BENJAMIN D. REISS

Madness and Mastery in Melville's "Benito Cereno"

> Through madness, a work that seems to drown in the world, to reveal there its non-sense, and to transfigure itself with the features of pathology alone, actually engages within itself the world's time, masters it, and leads it; by the madness which interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself. What is necessarily a profanation in the work of art returns to that point, and, in the time of that work swamped in madness, the world is made aware of its guilt.
>
> —Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*

> There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness.
>
> —Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

At the end of the Civil War, a conflict brought about "through the arts of the conspirators" by whom the "people of the South were cajoled into revolution," Herman Melville wrote of one of the dangers facing Reconstruction:

> In imagination let us place ourselves in the unprecedented position of the Southerners—their position as regards the millions of ignorant manumitted slaves in their midst, for whom some of us now claim the suffrage. Let us be Christians toward our fellow-whites, as well as philanthropists toward the blacks, our fellow-men. In all things, and toward all, we are enjoined to do as we would be done by. Nor should we forget that benevolent desires, after passing a certain point, can not undertake their own fulfillment without incurring the risk of evils beyond those sought to be remedied.[1]

The essay in which this passage is contained—the "Supplement" to Melville's collection of poems *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*—is a challenging one, and not wholly attractive to a contemporary viewpoint. Melville seems less concerned here with achieving equality for

Criticism, Winter 1996, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 1, pp. 115–150

the former slave population than with easing the burden of defeat for the resentful Southern whites, who are, after all, "nearer to us in nature" (167) than are the blacks. But, as the scene above in which we are to "place ourselves" reveals, within that near relation there is still a crucial difference—the difference of victory and defeat that shows itself in Southern resentment. Resolving that difference is a necessary step toward fulfilling Northern "benevolent desires" to integrate blacks into political and economic life, but it is also a *threat* to those desires. For in attempting to impose a sweeping resolution to the conflicts that brought on the war, the North may inadvertently cause resentment to spread and the difference to proliferate violently—creating "evils beyond those sought to be remedied." Melville does not spell out the nature of these evils, but apparently his idea is that if the North were to press the South too hard on questions such as the "test-oath," which was meant to exclude all those who had supported Secession from Congress, Southern resentment would build and the "furnace . . . in regions like Tennessee and Texas" would explode once again. "With certain evils," Melville warns, "men must be more or less patient" (272).

A passionate reformer in his early career, Melville seems now, in middle age and at the end of four years' witness to fratricidal warfare, a man walking through a minefield, almost as fearful of the results of reformist action as of the causes that impel it. But the last sentence in the quotation above has the ring of a general principle, rather than a situational warning: ". . . benevolent desires, after passing a certain point, cannot undertake their own fulfillment without incurring the risk of evils beyond those sought to be remedied." So where exactly did Melville learn this lesson? The aftermath of the War may have deepened his skepticism about the possibilities of reform, but it certainly did not initiate it; on the eve of that conflagration, he wrote in the poem "Misgivings" (1860) that "Nature's dark side is heeded now—/(Ah! optimist-cheer disheartened flown)."[2] The "optimist-cheer" that had flown from Melville not only extinguished his hope that North and South could be reconciled, but points to a more general crisis of faith in the very principles of natural rights, progress, and the capacity of human institutions to improve the human condition. It is in an 1856 story, "Benito Cereno," that this crisis is most clearly manifested: the seemingly intractable—and strangely interwoven—problems of race and insanity are made far worse by misguided liberal attempts to understand, contain, and rectify them. In that story, the benevolent desires of a liberal captain from Massa-

chusetts to help a ship (of state) in distress eventually win him a fragile peace of mind, but threaten to bring on an apocalypse.

In this essay, I will show that Captain Delano's troubles result in large part from his reliance on widely held and highly charged categories of "difference" that liberal reformers and prominent legal theorists of Melville's day applied both to insanity and race. How is it that Delano reads a slave uprising as an epidemic of mental illness? Discussions of both racial unrest and insanity shuttled anxiously between schemes for confinement, assimilation and, in the last resort, exile. Crucial to these discussions were questions of obedience and rebelliousness, and the desire to set forth an "expert" language—mixing law and science—that would assure that these "different" subjects would not threaten the security of the community, and specifically the rights of its members to hold property. Moreover, the dominant technologies of curing insanity that arose in the 1830s and 1840s and that contributed to the rapid expansion of the asylum system blithely drew on certain underexamined notions of racial difference to provide paradigms for the treatment of psychological difference. Ironically, as I will show, the resulting psychiatric findings were often fed back into racialist discourse in a curiously looping reinforcement. The confusion of realms made "benevolent desires" all the more vexed and, in Melville's story, proves an explosive mixture. Looking at slavery and insanity, Delano sees only a knot; the knot is, in fact, produced by his own mind, but is no less real for being so.

For about the first fifty pages of "Benito Cereno," one of the central interpretive dilemmas facing the reader involves deciding which, if either, of the story's two captains is insane. Referring to the Spaniard Benito Cereno of the *San Dominick*, a slave ship in distress off the coast of Chile, a third-person narrator hovering close to the American Amasa Delano's consciousness tells us that "the Spaniard, regarded in his reserve, seemed the involuntary victim of mental disorder." But despite his "undistrustful" good nature, Delano himself gradually becomes subject to confusion and suspicion so intense that they "mock him" like "phantoms" and poison his mind as an "ague" would his body.[3] Ultimately, Delano hangs onto his reason and wards off the ague of suspicion, maintaining his sanity by casting the terrors to which he has been subject into an undifferentiated and unthreatening past, "forgotten" by the sun and sea. This self-protective forgetting is enabled by his discovery of what he takes to be a ra-

tional explanation for the mysterious behaviors that have so threatened his equanimity, and that explanation is apparently enough to check his free-fall into unreason. Having unravelled the mystery of the *San Dominick* and defused the threat posed by the disguised rebel slaves aboard it, he is cheered by the "bright sun . . . the blue sea, and the blue sky." His liberal faith in the "human-like healing" of nature—an unwarranted one, Melville hints—enables him to regain his "good-nature, compassion, and charity" and put his former "suspicions" into perspective (314).

Don Benito is not so lucky. Whether or not he has been mad while Delano suspects his sanity we never definitively learn, but by the end of the story he clearly suffers at least bouts of mental disorder. The legal deposition that brings to light much of the story's murky proceedings leaves out, the narrator informs us, much of Don Benito's testimony because "the tribunal inclined to the opinion that the deponent, not undisturbed in his mind by recent events, raved of some things that could never have happened" (299–300). What those "things" are we never learn, and so the ravings of madness induced by Don Benito's experience of "recent events" are registered as a textual silence. Fittingly, the Spaniard's story concludes when he takes his monastic vows on Mount Agonia, and dies there in silence, three months after the tribunal.

The action of the story thus locates the genesis of Benito Cereno's madness—a clinical "private" madness as well as the social pathology it allegorically represents—in the conflicts slavery brings about. More specifically, madness seems to stem from a breakdown in the social and psychological mechanisms established to regulate and contain suspicion. Surely managing suspicion is a central problem for any society that is based on the principle of defending individual rights, but that problem is particularly acute when an entire caste is denied the freedoms and opportunities that would permit its members to be "trustworthy"—a word the soft-headed Delano invokes to describe the slaves who are anything but. (In fact, trusting slaves is what gets Benito Cereno in trouble to begin with: acting on the owner's word that they were "tractable," he has left them unchained.) Once an appropriate suspicion is engaged, however, it is liable to overflow its bounds and become a pattern of mind, or even an illness —the debilitating mental "ague" that Delano narrowly avoids, and that engulfs Don Benito in silence.

There is another, and quite different, silence that doubles Benito Cereno's at the story's end, and that deepens the link between mad-

ness and slavery. Babo, Don Benito's supposed "servant," who has actually led the slave revolt on board the *San Dominick*, ultimately surrenders his body to the Chilean tribunal that sentences him to execution, but he carries his voice with him into death:

> Seeing all was over, he uttered no sound, and could not be forced to. His aspect seemed to say, since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words. Put in irons in the hold, with the rest, he was carried to Lima. During the passage, Don Benito did not visit him. Not then, nor at any time after, would he look at him. Before the tribunal he refused. When pressed by the judges he fainted. On the testimony of the sailors alone rested the legal identity of Babo.
>
> Some months after, dragged to the gibbet at the tail of a mule, the black met his voiceless end. (315)

Whereas Benito Cereno's silence indicates the collapse of his mind, Babo's voicelessness is a willed message of mute defiance to his former captor and to the law: "Since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words" (315). This more assertive silence amounts to a deliberate concealment, and as such is an extension of Babo's strategy to dupe Delano and set the slave ship on course for Africa. Hiding his true role in creating the confusion that almost drives Delano mad, Babo enforces a code of tactical silence on his followers and captives alike. His speech and actions aboard the ship are what Homi K. Bhabha calls "camouflage": a social resistance that takes the shape of acceptance, a masking of silent subversive intent with the chatter of normality.[4] Babo and his followers are thus performing a strange kind of strategic blackface minstrelsy that was often performed by blacks themselves, imitating slavery in order to undo it.[5]

When Babo and his followers perform their charade, they navigate the space between mimicry, "a difference that is almost nothing but not quite," and "menace—a difference that is almost total but not quite."[6] This uncanny alternation is what Bhabha calls "hybridity." Since the authorities have created the difference they perceive but deny that they have done so, the objects of this differentiation, the hybrids, can return the repressed material, terrifying their oppressors with the uncanny difference that has been cast onto them: "If discriminatory effects enable the authorities to keep an eye on [the hybrid], their proliferating difference evades that eye, escapes that surveillance. . . . Hybridity represents that ambivalent "turn" of the discriminated into the terrifying, exorbitant object of paranoid classi-

fication—a disturbing question of the images and presences of the authority."[7] When the menace lurking behind his mimicry is exposed, Babo finally becomes the "terrifying, exorbitant object" of the authorities' fear, and, at the end of the story, the Chilean tribunal tries to contain his threat by setting his head on a stake in the town Plaza. But in doing so, they only increase the terror their object inspired, for Babo's silence continues to speak even after his death. The body of this "small negro" (301), never in itself much of a threat, is in the end "burned to ashes"; but "for many days the head, that hive of subtlety," continues to stare out across the landscape, meeting, "unabashed, the gaze of the whites" (315). Babo's threat, which utterly undoes Benito Cereno and even threatens to drive the benevolent American captain into a madness of suspicion, is not completely defused by the legal system that effects his punishment. For the whites, one presumes, are left to contemplate a legacy of terror and madness as they confront Babo's unvanquished gaze.

But for much of his eerie visit to the *San Dominick*, Delano regards Benito Cereno, not Babo, as the "terrifying, exorbitant object" of his anxieties. How to classify his threatening behavior? Delano is fleetingly aware that he is watching a performance based on mimicry and menace, but he mistakes the Spanish captain for the director of that performance, and not Babo. And the performance, he thinks, is one of feigned madness and not of simulated slavery: Don Benito's apparent "mental disorder . . . might, in some degree have proceeded from design"; and he comes to fear that "under the aspect of infantile weakness, the most savage energies might be couched" (246, 258). Delano's need to fix Benito Cereno as either a conscious dissembler or a genuine crazy person attests to the fact that it was not just racial others who posed problems of classification in the antebellum period. Isaac Ray, who, more than any other, helped systematize a previously chaotic assemblage of laws concerning madness (and whose work Melville read), devoted two chapters of his monumental *A Treatise on the Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity* (1838) to problems arising from "Simulated Insanity" and "Concealed Insanity." The mark of true insanity, Ray argues, may be unnoticeable to the untrained eye, but the expert knows that it will always leave a trace on the body. Not only do simulators lack the rapid eye flutter and heartbeat of maniacs, for instance, but "persons feigning mania lack the bold, unflinching look of real maniacs; they never look the physician steadily in the face nor allow him to fix their eye, and, on being accused, their change of countenance plainly betrays that they are conscious of

the nature of the charge."[8] Ray does not dispute that detection of this sort is yet an inexact science, but he does believe that "experts" will eventually be able to spot all cases of feigned madness, as other physicians spot other feigned diseases. Of interest, here, though, is the way in which Ray's somatic hermeneutics (inspired by his interest in phrenology) align insanity with the problems attending the detection of racial difference. The simulator or concealer of insanity performs a type of "passing" that is not unlike that of the mulatto or quadroon seeking freedom, and can hatch plans of deceit akin to those of a Nat Turner, a Denmark Vesey, or a Babo. Benito Cereno, clearly, has failed to read Babo's simulation of happy slavery as a concealment of subversive intent; now Delano doubles this misreading, viewing the effects of Babo's charade as a charade of madness. At one point in the story, Delano does nearly pierce the masks when he speculates that the blacks are involved in a conspiracy against him; but he ultimately dismisses the possibility because they are "too stupid" (270). The stupidity he runs up against here is actually his own false positivism. He sees madness through the distorted lens of his own racist assumptions, but he does not see that lens; his failure to divine the meaning of Don Benito's "insane" behavior follows from his failure to read himself and his own assumptions into the story.[9]

The menacing silences that conclude the story constitute Melville's refusal to replace the "stupid" positivist readings of difference that were available to him with more positivism. Inside Delano's head swarm the alternately paternalistic and fearful rhetorics of race and insanity that in Melville's day produced a hopelessly confused network of sliding and proliferating difference. Melville does not deliver a final answer on the meanings of race or madness; rather, he reveals the processes of domination and disavowal by which such silences are produced and by which they come to be linked. In doing so, he exposes the confused state of knowledge about African Americans and the insane, hybridized figures who were silent in and often silenced by the very debates on reform that were supposedly conducted for their benefit. For in Melville's story, the silences of Babo and Don Benito are both relegated to the margins of the legal deposition. However, Melville stresses that they are not identical. Rather, Babo's defiant silence (he "could not be forced to" speak) seems to fall on top of Benito Cereno, a kind of shadowy oblivion that smothers the Spaniard's voice. As he has missed the meaning of so much of the story, Delano fails to understand Don Benito's continuing gloom after his rescue from the clutches of Babo:

> "You are saved," cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; "you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?"
>
> "The negro."
>
> There was silence, while the moody man sat, slowly and unconsciously gathering his mantle about him, as if it were a pall.
>
> There was no more conversation that day. (314)

In "Benito Cereno," suspicion is both constituted by legitimate social threat (the threat to Delano emanating from the San Dominick, which has its real origin in Babo's revolt) and itself constitutes a source of threat, in that, run wild, it can lead to outbreaks of irrational violence, a sort of madness-in-action. In reference to his suspicions of the manifestly bizarre behavior of captain and crew, Delano thinks, "This is like the ague; because it went off, it follows not that it won't come back" (272). The lunacy that stems from unchecked suspicion, he worries, may be contagious. Accordingly, Delano labors throughout the story to contain his suspicions, calling on his diminishing reserves of "trust and good will" whenever his mental apparatus is threatened by the scene unfolding before him. Strangely, though, the possibility of Don Benito's insanity is sometimes comforting to the American captain; at one point he reaches the altogether false conclusion that if the Spanish captain is mad, no intentional threat exists: Don Benito's is an "innocent lunacy." The possibility he misses is that Benito Cereno is mad *and* that an intentional threat exists. His difficulty in distinguishing between his legitimate suspicions, his own madness, and the madness of another suggest Melville's understanding of the fluid relations between psychopathology and social trauma. If insanity is produced by an experience of social trauma (as is undeniably the case with Benito Cereno), then Delano's hypothesis of an "innocent lunacy" is an oxymoron. But for the moment, at least, it puts a halt to interpretation and suspicion, and thus has a palliative effect on the American.

By affixing the label "insane" to a threatening phenomenon, Delano tries to banish an uncomfortable aspect of humanity from the social scene: if Benito Cereno's behavior is only the result of madness, Delano wishfully hypothesizes, it will have no social meaning. Michel Foucault writes of this process as a specifically Modern type of disavowal in *Madness and Civilization*. By better "knowing" madness, Foucault argues, early asylum keepers defused madness's potential to disrupt a rationally ordered society, and made it, as Delano

wishes to see it, more "innocent."[10] This preoccupation with controlling an unreasonable madness emerged in France (as well as England) during the post-Revolutinary period, "at the moment," Foucault writes, "when 'humanity' was being re-evaluated," and "too much liberty" was seen as a supreme danger of revolution against the old order. A causal link was made, in other words, between revolution and madness: radical disruptions of the social order led to radical disruptions of individual identity. For example, trying to explain why "madness is more frequent in England than anywhere else," the Viennese phrenologist Johann Spurzheim wrote in 1819 to the effect that it was the result of too much liberty: "Religious sentiments . . . exist without restriction; every individual is entitled to preach to anyone who will listen to him . . . [and] minds are disturbed in the search for truth."[11] The madness Spurzheim feared was the manifestation, at the level of individual psychology, of a breakdown in the social order.

As Eric Sundquist has argued, Babo's revolt plays on similar post-revolutionary fears—the threat of a Jacobin or Haitian reign of terror, an irrational blossoming of violence and disorder brought on by too much freedom.[12] Babo thus sets off a series of collapses of authority, beginning with Don Benito's loss of control over the ship, and then over his own mind. The asylum, in Foucault's account, presented itself as a paternalistic corrective to one aspect of this breakdown of paternalism. The first asylums were set up to reconstitute in their inmates an intimate and individuated—yet formally reproducible—sense of authority. The paradigm for this authority came in the shape of the "half-real, half-imaginary dialectic" of the bourgeois family, the institution that both literally and figuratively was supposed to prevent excessive freedom from engulfing society. Consequently, madness was judged as a transgression against family; the model of domesticity posed a rational limit to a potentially irrational freedom.[13]

What Delano insists on reading as an outbreak of madness aboard the San Dominick seems a transgression of this dialectic of the domestic space as well, with an anti-Catholic twist. Upon boarding the *San Dominick*, he compares the ship to "a strange house with strange inmates in a strange land" (242). On first sight, though, this "strange house" looks like a "whitewashed monastery," and the "negroes" give him the impression of "Black Friars pacing the cloisters" (240). The enclosed space of the monastery is a standard topos for horror and unreason in Gothic fiction, a domestic space gone haywire; but

the usual anti-Catholic associations of the monastery with torture and sexual perversity are connected here with madness as well.[14] Delano's first impression of Don Benito is that "his mind appeared unstrung, if not more seriously affected," and his next thought is that he is like "some hypochondriac abbot," both because he is "shut up in these oaken walls" and because he is "chained to one dull round of command, whose unconditionality cloyed him" (245). Within the "oaken walls" of the ship, Delano fears, resides either an unconditional power or an absolute madness—and either possibility would fit his Protestant imagination of the interior of a Catholic monastery.[15] Don Benito's final mental breakdown leads him not into a mental institution, but into a monastery; for by the time Melville wrote his story, the asylum was beginning to look like a Gothic space, rather than a reconstituted family home. The paternalistic notion, prominent in the 1830s and 40s, that science, rationality, and good will could converge to produce institutions that would free American society of mental illness was by the 1850s an increasingly difficult proposition to maintain. To many, it seemed more likely that they would only produce more mental illness.

Whereas the prominent American colonial view was that mental "disturbances" and "distractions" were inevitable and largely unthreatening imbalances in the social order and that incarceration should be a last resort, the new breed of post-revolutionary mental health experts came to view madness as a dangerous disease, whose diagnosis and treatment required the medical training used to combat other illnesses.[16] By the nineteenth century, as psychiatry had gained a large degree of autonomy from other medical specialties, treatment was most often performed in asylums, where "medical superintendents" practiced their profession in isolation from the community. Despite growing concerns about the dangers of untreated insanity, an enlightenment-style democratic optimism characterized the early days of the asylum. In the 1820s and '30s, the most progressive new mental health experts like Thomas Kirkbride, Isaac Ray, Edward Jarvis, and Pliny Earle—who were the prominent theorists and developers of mental institutions—saw their task as radically egalitarian and activist. The asylum-builders acted on a faith that mental health was a universally attainable condition. In the words of Kirkbride: "Every individual, who has a brain is liable to insanity, precisely as everyone with a stomach runs the risk at some period of being a martyr to dyspepsia";[17] and the cure for each should be equally attainable. Strangely enough, though, early psychiatrists

found that many of the causes of this somatic insanity rested with disturbances of the social body, rather than the individual one. True, some insanity was thought to result from such physical forces as blows to the head, but many of the disturbing forces were not physical in nature[18]—among them were emotional or mental excess, revolutions, and exposure to religious fanaticism.[19] More generally, as Earle wrote, "there was a constant parallelism between the progress of society and the increase of mental disorders"; and increased opportunities in the Jacksonian period created an increase in "ambition," which Jarvis claimed led many "to aim at that which they cannot reach, to strive for more than they can grasp. . . . Their mental powers are [thus] strained to their utmost tension."[20]

If the centrifugal forces of antebellum society threatened to undo the minds of individuals, the asylum was there to mend them. As historian David Rothman has it, these isolated communities of the mad and their wardens grew in response to an increasing need in the Jacksonian period for control of loose particles among the population at a time when the country was expanding its frontiers and population dramatically—by settling the West and by a huge increase in immigration—and experiencing drastic changes in the kinds of roles its citizens were expected to play. Rothman's convincing conclusion is that the primary thrust of the early development of the asylum was as a corrective, rather than an alternative, to the increased fluidity of social roles encouraged in the Jacksonian period. The primary task of the asylum was to combat the negative effects of this rapidly accelerating change by restoring the brain to its proper balance through an inculcation of proper work habits and moral values.

The enthusiasm of these liberal correctors of liberalism led to an unfortunate overestimation of their powers, verging on the megalomaniacal: a belief that no silence brought about by liberal society's excesses was beyond retrieval by civilized institutions. Ruth Caplan writes of the widespread "curability myth" circulating in the first few decades of the existence of American asylums, in which superintendents regularly claimed success rates upward of eighty and ninety per cent for their patients.[21] These rosy figures helped bolster support for the building of more public asylums, and state expenditures for the construction, maintenance, and improvement of asylums rose dramatically through the 1840s. As the superintendents propagated this rather self-serving myth of curability, they also painted a benevolent view of the insane as childlike and innocent; as Pliny Earle put it: "The motives, the influences, and, as a general rule, the means ne-

cesssary for the good government of children, are equally applicable, and equally efficient for the insane."[22] Delano reflects this sentiment in his wishful hypothesis of Benito Cereno's "innocent lunacy."

But faith in the "good government" of the mentally ill soon began to wane, for the insane, it turned out, were not always curable. During the 1850s, superintendents came to recognize the chronic and even dangerous nature of much mental illness (a recognition that perhaps resonated with Melville's experience of his own father's apparent descent into madness[23]). Asylums were becoming overcrowded, and themselves began to represent a social problem. Wealthy families took to placing their afflicted relatives in private institutions, as the public ones were filled with paupers and immigrants who could not adjust to the expectations of their new country. The Worcester State Hospital in Massachusetts even created "separate but equal" facilities for the native-born and foreigners in 1859.[24] Furthermore, the very nature of insanity seemed more threatening than before. Isaac Ray and Pliny Earle each wrote sober accounts of the intractability of much mental illness; and as opposed to the earlier views of insanity as a malady that required sympathy and benevolent application of discipline for a cure, the professional and popular press were full of tales of the extraordinary dangers posed by too much contact with the insane, particularly in asylums. In 1857, for example, a report in the *American Journal of Insanity* told of a doctor who had allowed an apparently harmless old patient to play with his children, only to have the patient tell him later that "three or four times I have had a strong inclination to kill" one of them.[25]

A reverse fear also began to surface. Not only could the insane present a threat to the security and property of others, but the psychiatric "experts," with their new legal powers, could conspire against the property of those they labelled insane. The *Atlantic Monthly* published a sensational account of a sane man driven mad by his wrongful incarceration in an asylum. The writer of the article, L. Clarke Davis, claimed that the man's estranged wife had conspired with a doctor to have him committed to an asylum in Pennsylvania, with the motive of gaining control of his assets. In Davis' portrait, the asylum was at once a Gothic space of unfreedom, presided over by corrupt and vicious superintendents, and a rat's nest of sexual license. "Female patients, who, from the carelessness of those having charge of them, have had improper intercourse with men," were turning asylums, literally, into "breeding-houses of insane offspring." Cast into such an environment by "conspirators against our own es-

tate or happiness" who are aided by a power-seeking medical establishment that regularly administers tortures and confinements that would "drive a sane man mad," Davis offered a call to vigilance for readers; for asylums are "torture-houses, breeders of insanity, for those who may, by cruel chance, be brought under their peculiar influence."[26]

Isaac Ray's response to this attack on his profession reflects the increasing defensiveness of medical superintendents after the heady years of the 1830s and '40s; the institution of the asylum promotes "order, peace, and freedom," and the rigid hierarchy within its walls is not an indication of medical designs on the freedom of the individual, but simply the "most efficient" means of organization.[27] Absent from his rebuttal are any strong claims of the asylum's curative powers; rather, he focuses on dispelling the notion of widespread abuse, and casts the medical superintendents as protectors of, rather than conspirators against, the rights of Americans. The profession, according to Ray, recognizes "the sacred right of the family under the great law of humanity, to place one of its members in a hospital for the insane." The "sacred right" defended here is the right to confine someone else; freedom is cast as orderliness and internal discipline.[28]

Although the exchange quoted above took place after the Civil War, the anxieties it represents originated in the increasingly fearful views of the insane that emerged in the 1850s; these anxieties paralleled and at times overlapped issues of race. During that period, the rationale for asylum care was as likely to be its custodial function for a threatening portion of the population as a curative or reformative one. The once-confident liberal voices of reform were now offering more unsettling messages. Dorothea Dix, an influential advocate of prison, almshouse, and asylum development in the '40s, was by the mid-'50s proposing the ultimate not-in-my-backyard scheme: the creation of a massive Federal Reserve of 12,225,000 acres in which to lodge the entire insane population of the United States. (The resulting bill actually passed both houses of Congress before it was vetoed by Franklin Pierce![29]) The discourse of insanity was now being conducted on the terrain of race, for the unspoken suggestion here was that housing the insane was a problem as intractable as that of racial cohabitation. Dix's scheme of mass (albeit internal) exile uncannily resembles various proposals that led to the Indian Removal Act of 1830, by whose dictates the federal government forcibly removed Native Americans to lands west of the Mississippi. In 1826, James Barbour, John Quincy Adams's secretary of war, was proposing to end

disputes with states (particularly Georgia) over their brutal dispossession of Indian populations. How, he asked, could whites hope to persuade the Indians to love civilized "justice" and practice "religious worship" if they continued on "a course, which, judging from the past, threatens their extinction?" His somewhat surprising proposal was not to ensure the protection of the tribes on their native land, but to effect a massive relocation of all eastern Indians to a federally controlled region, stretching from Texas to Canada and including much of Minnesota, the Rockies, and part of the North coast of the Pacific.[30]

Many abolitionists were coming to the same conclusion, with regard to the place for former slaves in white American society, that Dix and Barbour came to with regard to Native Americans and the insane. A well-known illustration of this tendency occurs near the end of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, when Harriet Beecher Stowe has her mulatto hero, George Harris, declare that he will sail for "the shores of Africa" and work to promote the development of the new republic of Liberia.[31] Although this republican ideal is presented as the logical endpoint of a narrative that has stressed the child-like benevolence and trustworthiness of the black race, one cannot help but read into it a certain liberal anxiety about prolonged contact with blacks and about the limits of "uplifting" them. The shifting logical grounds of such a proposal are not dissimilar to those underlying such a massive scheme as Dix's. The initial appeals to the innocence and neediness of the victims (of mental illness, of slavery) galvanize support for paternalistic solutions (a church-based abolitionism, the development of the asylum). But as it became clear by mid-century that those institutions were failing to resolve the tensions and conflicts they address, and as the objects of reform charity stubbornly asserted their need for property as well as their need to be free, a new appeal was made: if America can't solve its problems, it may need to send those problems away.

The prevalence of schemes of exile in the antebellum political imagination stemmed from conflicted conceptions of citizenship and property rights. The *Dred Scott* decision of 1857 would definitively conclude that the Constitution did not include descendants of Africans in its conception of "We the People," and therefore excluded them from the rights of citizenship. A Lockean conception of self-ownership and the inalienable right to property was the basis of American citizenship; because blacks were denied the former, the latter followed. Thus, instead of possessing an "inalienable" right to

property as white Americans did, they could become a part of the property that whites could own.[32] Somewhat differently, the courts and the Congress justified the Indian Removal Act largely on the basis of the Cherokees' lack of respect for the notion of individual property. As Priscilla Wald argues: "Where citizenship [in the antebellum period] is defined through the natural right to own property, and, following Locke, the most basic expression of this concept rests in the citizen's *self*-ownership, members of tribes and slaves (extending, at least in *Dred Scott*, to all 'descendants of Africans') constitute two ways of not owning the self: the former in the tribal absence of an 'American' concept of private property, and the latter in their being owned by someone else."[33] If Native Americans and African Americans did not own themselves but constituted a threat to white ownership (by running away or by refusing to yield ground), then sending them away began to look like a good idea.

Neither, apparently, did the insane properly "own" themselves. Isaac Ray wrote in the introduction to *A Treatise on the Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity* that he was motivated by "the vast amount of property affected by legal regulations and decisions" concerning insanity. Ray argued that the insane should be held responsible for their actions only to the degree that they are "in possession of their reasoning powers." The absence of this self-possession became threatening precisely when the person in question is "dissipating his fortune to the great detriment of himself and of those who are dependent on him": consequently, interdiction should come about only when the person "is not capable of managing his affairs."[34] The property threat posed by the insane increased in the Jacksonian period as unprecedented numbers of poor, displaced, and transient young men gathered in cities; these wanderers were both vulnerable to mental illness and represented legitimate threats to the property of more established citizens.[35] By the 1850s, this condition, like that of blacks and like that of the Indians before them, motivated variously practical political and legal fantasies of removal. Perhaps this is what allowed Congress to understand and ratify so quickly a scheme of relocation such as Dix's, which seems so radical to us today.

At the end of Melville's story, the "raving" Benito Cereno is sent away, if only by himself; his capitulation into total silence leads him to monastic exile. Babo's voicelessness under slavery leads him, too, to strive for exile, which motivates his plot to steer his floating prison to Africa. Is Melville imagining the consent of the dispossessed in

their own removal? I would say no, because we are not presented with anything like the Utopian images of removal that characterized the writings of Dix and Stowe. Removal of freed blacks would come peacefully for Stowe, who wrote in her "Concluding Remarks" to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that there was a need to give freed slaves the "educating advantages of Christian republican society and schools, until they have attained to somewhat of a moral and intellectual maturity, and then assist them in their passage to those shores, where they may put in practice the lessons they have learned in America."[36] The cheery articulateness of her mulatto proponent of this scheme stands in stark contrast to the heavy silences of Melville's would-be exiles Babo and Benito Cereno.

Melville's parallel between the fate of the silently insane and the silenced slave emerged at a time when discussions of mental illness were becoming strangely entwined with questions of race and slavery, not only in terms of the conflicting definitions of citizenship and property rights, but in etiological terms as well. The famous image of the "knot" shows Delano's inability to separate the issues. Early in his visit to the Spanish ship, he tries out several interpretations of the threatening scenario that has unfolded in front of him, only to reject each one. Retreating into his bafflement, he regards an "aged" Spanish sailor, who is engaged in making an elaborate knot of rope:

> Captain Delano crossed over to him, and stood in silence surveying the knot; his mind, by a not uncongenial transition, passing from its own entanglements to those of the hemp. For intricacy, such a knot he had never seen in an American ship, nor indeed any other. The old man looked like an Egyptian priest, making Gordian knots for the temple of Ammon. The knot seemed a combination of double-bowline-knot, treble-crown-knot, back-handed-well-knot, knot-in-and-out-knot, and jamming-knot.
>
> At last, puzzled to comprehend the meaning of such a knot, Captain Delano addressed the knotter:—
>
> "What are you knotting there, my man?"
>
> "The knot," was the brief reply, without looking up.
>
> "So it seems, but what is it for?
>
> "For someone else to undo," muttered back the old man. . . . (270)

The entanglements of mental and social disorcer brought on by Babo's revolt produce a knot that seems impossible to untie; if it is unravelled, the sailor's cryptic response to the first question implies,

it will yield another knot. Delano's dangerous role as unwitting intruder only deepens the paradox, for simply looking at the knot causes one to fall into it. For a moment, with "knot in hand and knot in head" he "stood mute" (271), managing to push back his stunned puzzlement only when "a good-natured . . . elderly negro" informs him that "the old knotter was simple-witted, but harmless, often playing his odd tricks." Viewing this "queer" performance, Delano feels the onset of another episode of mental "ague," but "he strove, by ignoring the symptoms, to get rid of the malady" (271). A correct interpretation of the knot might lead to madness; Delano's maintenance of his reason is shown to be a willed form of ignorance, a self-protective failure of perception, a delusional if strategic faith in the subservient "good nature" of the blacks and his own powers of reason.

Both strands of the knot, madness and race, brought up crucial questions of authority, confinement, rebellion, natural rights, and the need for moral uplift, but in many ways these issues had different social meanings in the antebellum period. The idea of the natural subservience of blacks, for instance, complicated the understanding of insanity. This idea was not limited to slaveholders; an overwhelming proportion of freed blacks in the North worked in service positions, which makes them seem to Delano "natural valets or hairdressers" (279). If many liberals considered blacks to be "naturally" subservient, then the ordinary rules of insanity would not apply; indeed, their mental health would likely flourish in conditions of confinement, or at least restricted freedom, that would undo the minds of other people. When the results of the Sixth Census—the first to include demographic data concerning insanity—were published in 1840, one finding thus seemed particularly interesting: while the rate of insanity was virtually the same for Northern and Southern whites, the rate was eleven times higher for Northern blacks than for Southern ones, and six times the rate of white insanity.[37] In fact, the census showed that the rate of black insanity increased consistently in a Northward direction, so that in Delaware the rate was one in 600; in New Jersey, one in 297; in Massachusetts, one in forty-three; in New Hampshire, one in twenty-eight, and in Maine, one in fourteen.[38] That these figures were cited by prominent advocates of slavery such as Vice President John C. Calhoun is understandable;[39] more germane here is their initial widespread acceptance within the generally liberal Northern psychiatric profession. Although many questioned their ac-

curacy, the figures were still cited in influential psychiatric journals as late as 1851.[40]

The reception of the census figures did not constitute an isolated linkage between freedom, blackness, and insanity. Mainstream mental health professionals in the North may have largely ignored the claims of Southern physicians like Samuel Adolphus Cartwright that blacks were suspectible to special diseases such as "Drapetomania" (which, "like a malady that cats are liable to, manifests itself by an irrestrainable propensity to run away") and "Dysoesthesia oethiopeca" (which included "paying no attention to the rights of property," destroying "the tools he works with,"[41] etc.); but prominent Northern thinkers often, consciously or not, similarly implied a parallel between insanity and racial "otherness." A common argument held that insanity did not exist in "savage" races in their "natural" environments, and that only their improper attempts to attain a civilized state could lead to mental instability. It is this view that permeates the Gothic world of Oliver Wendell Holmes's novel *Elsie Venner*, in which a young teacher becomes fascinated with a beautiful but wild and possibly insane pupil. Her insanity vexes his carefully achieved understanding of the workings of blood and race on mental and psychological make-up; for she is the daughter of well-to-do, genteel parents, and yet her behaviors are so mysterious that "some, of course, said she was a crazy girl, and ought to be sent to an Asylum," and one character remarks that "I should think there was something not human looking out of Elsie Venner's eyes!" At one point, in fact, she bites her cousin and childhood playmate Dick on the arm, and from that point on, he is not to be managed, and even goes off and makes "friends with the Indians, and rid[es] with them, it was rumored, in some of their savage forays."[42] The threat this mystery poses to the young teacher's system of psychological classification is overcome when he discovers that Elsie's mother received in pregnancy an ultimately fatal bite from a rattlesnake and passed on the venom to her daughter; Elsie's apparent insanity and strange incompatibility with civilization flow, if not exactly from racial difference, then at lest from her mother's impure blood. The parallel lines drawn here are between sane and insane; white and not-white (in Dick Venner's wild ride with the Indians); human and inhuman.

Holmes, who was himself a doctor, reflects the dependence of psychiatric knowledge on racialist knowledge. This dependence also structured much theoretical writing about the asylum. Isaac Ray, for

instance, wrote of two extremes of asylum-keeping. In the first, exemplified by the establishment of a Dr. Willard,

> . . . the main idea was to break the patient's will and make him learn that he had a master; to teach him that there was a mind and physical strength there all superior to his own. That was the principal object to be kept in view, and it was to be gained at any risk. If fair means would not do, other means should; if strong words or curses would not answer, then resort was had to the knock-down arguments. This was thought to be the proper way; no secret was made of it, and the friends of patients understood it perfectly well.

The second and, in Ray's view, superior type of asylum-keeping was exemplified by the methods of the famous Thomas Kirkbride and his son Joseph:

> They never received their patients in their own homes, but made arrangements for boarding them in two or three private families. These families were presided over by strong, fearless, capable, and good natured women, most of whom had husbands, and the patients were under little restraint, though subject to constant supervision. They do not appear to have belonged to the most violent classes, as there do not seem to have been any strong rooms in which to confine them.[43]

Ray's distinction sounds very much like the standard depictions of the difference between the cruel task-master and the paternalistic, kindhearted slave-owner. But the "knot" tying together race and mental illness often looped the other way; it was not that insanity could be understood with reference to racial difference, but that racial difference must be treated like insanity. The following passage from George Fitzhugh's well-known defense of slavery, *Sociology for the South* (1854), should make the connection between the paternalism of the medical superintendents and the paternalistic defense of the peculiar institution clear:

> [The negro] is but a grown up child, and must be governed as a child, not as a lunatic or criminal. The master occupies towards him the place of parent or guardian. . . . If it be right and incumbent to subject children to the authority of parents and guardians, and idiots and lunatics to committees, would it not be equally right and incumbent to give the free negroes

> master, until at least they arrive at years of discretion, which very few ever did or will attain?[44]

Ray's defense of Kirkbride does not have any direct bearing on the slavery issue, but it seems that Ray learned something from slavery's advocates about how to frame a defense of a custodial institution. Curiously, that knowledge is fed back in its new guise, in the Fitzhugh text, to reinforce the original proposition: the lunatic is like a child is like a slave is like a child is like a lunatic. The words of Ray and Fitzhugh slide into an almost deconstructive intertextuality, in which the arguments of the one are contingent on the arguments of the other, and foreground and context become indistinguishable. One cannot imagine an argument such as Ray's taking shape in the absence of decades of debate about the proper care of slaves; nor can one imagine a defense of slavery that draws analogies to the condition of lunatics without the arguments of figures like Ray.

There are, nonetheless, slight but important differences between the rhetoric of the two arguments, as the slipperiness of the final sentence from Fitzhugh quoted above suggests. Despite the waning of faith in the 1850s concerning the cure of the insane, the psychiatric profession had to be careful to present itself as promoting a *temporary* disciplinary and remedial intervention, or else they really were no better than enslavers; conversely, the paternalistic slave-owners had to stress the *permanence* of the relationship they were advocating, or else there would be no reason not to set the slaves free after their masters had showered them with the love and protection of a "parent or a guardian." The movement in that final sentence of Fitzhugh's from child to lunatic to slave is one of temporary to possibly permanent to (nearly) absolute need for confinement. It is interesting to speculate whether the appeal to a central institution of Northern reform offered here (slave quarters are like an asylum) would have made its way into the slavery debate were it not for the increasing sense that insanity, like racial difference, was an unchanging fact, and that institutions of reform were in reality nothing but elaborately conceived holding cells.

When these holding cells break down, and the inmates "evade the eye of surveillance" (return to Bhabha's phrase) as they do aboard the San Dominick, it is left to the law to recontain the subversion and re-establish trust in custodial institutions. But at the time of the story's writing, important legal decisions addressing issues of custody often merely sharpened suspicions, rather than assuaging them.

The most striking legal failure of the period was the attempt to formulate a positive law that would yield a compromise to the deep sectional conflicts driving the country toward war. The "natural" status of blacks was under intense debate in the 1850s, with famous cases of shipboard slave mutiny provoking appeals to natural law by both abolitionists and advocates of slavery. Both sides were likely to argue that where no positive law clearly applied (such as the high seas, under no national jurisdiction), the law of nature was the last resort of appeal; but the debate over whether this natural law sanctioned slavery or gave the slave the same freedom to rebel as it supposedly had given the American fathers two generations earlier made the category of "nature" highly unstable in the American legal arena.[45] By placing their faith entirely in positive law, judges thought (wrongly) that they could circumvent the raging arguments about the "natural" status of blacks. Liberal justices felt compelled to set aside their moral opposition to slavery in order to preserve the greater good of Union.[46] Such, for instance, was the rationale of Lemuel Shaw (Melville's father-in-law and the influential Massachusetts Supreme Court justice) when he ordered that the escaped slave Thomas Sims be returned to his former master. Shaw's biographer has called this decision "the first full-dress sustention of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 by any court."[47] As Shaw put it, upholding the Fugitive Slave Act in the Sims case was "absolutely necessary to the peace, union and harmonious action of the State and General governments."[48] Critics of Melville often cite this decision as a chief source for "Billy Budd, Sailor." More particularly, Captain Vere's valuation of allegiance to the State over allegiance to "natural" justice is often read as a dramatization of Shaw's dilemma in the Sims case.[49] Both Vere and Shaw argue that maintaining the social order is a duty far beyond the individual will or political inclination of the judge; as Vere says in justifying Billy's death sentence: "Our vowed responsibility is this: That however pitilessly that law may operate in any instances, we nevertheless adhere to it and administer it" (486). The duty of the justice system, therefore, is to enact a positive law constructed by and representative of the will of the people rather than to appeal to some abstract natural law; the violence enacted by the judiciary (killing Billy; re-enslaving Sims) is an attempt not so much to mete our "justice" as to contain resistance to that humanly ordained law.

Perhaps Shaw's mistake, like the mistakes of psychiatrists who had too much faith in the "moral cure," was overconfidence; he thought

that the sphere of legal reasoning mapped out by the Constitution could smooth over any conflict, a view William Lloyd Garrison proved incorrect when, in the wake of Sims, he called for anti-slavery judges to step down from the bench rather than uphold the Fugitive Slave Law. Publicly burning a copy of the Constitution, which he called "a covenant with death and an agreement with Hell," he prophetically declared that his country would soon have to choose between slavery and union.[50] On the opposite pole from Vere's and Shaw's faith in legal positivism, but just as dangerous a response to difference and suspicion, is Delano's complete faith in the natural categories that are in fact the products of his own mind: his "good-nature, compassion, and charity" re-emerge in the aftermath of his traumatic experience, willed forms of complacency that allow him to miss the significance of the threats posed to himself and his class. But he presents this trust as a "natural" position—one that occurs just as inevitably as "the bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky." And in viewing Babo's masterful performance in the barber scene—in which the rebel leader at once displays to the American his supposed trustworthiness and holds a blade to his master's neck—Delano can only comment that "most negroes are natural valets or hair dressers" (278). His mistake is the same one that allowed the blacks to revolt in the first place—as slaves, none of them "wore fetters," Don Benito states in his deposition, "because the owner, his friend Aranda, told him they were all tractable" (301). Babo capitalizes on this drastic white underestimation of the slaves' resentment of slavery; the supposedly "natural" servitude that Delano so admires is actually a calculated performance springing from what could be seen as another—and entirely contrary—natural desire: the desire to be free.

Delano's faith in nature, as I have shown, helps him contain his own suspicions. In this regard, his faith is an internalization of an important legal function—regulating suspicion by formalizing and stipulating a certain kind of trust.[51] The clearest example of this psychological function of the law is the contract drawn up by Don Benito in the midst of the rebellion, in which he "formally made over the ship" to the insurgents. Contracts, as opposed to slavery, imply a voluntary submission to the service of another, a bond formed out of trust rather than coercion. Significantly, the two classes of people who could not enter into contracts in the antebellum period were slaves and the insane. As Isaac Ray wrote, "Where the insanity of one of the parties is perfectly well known to the other or might have been

so by the exercise of ordinary sagacity, a contract between them, except for the necessities of life or comforts and luxuries suitable to his wealth or station, should obviously be held invalid."[52] The unusual exceptions of vital necessities (or, strangely, class privilege) lift the insane above the condition of the slaves, who, not owning themselves, can have no right to contract their services; but still, slaves and the insane represent a continuum in their exemption from contract law. Something is up, then, in "Benito Cereno," when a legally insane man and a rebel slave draw up a contract.

Upon signing the contract, Babo and his men have already killed Don Alexandro Aranda (the owner of the ship and the "one hundred and sixty blacks, of both sexes" who were its primary cargo) and eighteen of the thirty-six Spanish crew by hatchet, and thrown seven more alive into the sea. Now in control of the ship, Babo experiences the kind of suspicion of his remaining captives that they had perhaps been "too stupid" to feel toward the slaves. Babo makes clear that his regime will not repeat the same mistake. As the deposition recounts it: ". . . they (the Spaniards), being then assembled aft, the negro Babo then harangued them, saying that he had now done all; that the deponent (as navigator for the negroes) might pursue his course, warning him and all of them that they should, soul and body, go the way of Don Alexandro, if he saw them (the Spaniards) speak or plot anything against them (the negroes)—a threat which was repeated every day. . . ." (305) Don Benito shrewdly observes that the whites' only chance for survival under such a suspicious regime is to convince their captives-turned-captors of two things: first, the dependence of the blacks on the whites' technical shipboard expertise; and second, the whites' understanding that their lives depend on fulfilling the blacks' desire for freedom. The document he draws up is thus intended as a check against Babo's suspicion that the whites will try to rise up against him as he has done against them:

> . . . that a few days after, the deponent, endeavoring not to omit any means to preserve the lives of the remaining whites, spoke to the negroes peace and tranquillity, and agreed to draw up a paper, signed by the deponent and the sailors who could write, as also by the negro Babo, for himself and all the blacks, in which the deponent obliged himself to carry them to Senegal, and they not to kill any more, and he formally to make over to them the ship, with the cargo, with which they were for that time satisfied and quieted. (305)

What Don Benito recognizes in the situation is the importance for both sides of managing suspicion within the new power relations that have emerged on board the *San Dominick*. The contract thus defines a ground of common interest between the whites and the blacks, but Melville's dramatization of the signing exposes the field of absolutely naked (but unstated) power relations that create that common interest. Don Benito, it is true, draws up the document of his own "free" will, but he does so only as the final means to "preserve the lives of the remaining whites," who would otherwise be completely at the mercy of Babo.

Nothing, of course, could be further from a position of "equal bargaining power," the condition antebellum courts increasingly assumed to underlie the signing of contracts—a sort of default position of power relations. The new field of Contract Law was one of the chief areas in which the legal philosophy known as formalism was worked out. This philosophy, according to Morton Horwitz, reflected the new powers of a confident legal profession by creating the appearance of law as a "self-contained, apolitical, and inexorable" system and making "legal reasoning seem like mathematics," which conveyed "an air . . . of inevitability about legal decisions."[53] One of the supposedly apolitical assumptions underlying legal formalism was the formal equality of all subjects under the law. A worker, therefore, was considered to possess the same degree of "freedom" in drawing up a contract as an employer; this legal equality, according to Horwitz, thus masked the very real advantages that employers usually possessed.[54] When put into practice, then, the idea of "separation of law and politics" had a profoundly conservative political effect, in that it neutralized "the inevitably political and redistributive functions of law."[55]

The contract Don Benito draws up mocks the logic of formal equality upon which this principle of "equal bargaining power" rests. The freedom of Don Benito's will clearly exists at this point only within a marginal space of his unfreedom, and the promissory structure of the contract serves mainly to demarcate that unfreedom—to make its terms understood, if not agreed upon, by both parties. The context of the signing dramatizes the importance of this understanding. Immediately before recounting how the document is drawn up, the deposition outlines a scene in which Babo demonstrates to each of the sailors his absolute authority:

> . . . the deponent, uncertain what fate had befallen the remains of Don Alexandro, frequently asked the negro Babo where they were, and, if still on board, whether they were to be preserved for internment ashore, entreating him so to order it; that the negro Babo answered nothing till the fourth day when at sunrise, the deponent coming on deck, the negro Babo showed him a skeleton, which had been substituted for the ship's proper figure-head—the image of Cristobal Colon, the discoverer of the New World; that the negro Babo asked him whose skeleton that was, and whether, from its whiteness, he should not think it a white's; that, upon discovering his face, the negro Babo, coming close, said words to this effect: "Keep faith with the blacks from here to Senegal, or you shall in spirit, as now in body, follow your leader," pointing to the prow; * * * that the same morning the negro Babo took by succession each Spaniard forward, and asked him whose skeleton that was, and whether, from its whiteness, he should not think it a white's; that each Spaniard covered his face; that then to each the negro Babo repeated the words in the first place said to the deponent. . . . (304–305)

The "paper" that Don Benito later draws up is only the final acknowledgement of the relationship that is established in this extraordinary scene. The Sartrean optics of recognition and power that Babo sets into play serve to bind each Spaniard to "faith" in the blacks; it is this ocular contract—written by the gaze of Babo, and recognized by each Spaniard as the gaze of power—that silently establishes the meaning of the new relationship between the races. The paper contract is merely an attempt to solidify whatever fragment of security the whites are offered under the new arrangement. Further, the description of Babo's initial gaze of power upon the vanquished Benito Cereno as "discovering his face" links it to the image that immediately precedes it, that of "Cristobal Colon, discoverer of the New World." That initial discovery, of course, inaugurated the reign of Spanish power over the Americas; but now, in a very different sort of voyage, Babo "discovers" the Spanish slavers in a position so powerless that each one is said to have "covered his face" upon being so regarded. "Discovering" thus gains a punning meaning of "uncovering." The naked power of the slave-owners, made blind by its disavowals (Benito Cereno, projecting "trustworthiness" on the slaves, has left them unchained) has been turned, by a simple reversal, onto the Spaniards, which makes them "cover" themselves first with their hands, then with the legal document, then with forced

complicity in the charade to which Delano is witness. When the tables are turned once again, it is Babo who must cover himself with the false mask of a slavery that he has in fact already thrown off. But the authorities have not entirely regained their power to look—having once discovered Babo's discovery of them, they must continue to cover their eyes: "Put in irons in the hold, with the rest, [Babo] was carried to Lima. During the passage, Don Benito did not visit him. Nor then, nor any time after, would he look at him. Before the tribunal he refused. When pressed by the judges he fainted." (315)

But Babo's possession of the gaze of power and his possession of the *San Dominick* entail a price: experiencing suspicion. If Babo is to avoid Aranda's fate, then every action and gesture of the whites must now be regarded in the light of the threat it potentially signifies: the new hybrids, the whites, are not to be afforded any opportunity for camouflage. Proper management of suspicion is thus paramount for Babo and his followers. On the fifth day of their new regime, suffering from heat and lack of water, "the negroes became irritable, and for a chance gesture, which they deemed suspicious—though it was harmless—made by the mate, Raneds, to the deponent in the act of handling a quadrant, they killed him; but that for this they afterwards were sorry, the mate being the only remaining navigator on board, except the deponent" (306). Although the blacks may seem to have total control over the whites, some degree of trust remains essential to their plan of returning to Africa; any failure of that trust could doom them just as easily as it has the whites. This trust is circumscribed by a nearly absolute power which repeats that of the slave system it has overthrown; and it is toward this mutually beneficial trust, based on rules for the management of suspicion between slave and owner, that Don Benito draws up his document. But the "irritability" that leads to the killing of Raneds breaks through that pseudo-legal framework, revealing suspicion's potential to overflow its artificial (legal) boundaries, provoked only by a "chance gesture." The contract only gives a sharper edge to the madness of suspicion it was meant to allay. It takes strong self-discipline, as well as direction from Babo, for the blacks not to strike out and descend into irrationality when Delano is on board; accordingly, the insurrectionaries are quick to discipline any of the captives who threaten to step outside of their parts.

The contract thus links the black rebels with the whites in an economy of suspicion and violence; where those forces overflow the formal and psychological structures that are supposed to contain them,

madness ensues. But what happens when madness itself returns to threaten the legal system? Another episode from Lemuel Shaw's career is instructive. In the case of *Commonwealth v. Rogers* (1844), Shaw judged the case of an inmate of the Massachusetts State prison whose defense rested on the claim that voices had told him that the warden would kill him. In deciding the case, Shaw became the first justice in the United States to admit as evidence judgments on a defendant's mental state made by psychiatrists; their testimony was crucial in Shaw's decision that Rogers was not guilty by reason of insanity—more specifically, monomania. "The act," wrote Shaw, "was the result of the disease and not of a mind capable of choosing; in short, . . . it was the result of uncontrollable impulse, and not of a person acted upon by motives, and governed by the will."[56]

Babo, like Rogers, is an inmate who rises against his jailors. But whereas in the Commonwealth case the psychological status of Rogers was under examination—the status of his mind as a human instrument of intentional "motives" and "will"—in "Benito Cereno" the category of intention enters the legal discussion of the behavior of the "negroes" to a relatively minor degree. The deposition has something to say of the intentional acts of particular mutineers after the plan for the revolt has been hatched: "That the negro José . . . was the one who communicated the information to the negro Babo about the state of things in the cabin; . . . that the negresses of age were knowing of the revolt, and testified themselves satisfied at the death of their master. . ." (309–10). They knew and approved of the plan, and each acted a part accordingly. But this indivuation and assignation of responsibility does not extend to the basic motives of the revolt. All we learn is "that on the seventh day after leaving the port, at three o'clock in the morning, all the Spaniards being asleep except the two officers on the watch . . . the negroes revolted suddenly" (301). Later incidents recounted in the deposition make clear that Babo's goal in rising up is to guide the ship to the coast of Senegal and free the blacks, but this motive has no place at all in the decision.

In Melville's story, "intention" is a category reserved mainly for those who react to the slave uprising. Don Benito's deposition, which is the main basis for the "capital sentences" handed down on the blacks, is not designed to show the motives upon which Babo and his followers acted, but that "from the beginning to the end of the revolt, it was impossible for the deponent and his men to act otherwise than they did" (311). The paradox is that the slave possesses just enough intentionality to break a law, but not enough to have motives to do

so. The psychological pronuncement made by the Chilean tribunal in "Benito Cereno"—that Don Benito, "not undisturbed in his mind by recent events, raved of some things which could never have happened" (299–300)—accordingly refers to the jailor and not the prisoner. Because the intentions and mental state of those accused of a crime are not under review, madness is examined not so much as a cause of violent behavior, but as a result of it. Babo's intentions could never become a legal issue, because to suppose that a slave could intend would be to admit that his natural state was a rational one, which would destroy the very grounds for justifying slavery. Only an artificial exposure to freedom, as the Census Report cited earlier suggests, could introduce the sane/insane distinction into the discussion of slaves. As long as they were "protected" from society, the editor of the *American Journal of Insanity* wrote in 1845, the lower races shared "an exemption . . . from insanity."[57] But if slavery is the natural position for blacks, then the motivation for rebellion is an unspeakable subject for a court; Babo's transgression stands in the deposition as an act with no causes, only effects. In the Rogers case, insanity had been the rational legal explanation for a seemingly gratuitous act of violence; in the deposition of "Benito Cereno," Babo's rationality is impossible to imagine, and introduces an element of "raving" into the proceedings. Don Benito's insanity comes back to haunt the legal process as law's nemesis—law can no more divine the inside of the Spaniard's head than it can penetrate Babo's "hive of subtlety."

In Jacques Lacan's account, paranoid psychosis is brought on when paternal law (or the "name-of-the-Father") fails to cover over the hole in meaning brought on for the subject by a traumatic encounter with the "real." This hole therefore "sets off the cascade of reshapings of the signifier from which the increasing disaster of the imaginary proceeds, to the point at which . . . the signifier and signified are stabilized in the delusional metaphor."[58] Law in Melville's story resembles what Lacan calls the symbolic realm, which is brought on by the "name-of-the-Father"; the "truth" of Babo's alterity might be the threat against which the symbolic defends. Lacan is writing of a generalized process by which modernity interpellates its subjects; "Benito Cereno" poins to a moment in which that interpellation was particularly fragile—the legal edifice of the symbolic fails notably to defend against Babo's threat. Melville does not provide us access to what Don Benito "raved about" or the "cascade of reshapings of the signifier" that would allow us to follow out the analogy with Lacan. But the structure of slavery in "Benito Cereno" does read like a para-

noid psychosis, in which law fails to constrain the suspicion and aggressivity that occur when one enters the social realm. As Philip Fisher has written, the conditions aboard the ship suggest that "like a seriously damaged neurotic, the society's every expenditure is self-obsessed and directed to self-maintenance."[59] Rather than acting under the dictates of the father, the whites aboard the *San Dominick* and later the law itself must constantly produce the illusion of the rule of the father, who is already dead : Don Aranda's head is fixed on the prow of the ship, and Don Benito's sword is in reality no more than "a scabbard, artificially stiffened" (315).

Babo's silence cuts through the imagination of the legal system and Delano's mind like a Lacanian irruption of an unrepresentable, prerational "real." But from Babo's perspective, his silence is a rational strategy, which Melville echoes in the deliberate and poised silence of his own formal presentation. Babo's voice, it is clear, may be silenced by a Delano-esque repression, founded on an inability to conceive of freedom as motive for a "stupid" black slave; but this repression is returned to us in the story's own eloquent gaps. The literary power of Babo's "voiceless end" is an ironic reversal of the fate of the escapee under the Fugitive Slave Act.[60] One of the provisions of that law held that the alleged fugitive was not allowed to testify in his or her own behalf. The "union" that the law was intended to strengthen through stipulating Northern complicity in the slave system thus depended on silencing black voices, as if in recognition that the stability of the law depended on denying them a venue for self-representation. As Jean Fagan Yellin has put it, Babo's silence "expresses not only the intransigence of Negro rebels and voiceless black experience, but the status of black slaves in America. Legally, a black man's speech did not exist: his testimony inadmissible in court, his literacy forbidden by law, quite literally he stood mute."[61] Melville demonstrates the ways in which this "intransigence" could pose more of a challenge to legal authority than words could; silence represents not only a conscious refusal to participate in the legal process, but a storing up of the energy that challenges that system. By refusing to "speak words," Babo hoards the contents of his "hive of subtlety"—the mental and psychological forces that have enabled him so to threaten the security of the whites. The image of his head on a stake, intended by the tribunal as a symbol of law's containment of that which is most threatening to social confidence and the rule of whites, only serves to puncture the psychological safety that law is supposed to create. Similarly, the killing of Raneds has demonstrated

to the insurgents how fragile was their compact with the defeated whites, how easily their own minds could be undone by even a "chance gesture."

I have tried to show that Delano's conflation of the threats posed by race and by madness is representative of a wider cultural confusion, based on a collective antebellum denial of slaves' capacity to think their way out of slavery and on a promiscuous transferring of "knowledge" between antebellum discourses of race and insanity. Both discourses mark limits to supposedly "inalienable" American rights to citizenship; both raise the problem of how to provide custodial care for an often intransigent dispossessed population; and both map out spheres of unreason against which the law must defend. The law, as I have argued, helps create this unreason and for that reason can only deepen it while attempting to resolve it; the pseudo-scientific discourse of insanity threaded through the story—largely through the anxious "liberal" speculations of Delano about the madness of Benito Cereno—similarly adds to the sense of fearfulness. These failings culminate in a startlingly prophetic image of approaching doom; the image of Babo's head eerily foreshadows that of the white abolitionist John Brown, who, "Hanging from the beam/ Slowly swaying (such the law)" became in Melville's 1859 poem "The Portent," "the meteor of the War."[62] Significantly, Brown's lawyer, George Hoyt, urged the court to grant clemency for Brown in the wake of his rebellion at Harper's Ferry on the grounds that he was insane, but Brown himself refused to plead insanity and was ultimately sentenced to death. Radical abolitionists, too, challenged the notion that those who fought slavery must be mad. "Call them madmen if you will," Wendell Phillips declared, but in a slave state, it was "hard to tell who's mad."[63]

Delano's confusion, like Phillips's, is produced by a system of social meanings in which race and insanity are figured as crucial sites of difference, but as such are difficult to distinguish from each other. At the time of the story's writing, "liberals" were still trying to maintain these precarious distinctions, viewing them at times with suspicion (necessitating legal and other constraints) and at times with benevolence (as when Delano hypothesizes the Spaniard's "innocent lunacy" or the "trustworthiness" of the slaves). But it seems that these options could not be held simultaneously. Nor could a position of ambiguity—one that would allow the "different" subject a complexity and richness too close to one's own—obtain, for this would

threaten the self-confidence of the reformers: a self-confidence against which Melville warns in the "Supplement" discussed at the beginning of this essay. Melville grafts this anxious but ultimately unself-conscious pattern onto the mind of Delano, who ultimately denies its significance, self-protectively retaining faith in the correspondence of human institutions with a benevolent human nature, all evidence to the contrary.

The picture of Melville presented here is indeed a gloomy one, comprising lost ideals and dim hopes for the future. There are, however, two aspects of the story that I find, if not reassuring, then at least a basis for moral reasoning. The first is Melville's resurrection of a rapidly collapsing distinction in social classification. Babo's silence, as I have shown, is linked with Benito Cereno's in a complex web of cause and effect, but in the end, the black man is *not* turned into the madman. When the rebels kill Raneds, unchecked suspicion threatens to overwhelm them and engulf them in a collective madness that would subvert their purpose of returning to Africa; but ultimately, Babo's intense rationality holds sway. It is, rather, Benito Cereno who is undone by the violence of the story, it is *his* descent into the abyss that Delano finds himself guarding against.

The second point is a bit more abstract, and it springs from my sense that Melville does not attempt to erect a new edifice over the gaps opened up by collapses of certitude. The final impct of the story falls exactly in those silent spaces that the legal system—and Delano—can't account for, and therefore disavow. The voices of unmasked black rage and, at the other extreme, white insanity, may be pushed out of the margins of the official proceedings and out of Delano's sunny world-view, but it is with those silent darknesses that Melville leaves us. Despite the tightness of the narrative frame and the relentless uncovering of deceptive appearances, he finally does not impose a superior literary order on social trauma. Nor is he content to leave that ordering function to the legal system or to the rhetorics of psychiatry, law's emerging carceral sibling—both of whose failures are exposed by the silences they create and the silent forces then try to control, or at least contain. Opposed to the unself-conscious psychological positivism of the tribunal, which attempts to show that "it was impossible for the deponent and his men to act otherwise than they did" (311), lies Melville's psychological realism. This is a realism of the limits of representability: its objects lie past that "certain point" beyond which representation, like "benevolent desires," dares not tread. At the conclusion of the deposition, the narrator writes: "If the

Deposition have served as the key to fit into the lock of the complications which precede it, then, as a vault whose door has been flung back, the *San Dominick's* hull lies open today" (313). The story, like the hull, remains "open"; its concluding image gives off an aura of incompleteness and immediacy. Suddenly, the narrative filters of Delano's consciousness and the deposition's plodding cadences are stripped away. As Babo's eyes follow Benito Cereno into his monastic exile, Melville turns that posthumous "unabashed" gaze back on the readers. Even as a white man reading a white man's story about a white man's misreading of a black man, I still feel caught by Babo's look, by the sense that there is still something left to know. I have had to confront, in writing this essay, the inevitable discomforts of writing about race, and to ask myself whether the desire to "know" Babo isn't the desire to master him. Is Melville saying, instead, that Babo knows something about me?

University of California, Berkeley

Notes

1. Herman Melville, "Supplement," in *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), 268–69.
2. Ibid., 13.
3. Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno," in *Great Short Works of Herman Melville*, ed. Warner Berthoff (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 246, 292, 272. Future references to this text will be cited by page number.
4. Homi K. Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," in *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), 102–22.
5. See Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 234–35. Lott sees Babo's charade as an ingenious re-appropriation of the popular stage genre of blackface minstrelsy. The implication is that Captain Delano's inadequate responses to the slaves in secret revolt have been so conditioned by forms such as minstrelsy that the blacks are reduced to instances of white fantasy about them, a fact that the insurrectionaries use to their own advantage.
6. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," in *The Location of Culture*, 91.
7. Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders," 112.
8. Isaac Ray, *A Treatise on the Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962), 253. For evidence that Melville was familiar with Ray's work, see Paul McCarthy, *"The Twisted Mind": Madness in Herman Melville's Fiction* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990), 142.
9. My understanding of Delano's failure to read himself into the story

has been influenced by Carolyn Porter's application of Lukacs's phrase "reification" in her study of classic American literature: "Man makes his world but then it takes on the appearance of an alien, autonomous, given world" (*Seeing and Being: The Plight of the Participant Observer in Emerson, James, Adams and Faulkner* [Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981], 26). For an ideological analysis of this reifiying blindness that focuses on ongoing problems in critical interpretation, see James H. Kavanagh, "That Hive of Subtlety: 'Benito Cereno' and the Liberal Hero," in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 352–83.

10. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Random House, 1965), 199–278, passim.

11. Quoted in Foucault, 213. For Spurzheim's influence in antebellum New England medicine, see William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1815–1859* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 35–36.

12. Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 140–45.

13. Foucault, 254.

14. A partial explanation for this association might lie in the fact that many of the early European asylums for the insane were converted monasteries. See David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston & Toronto: Little, Brown, 1971), 134.

15. On the logic of anti-Catholicism in "Benito Cereno" and Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum," see Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebelum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 162–81.

16. The following section draws primarily from three accounts: Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum;* Mary Ann Jimenez, *Changing Faces of Madness: Early American Attitudes and Treatment of the Insane* (Hanover & London: University Press of New England for Brandeis University Press, 1987); and Ruth Caplan, *Psychiatry and the Community: The Recurring Concern with Environment in the Prevention and Treatment of Mental Illness* (New York: Basic Books, 1969). Rothman and Jimenez, trained as social historians, are more suspicious of the newly emerging field of psychiatry than Caplan, a psychiatric researcher. (Cf. Jimenez's conclusion that "the first interest shown in the insane [in nineteenth-century America] was not a humane one," [129]; and Caplan's view that early nineteenth-century "moral treatment" was "a prophetic movement . . . many of [whose] practices resemble those of progressive programs of our own day" [4].) However, all three are more attuned to historical nuance and ideological contestation in the histories than Foucault, who sees liberal reformers as little more than unwitting errand boys for a brutal yet flexible regime of control.

17. Quoted in Caplan, 39.

18. Ibid., 8–9.

19. Jimenez, 73.

20. Pliny Earle and Edward Jarvis, quoted in Rothman, 112, 115.

21. Jimenez, 88–97.
22. Quoted in ibid., 41.
23. Allan Melvill died in 1832 of what now seems to be a case of lumbar pneumonia. Family letters refer to the "melancholy spectacle" presented by the "delirium" of his final days—a condition which at the time indicated, according to Paul McCarthy, "insanity, psychopathy, and almost any psychopathologic manifestation" (*"The Twisted Mind,"* 4).
24. Jimenez, 75–76.
25. Ibid., 151.
26. L. Clarke Davis, "A Modern Lettre de Cachet," *Atlantic Monthly* 21 (May 1868): 600, 589, 592.
27. S. P. Fullinwider argues that this mechanization and emphasis on efficiency was a scientific forerunner of the cult of the machine that swept business management later in the nineteenth century. See S. P. Fullinwider, *Technicians of the Finite: The Rise and Decline of the Schizophrenic in American Thought, 1840–1860* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982).
28. Isaac Ray, "A 'Modern Lettre de Cachet' Revisited," *Atlantic Monthly* 21 (August, 1868): 242–43, 239, 227.
29. Caplan, 83.
30. Quoted in Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London and New York: Verso, 1990), 57–58.
31. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life Among the Lowly* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 609.
32. For a brilliant and at times enraging examining of the slippages of "inalienability" in the antebellum period, see Walter Benn Michaels, "Romance and Real Estate," in *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 87–112.
33. Priscilla Wald, "Terms of Assimilation: Legislating Subjectivity in the Emerging Nation," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 65. On the justifications of the Indian Removal Act on the basis of conceptions of citizenship and property, see Lucy Maddox, *Removals: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 15–49.
34. Isaac Ray, *A Treatise*, 5, 32, 325, 328.
35. Jimenez, 128.
36. Stowe, 626.
37. Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 136–38.
38. Figures cited in Stanton, 59.
39. Calhoun, in a letter defending slavery to the British ambassador, wrote that "The census and other authentic documents show that, in all instances in which the States have changed the former relations between the two races, the condition of the African, instead of being improved, has become worse. They have been invariably sunk into vice and pauperism, accompanied by the bodily and mental inflictions incident thereto—deafness, blindness, insanity, and idiocy—to a degree without example; while, in all other States which have retained the ancient relation between them, they have improved

greatly in every respect—in number, comfort, intelligence, and morals." Quoted in Gilman, 137.

40. "Who would believe," asked a writer in the *American Journal of Insanity* in 1851, "without the fact, in black and white, before his eyes, that *every fourteenth colored person in the State of Maine is an idiot or lunatic?*" Quoted in Stanton, 65; see also 214, no. 24.

41. Quoted in Suman Fernando, *Race and Culture in Psychiatry* (London & Sydney: Croom Helm, 1988), 24. On Cartwright's marginality, see Stanton, vii.

42. Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Elsie Venner: A Romance of Destiny* (Boston & New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1891), 127, 146, 154.

43. Quoted in Jimenez, 110, 111.

44. George Fitzhugh, "Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society," in *Ante-Bellum: Three Classic Works on Slavery in the Old South*, ed. Harvey Wish (New York: Capricorn Books, 1960), 90–93.

45. See Robert M. Cover, *Justice Accused: Antislavery and the Judicial Process* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 110–16.

46. According to Leonard W. Levy, "Shaw . . . had commented that one of the many evils in legally sanctioning slavery was that it degraded ministers of the law and profaned the sanctuary of justice" (*The Law of the Commonwealth and Chief Justice Shaw* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957], 93.).

47. Ibid., 98.

48. Ibid., 101.

49. See Michael Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Art and Politics of Herman Melville* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 288–316; and Brook Thomas, *Cross-Examinations of Law and Literature: Cooper, Hawthorne, Stowe, and Melville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 206 ff. I am indebted to these two works for their pioneering examinations of legal issues in antebellum literature. For the relevance of the Sims case to "Benito Cereno," see Susan Weiner, "'Benito Cereno' and the Failure of Law" *Arizona Quarterly* 47, 2 (Summer, 1991): 1–28.

50. Cited in David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis: 1848–1861* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 47–48.

51. My discussion of the law's role in regulating suspicion is informed by René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

52. Ray, *A Treatise*, 19.

53. Morton J. Horwitz, *The Transformation of American Law, 1780–1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 252.

54. Shaw's ruling in favor of a railroad company in the case of Farwell v. Boston & Worcester R.R. (1842) was pivotal in the development of this "fellow-servant rule"; in the case, he determined that the railroad company was not liable for an injury sustained by one of its workers due to the carelessness of another worker because the risk of such injury was a "natural and ordinary risk" taken on voluntarily by the worker when he signed his employment contract. See Levy, 169.

55. Horwitz, 262. For an intriguing rebuttal of this view, see Thomas Has-

kell, "Capitalism and the Origins of Humanitarian Sensibility," *American Historical Review* 90. 2 (April, 1985): 339–61 and no. 3, 547–66.

56. Quoted in Levy, 216.

57. Quoted in Lynn Gamwell and Nancy Tomes, *Madness in America: Cultural and Medical Perceptions of Mental Illness Before 1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 104. I thank Lynn Gamwell for making page proofs of this marvelous book available to me before its publication.

58. Jacques Lacan, "On a Question Preliminary to Any Treatment of Psychosis," in *Écrits: a Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1977), 215–17.

59. Philip Fisher, "Democratic Social Space: Whitman, Melville, and the Promise of American Transparency," in *The New American Studies: Essays from Representations*, ed. Philip Fisher, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 70–111. While I find Fisher's article provocative and informative, I disagree with his suggestion that a cultural preoccupation with "ritual" is "neurotic," while "production" is healthy. The opposition between the terms "ritual" and "production" seems to me to border on ethnocentrism—if not incoherence, given the deeply ritualistic qualities of productivity in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia.

60. Cover, 175.

61. Jean Fagan Yellin, "Black Masks: Melville's 'Benito Cereno'," *American Quarterly* 22. 3 (Fall, 1970): 688.

62. Melville, *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, 11.

63. Quoted in Gamwell and Tomes, 81.