasized possibility that the past can, or should, be perfectly recaptured and restored. Rather, the importance of the fragment lies in its re-deployment in a presentist project that emphasizes apprehension rather than knowledge, one that resists enchantment by the past and uses it, rather, to enable critical/dialectical vision. Melville's revision of Delano's purport-
edly historical narrative reshapes it into a history of (and in) the present.

This fragmentation of Delano's narrative (and of "Benito Cereno" itself) is most visible in the legal documents that interrupt the story, which induced the editor of Putnam's Monthly to lament Melville's inability to write a "connected tale" (qtd. in Parker 250). The disconnections introduced by these documents, however, are precisely the point of this section, as the narrative emphasis on their fragmentary appearance suggests. Where Delano's transcript identified the court documents as representing the whole truth—"officially translated, and inserted without alteration, from the original papers" (331)—Melville's tale declares that they are "extracts . . . selected, from among many others, for partial translation" (89). The alterations Melville makes in the text of the documents themselves further emphasize their disintegration. Some of these changes are designed to multiply the narrative's allegorical possibilities; most notably here, Dago, one of the rebels, identified as a "caulker" by profession in Delano's text, is described in Melville's as a "gravedigger" (90). Melville's changes, as Susan Weiner has argued, throw both the veracity and the referentiality of the legal text into doubt. Not only do the changes Melville makes to the deposition challenge the authority of the "real thing," his decision to avoid revealing the "source" for his narrative also compels the reader to speculate on its historical referent(s). While Melville's readers in 1855 might well have been unaware that the novella was based upon a putatively historical account published three and a half decades before, they would likely have had in mind other slave uprisings on U.S. soil, from Gabriel's Rebellion to Nat Turner's abortive revolt; the alteration and invention of detail in "Benito Cereno" deliberately invite other events, such as the Haitian revolution and the Amistad incident, into its historical overlay as well. The manifold historical references prevent the reader from severing the present-tense world from the past as represented in the tale; unlike a singular citation, the dispersed allusions resist closure, making the subject of the narrative appear as ongoing.

While the fragmentary remains of Delano's narrative within Melville's tale challenge the conception of history as a lost totality calling out to be monumentalized, the deliberate insertion of counter-monumental spectacles constructed not from textual but from human
remains emphasizes the human costs concealed behind this conception. The first of these spectacles is the suspended skeleton of the slave-owner Don Alejandro Aranda. In Amasa Delano's narrative, the rebels, who believed their freedom would only be secure if they killed Aranda, were said to stab him and dispose of his body by tossing it overboard. The pragmatic violence of Delano's account is replaced by allegorical violence in Melville's revision, however, as Aranda's burial at sea is replaced with his unburial. Concealed for most of the first part of the narrative, Aranda's prematurely exposed bones are revealed, at the moment it becomes clear that the black "slaves" are actually rebels, to be fixed to the prow of the ship, where they replace the ship's original figurehead, "the image of Christopher Colon, the discoverer of the New World" (93). Under the skeleton, the cryptic message "Follow your leader," in Spanish, has been written. The deposition fragments explain that Babo has arranged this spectacle and then used it in a ritual of intimidation, showing Aranda's bones to Cereño and the other Spaniards, asking each of them in turn "whose skeleton that was, and whether, from its whiteness, he should not think it a white's," and then advising them that resisting his authority will cause them to "follow [their] leader" (93).

In an astute recent reading of "Benito Cereno," Geoffrey Sanborn observes that the melancholy spectacle of Aranda's skeleton turns the nineteenth-century fantasy of sentimental mourning inside out. Sanborn identifies Aranda's bones as recalling the Puritan funerary emphasis on skeletal forms, thus representing "the recursion of a pre-sentimental understanding of the relation between body and spirit. No longer the symbol of personality, the corporeal self has become, once again, a purely indifferent sign" (195). The skeletal sign mocks the redemption of loss by meaning promised in the sentimental-monumental figure of the angel monument, hollowing out the transcendence of the resurrection fantasy and bringing it face to face with historical transience. The Puritan skeleton, however, is itself layered upon earlier mortuary iconography, the late medieval danse macabre. While the dance of skeletons deployed death as a compensation for living, emphasizing its indifference in contrast to worldly differences of wealth, fortune and social position, the Puritan revision accentuated its moral pedagogy, insisting upon the one difference that mattered in death, the distinction between election and damnation, stressing not only
the inevitability of death but also the irreversibility of post-mortem judgment.\textsuperscript{14}

In Melville's resurrection of Aranda's bones, the "impartial" authority of "divine judgment" is replaced by an emphasis on human judgment, which is always interested and located. What Sanborn terms the skeleton's "indifference" allows it to perform crucial differentiating work within the story. The skeletal counter-monument undoes the sentimental fantasy of universal feeling, the (monumental) selection of timeless significance expressed in the symbol, and emphasizes instead the radical proliferation of invested meanings around Aranda's uncovered bones. Babo's ironic question concerning the skeleton's identity—whether its whiteness proves it a white's skeleton—supplants the color white, as an ostensibly neutral physical description of bones, with the identity of whites, whose investment in racial violence brought about this inversion. Though the distinction between whiteness and blackness had worked to naturalize racial hierarchies, permanently securing freedom and privilege to Aranda and the other whites, the "shadow" the Negro casts is the end of whiteness as such: its exposure not as timeless natural fact but as an historical formation, an effect of power. For the blacks, then, the skeleton operates as both an emblem of their freedom, realized in the death of whiteness, and a symbol of their power over the Spaniards, secured by the threat of death. Accordingly, for the Spaniards, the skeleton is both a sign of their bondage and a warning signal. Cérenô reads the skeleton as a melancholy reminder of his own emptiness. Covering his face as the skeleton is exposed, he cries out, "'Tis he, Aranda! my murdered, unburied friend!" (86). The temporal suspension of the skeleton—dead but unburied—figures Cérenô's own melancholic dislocation, his lack of place in the present tense. Yet Cérenô's use of Aranda's name demonstrates his resistance to the dissolution of Aranda's identity in death enforced by Babo's revolutionary act, which not only unburies the bones but also unnames them. After placing the bones on the prow of the ship, Babo repeatedly asks the Spaniards whether they know whose skeleton it is rather than telling them, questioning rather than confirming its (and their) identity; his message here—that the bones could as easily be theirs—strips Aranda of particularity and reduces him to type. Only after the rebellion has been put down and Babo executed are the bones again collected under the sign of Aranda as, "recovered," they are interred in a vault at St.
Bartholomew's church. The representation of this burial as a recovery emphasizes the workings of power in the writing of monumental history, which purports to heal the damaged forms of the past even as it enacts damage in the very gesture of "healing." This perpetuation of destruction under the guise of restoration emerges from the Americans' monumental reading of the skeletal spectacle. Ignorant of Babo's commentary exposing the contingency of racial identity, the Americans read Aranda's skeleton as embodying an affiliation they understand as always-already racialized. As they prepare to retake the _San Dominick_, the skeleton appears to the American sailors to be "beckoning the whites to avenge it"; in response, the ship's mate bellows "Follow your leader!" as the Americans board (88). Representing the purpose of their attack on the ship as the reclamation of Aranda's dead body more than the re-enslavement of the Africans' live ones, the Americans read whiteness as a given, the "natural" basis of alliance between Europeans and Americans against Africans. The racialized (re)consolidation of Don Aranda, then, marks the silencing of the play of differential meaning around the unnamed bones by the emergence of a victorious differentiating power in the Americans, whose military force underwrites the legal resolution of the rebellion.

While these located readings emphasize the partial and limited nature of interpretation within the world of the story (and that of the reader), the function of the skeleton in the narrative as a whole moves in the opposite direction, underscoring the uncertainty of the allegorical register in which it operates. One way of reading the skeleton—as gesturing toward the idea of death—is suggested by the narratorial description of the bones as "death for the figure-head" (86). This association of the skeleton with the idea of death parallels the narrative with the message of the _danse macabre_: a reminder that regardless of race or social location, enslavement or freedom, all are equally subject to death. This reflection on transience situates "Benito Cereno's" ethical implications within a post-sentimental conception of human community based on finitude, making it possible to read the narrative as deploying the inevitability of death to insist on justice in the present. This reading of the skeleton as a figure insisting on the erasure of racial difference echoes Babo's ironic commentary on the skeleton, which annulled white privilege by matching social whiteness with its skeletal counterpart. Yet this emphasis on death as dissolving racial difference
also makes race merely one among a number of differences expunged by
death, disregarding the historical specificity of the bloody power strug-
gles waged in the name of race and turning the narrative’s suggestive
exploration of racial history into a negation of that history. To read
the skeleton as simply allegorizing the human condition, then, risks
producing an ethical interpretation of the narrative at the expense of
an historical one, sacrificing materiality for universality.

Melville’s location of the skeleton in the place formerly occupied by
the figure of Christopher Columbus, identified in the narrative as “the
discoverer of the New World” (93), returns an historical frame to the
allegory. The narrative’s substitution of death for Columbus is, in this
sense, as allegorical equation designating an epoch of violence masked
as progress, the effects of which never quite catch up with its own self-
image. The gap between Columbus’s displaced figure and the displayed
skeleton outlines the historical erasure of this violence in reverse. In
this sense, the skeleton signifies not the idea of death as a universal fu-
ture, but the materiality of death in the occluded past, not in order to
gesture toward its inevitability but to underscore that history could
have happened otherwise—that while death in general might not be
avoidable, specific deaths, millions of them, were.

Two allegorical readings of the skeleton’s significance circle around
one another, suspending the figurehead between past and future, be-
tween experienced “history” and idealized “truth.” The divergent direc-
tions of the allegory are connected in an ironically doubled present-
tense. Irony, as Paul de Man has argued, works, like allegory, to
demystify the transcendental symbol and to emphasize a “truly tempo-
rnal predicament,” yet the time-space of irony is the “reversed mirror im-
age” of that of allegory (222, 225). Allegory gestures toward a past sig-
nificance with which it can never coincide, and so emphasizes the
irreducibility of that gap. Irony, in contrast, inscribes a discrepancy of
meaning which is instantaneous and so is “essentially the mode of the
present” (226). The mode of the present is associated, in “Benito
Cereno,” with Babo, mastermind of both the rebellion and the decep-
tive show staged for the American, whose perpetual presence recalls
Cereno whenever his mind has “wandered” into traumatized reflections
on the past. Babo’s skill as ironist enables him to locate freedom within
the very rituals of slavery, as his inversion of the “significant symbols” of
padlock and key demonstrates (51); his subterfuge evokes a duplicity of
meaning from even the most single-minded commentary, as when he inspires Delano to announce in admiration that he cannot call Babo a slave (45). Even Babo’s silence at the end of the tale speaks ironically, supplanting the legal suppression of his voice with a willfully resistant enactment of that condition.

The final scene of “Benito Cereno” confirms Babo’s posthumous position as the “reversed mirror image” of the allegorical skeleton. Executed to excess (his body is dragged, hung, and then burned), Babo nevertheless remains a presence at the end of the narrative:

[Babo’s] body was burned to ashes, but for many days, the head, that hive of subtlety, fixed on a pole in the Plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of the whites; and across the Plaza looked toward St. Bartholomew’s church, in whose vaults slept, then as now, the recovered bones of Aranda; and across the Rimac bridge, looked toward the monastery, on Mount Agonia without; where, three months after being dismissed by the court, Benito Cereno, borne on the bier, did, indeed, follow his leader. (102)

The ritual public display of Babo’s severed head references a common fate for slaves convicted of inciting rebellion (which, in fact, was precisely the sentence meted out to five of the rebels by the Spanish court in Delano’s account); it is meant to serve as a warning to observing blacks in precisely the way that Babo used Aranda’s bones as a warning to the whites. Yet Babo’s “unabashed” gaze turns this symbol of defeat into an ongoing assault, just as his rhetorical juxtaposition to the remains of both Aranda and Cereno in this tableau mortant, enfolding time within and through the gaze of those abjected from official history, challenges the narrative arrangement of the rebellion that would locate closure in his execution.

Drawing together three disparate moments in time, the final sentence enacts a conjunction that does not exist within the space of the diegesis. In the complicated time zone established in the sentence, the collapse of past, present, and future deaths into the space of a “then as now” spanning an indefinite period of time suggests the kind of configuration that Benjamin names the dialectical image; it encloses “time filled by the presence of the now . . . blasted out of the continuum of history” (“Theses” 261). The dialectical image encapsulates time within
space differently than the traditional monument, which insulates unchanging meaning; the lack of reconciliation between its different elements resist monumental amnesia, beckoning instead toward the production of historical consciousness. The image, which brings together both types of allegory suggested by the skeleton-figurehead, the allegory of ideas (realizing the universality of death in the deaths of all three characters) and the historical allegory (since even death here does not erase imperial/racial hierarchies), ties these gestures to the past and future together in its unabashed insistence on the present.

The American, however, is excluded from the tableaux mortant; indeed, the final paragraph of the story appears to have forgotten him entirely. This omission suggests the inability of the monumental perspective to grasp the content of history, an inability that is connected to the much-discussed American denial of death.20 Babo’s enduring gaze suggests that the American’s escape from confronting the implications of this scene of death may be only temporary; but the image itself cannot predict the future—it can only insist on its connection to the “then as now.” This insistence does not, however, abandon the future to “fate,” but underscores its dependency on present-tense action. And it is this provocation—the insistence that time will tell, but only if we learn how to listen—that is the task of the counter-monument.

C.L.R. James has argued that “Benito Cereno,” while one of Melville’s finest works, is, in the end, too self-consciously formal, reflecting “the shallowness of modern literature” (134). For James, the tale’s attention to form suggests that Melville had “lost his vision of the future” because he did not invent any “new type[s] of human being” in its characters (134). James’s insistence on the non-newness of the dramatic personae overstates the case; as Arnold Rampersad has observed, Babo may indeed be a new kind of character in American literary history (168–69). Yet establishing Babo’s literary-historical status does not of itself answer James’s charge of “shallowness,” which attaches not to character but to form.21 James’s investment in character over form, and his frustration with Melville’s inversion of this valuation, apparently causes him to miss the direction of Melville’s “vision of the future,” which is projected, like Babo’s gaze, outside the diegetic frame of the tale. The manipulation of hyper-self-conscious forms and the failed
perspectives of deliberately static characters in “Benito Cereno” do fill the narrative with a sense of exhaustion, but this exhaustion does not reenact, on the authorial level, Cereno’s shattered abandonment of the future. Rather, the breakage of the fragmentary narrative reveals an effort to create, in its interstices, not a new kind of character but a new kind of reader. This reader, unlike Delano, would resist reading as a form of self-consolidation; she would view her necessarily dispersed and uncertain attempts to read the narrative not as tapping into an already-agreed-upon truth, but as establishing an understanding that is always provisional and subject to change.

The provisional nature of this interpretive labor has meant that critics have often been painfully unsure what to think of “Benito Cereno.” But it is precisely because the narrative does not stand upon a pedestal telling people what to think about the past that critics have found the narrative so useful to think with. The counter-monumental openings of the tale enable critics to bring it to bear upon a number of subsequent historical developments without “sacrificing” meaning. Lindsay Waters’ recent eloquent essay, “Life Against Death,” which employs “Benito Cereno” to work through the global politics of American “innocence” and amnesia around the events of 9/11, is a case in point. This kind of reading does not “weaken” the tale’s emphasis on the historical conditions and implications of New World slavery, but rather allows that history to engage dynamically with other events that bespeak and respeak one another across past, present, and future. It declares, with Benjamin, that “to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ . . . [but] to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger” (“Theses” 255). And indeed, “Benito Cereno” seems especially appealing to readers at moments of historical and epistemological crisis, times when the instability of political discourse is abetted by monumental amnesia and ignorance. The tale’s insistence upon thinking meaning in the plural and on using history reparatively counters the lure to forgetfulness frequently deployed in such moments—our own historical moment prominent among them. We need “Benito Cereno,” then as now, for its insistence, not on the transhistorical truth of any one particular content, but upon the vital necessity of critical thought itself in the process of undoing a historical “vision” that is disastrously underthought, and which increasingly threatens to make the future simply unthinkable.
NOTES

1. Israel Potter was serialized between July 1854 and January 1855; “Benito Cereno” was probably composed during the winter of 1854–55 (Parker 242).

2. My use of the term “reparative” is both indebted to and distinct from Sedgwick’s use of the term. Sedgwick derives her understanding of “reparative reading,” as distinct from the “hermeneutics of suspicion” that she argues characterizes much of contemporary literary criticism, from affect theory. As Sedgwick frames it, “reparative reading” constitutes an interpretive strategy associated with the depressive position that makes possible the growth, often in unpredictable ways, of the subject. Reparative reading, as Sedgwick, following Klein, frames it, is “additive and accretive . . . it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer an inchoate self” (27–28). My own use of the term also frames it as the result of a critical interpretive strategy distinct from the teleology of redemption but committed to the multiplication of constructive possibilities. I do not, however, seek to make a direct or transhistorical equation between affect psychology and critical history; though I argue that melancholia describes the modern sense of history, I make that connection on the basis of similarities in structure rather than identity of content. I also would resist reifying the individualist framework of twentieth-century psychology by suggesting that critical historiography of the counter-monument serves a “therapeutic” function.

3. Castronovo’s insightful reading of Melville’s “ironic” resistance to monumentalism in Israel Potter and “The Bell-Tower” has strongly influenced my own. I depart from Castronovo’s analytic framework in emphasizing counter-monumental, rather than anti-monumental, narrative. The function of counter-monumental artifacts is not merely to contest, revise, “undercut” and “cripple . . . monumental narrative” (183), but also, and crucially, to make possible an engagement in reparative critical history that moves beyond irony’s ability to “subvert.” While the subversive dimension of irony may effectively impel the work of reparation, as I later argue, a more complex understanding of its temporal function is needed to sustain this work.

4. Mumford’s echoing of Melville’s Pierre is the result of affinity, not coincidence; nine years before The Culture Of Cities appeared, Mumford had published a book-length study of Melville in which he lauded the writer as a proto-modernist visionary and which analyzed Pierre as a meditation on transience. See Herman Melville.

5. Huyssen remarks that given the traditional monument’s effort to present history as positive, any monument to the Holocaust is a counter-monument of sorts (258). In this essay, however, I am using the term “counter-monument” specifically to designate monumental objects which attempt to revise the spatial and temporal coordinates of the traditional monument—the form of its gestures, that is, toward “public” and toward “history.” Though monumental structures such as those built by the Gerzes and others are sometimes designated “anti-monuments,” particularly in the European press, here I reserve that term to describe the attempt to refuse to give commemoration any form, as distinct from the radically revisionist forms favored by counter-monumental projects. See Young, Memory’s Edge and Art of Memory, and Wiedmer.
6. Displacement is seen in Jochen Gerz's "hidden" monument, the Square of the Vanished, Horst Hoheisel's sunken monument in Kassel, and Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock's proposal for a "non-monument," a bus that would transport people out of downtown Berlin to the sites of the concentration camps. Evanescence is evoked by Gerz and Shalev-Gerz's Vanishing Monument against Fascism, Shimon Attie's photographic projections of vanished Jewish sites onto the still-extant buildings that used to house them, and Hoheisel's infamous proposal to blow up the Brandenburg Gate. See Young, Memory's Edge and Art of Memory for fuller discussions of these counter-monuments.

7. It is this that sets the counter-monument apart from the (also untraditional) Minimalist monument. While Minimalist forms—the best-known of which in this country is perhaps Maya Lin's Vietnam Veteran's Memorial—also resist assigning a singular meaning to loss, they rely heavily on symbolism rather than allegory in this resistance. For a thoughtful discussion of the complex relationship between form and function in the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, see Sturcken.

8. For perceptive discussions of Melville's political pessimism as manifested in "Benito Cereno," see Rogin, Coviello and Lee.

9. Kavanagh, for example, sums up the central question posed in "Benito Cereno" as "how a man like Delano . . . can think of himself as liberal, progressive, and charitable while staring in the face of his own racism" (137).

10. The narratorial emphasis on Delano's benevolence and sympathy throughout "Benito Cereno," suggests, as Coviello has recently argued, that Melville frames Delano as above all a sentimental reader, whose self-affirmative recognition of supposedly familiar forms aboard a strange ship enables an "often grossly self-satisfied ignorance" (158). This framing, I suggest, demonstrates the extent to which the monumental makes itself at home in the nineteenth century with the help of the sentimental. While the tender memorials of sentimental culture substitute the comfort of fellow-feeling for the neoclassical monument's pedagogy of awe, their parallel insistence on the timelessness of proper feeling and facilitation of the observer's self-consolidation establish them as linked modes.

11. Fabian defines "coeval" as "connor[ing] a common, active 'occupation,' or sharing of time" (31). As Fabian argues, the anthropological perspective has traditionally exerted power over its object in part by refusing it coevalness, distancing the object from observer in physical and/or typological time. These processes can be seen in Delano's historical distancing of the ruined ship, a belief that he does not occupy the same physical time, and his proto-ethnographic distancing of its slave occupants as belonging to another typological time.

12. The psychoanalytic model of melancholia is initially outlined in Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia" and refined in his later work. The construction of melancholia with which I am working in this essay is drawn from the reframing of Freud's ideas in the work of Abraham and Tórk and of Kristeva.

13. Though Melville apparently intended, originally, to reveal his historical source for the narrative upon its publication in book form, as he did in the preface to Israel Potter, he later wrote to his publishers asking them to delete the revelatory headnote.
14. For a discussion of American Puritan mortuary iconography, see Stannard. On the danse macabre, see also Ariès.

15. Indeed, the long tradition of reading “Benito Cereno” as a story about the struggle between good and evil, eliding its historical context, demonstrates the ease with which gestures toward “death” in the abstract can be stripped of all historical relevance and attached, instead, to other abstract ideas. E.O. Matthiessen, who interpreted the narrative in this ahistorical vein, actually faulted Melville for failing to realize that slavery itself constituted a history of evil (508).

16. de Man’s understanding of allegory, in this essay and elsewhere is clearly indebted to Benjamin’s, but the extent to which the two are compatible is a matter of some debate. While most critics read de Man’s comments on allegory as if they were continuous with Benjamin’s, this tendency, Sommer argues, obscures the extent to which one finds in de Man’s work “a polemic against the values de Man had guarded, namely time and the dialectic time makes possible” (61). de Man’s dehistoricizing of the dialectic, Sommers argues, moves the contemporary analysis of allegory away from the historical materialism for which Benjamin meant to retrieve it. Other critics argue, however, that de Man’s rejection of history has been overestimated. Waters, for instance, asserts that “it is precisely in his engagement with Benjamin’s ideas that de Man begins to flesh out his understanding of the materiality of literature and of the poetical act . . . [as] the quintessential historical act” (“Paul de Man” lvi); see Waters, “Paul de Man,” especially liv–lvii.

17. Here as elsewhere, Babo serves, as Franklin notes, as “the surrogate of the author as ironist” (“Slavery” 157).

18. In Delano’s narrative, Babo is not among these rebels because he did not survive long enough to be convicted and executed; he and Atufal were killed by the Americans as they boarded the Tryal.

19. Aranda’s recovered bones would likely have been interred before Babo’s execution, yet his post-mortem gaze appears to foresee them; similarly, the head, which remained in place “for many days,” would not have been in position three months later to witness Cereño’s burial, as the sentence suggests it does.

20. The belief that modernity American-style is organized around the repression, denial or erasure of death shapes most twentieth-century studies of the subject, most notably Phillipe Ariès’ well-known work on the history of death. See especially part v. Yet while the term “denial” accurately characterizes the American perspective on a number of issues, the framing of American attitudes toward death in this way, I would argue, is somewhat misleading; constructed as it is around the repressive hypothesis, it tends to obscure the techniques the modern American discourse of death uses to temporalize morbidity around specified forms of corporeality. I develop this point farther in my forthcoming book Configurations of Mourning.

21. James’s critique of Melville parallels Adorno’s criticism of Benjamin during the latter’s engagement in the Arcades project; Adorno repeatedly cautioned Benjamin that his mosaic methodology risked omitting theory from the project and hence creating a mere re-presentation of the past that omitted dialectical critique. See Pensky 225–27 and 276 n. 32.
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