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The Literary Significance of Herman Melville’s *Benito Cereno*: An Analytical Reflection on *Benito Cereno* as a Fictional Narrative

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Abstract:

In Herman Melville’s *Benito Cereno* (1855), Captain Amasa Delano discovers a distressed slave ship in need of aid, only to later find out that his perception of the dire situation was completely incorrect. Melville’s novella is derived from Delano’s nonfiction account of the experience, titled *Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres* (1817). This paper focuses on three questions that demonstrate why Melville wrote a novella almost completely derived from a nonfiction account of the events aboard the ship. In order to understand why Melville’s novella is powerful, one must ask, as an overarching question why he wrote it, and, more specifically, what Melville was attempting to communicate to his American readership by writing the novella. Studying what Melville changed from the nonfiction account is important in wholly understanding Melville’s intentions in *Benito Cereno*. This ultimately goes to show that fictional narratives can be as effective as nonfiction, if not more influential in illuminating complex realities that are likely outside of one’s limited perception.

Keywords: Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno*, Amasa Delano, slavery, African American
In Herman Melville’s *Benito Cereno* (1855), Captain Amasa Delano discovers a distressed slave ship in need of aid, only to later find out that his perception of the dire situation was completely incorrect. Captain Delano misreads the social hierarchy of the Spanish Captain Benito Cereno of the San Dominick by remaining ignorant of the slave revolt occurring on the ship while he is on it. Melville’s novella is derived from Delano’s nonfiction account of the experience, titled *Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres* (1817). Consequently, it is important to acknowledge what Melville’s fictional version of the slave revolt brings forth for a readership, that Captain Delano’s nonfiction account cannot accomplish. This paper focuses on three questions that demonstrate why Melville wrote a novella almost completely derived from a nonfiction account of the events aboard the ship. In order to understand why Melville’s novella is powerful, one must ask, as an overarching question why he wrote it, and, more specifically, what Melville was attempting to communicate to his American readership by writing the novella. Studying what Melville changed from the nonfiction account is important in wholly understanding Melville’s intentions in *Benito Cereno*. This ultimately goes to show that fictional narratives can be as effective as nonfiction, if not more influential, in illuminating complex realities that are likely outside of one’s limited perception.

To begin, one must pinpoint the differences between Captain Delano’s nonfiction account of his experience and Melville’s fictional novella, and analyze why Melville made these changes. Historically, Captain Delano’s experience took place in 1805, but Melville begins his work by introducing the story as occurring in 1799; the social context of the eighteenth century can explain why Melville set the story six years behind its actual occurrence. According to Jeannine Marie DeL Lombard, in an article titled “Salvaging Legal Personhood: Herman Melville’s *Benito
Cereno,” Melville may have changed the date to 1799 because it was a “pivotal year in the Haitian Revolution” (35), in which successful slave revolts were taking place. In addition to the changed date, Melville changed the names of the ships: Amasa Delano’s ship was changed from Perseverance to Bachelor’s Delight, and Benito Cereno’s ship from the Tryal to San Dominick. San Dominick connects to the Haitian Revolution and Saint Domingo: where the revolutions took place in Haiti. Infamous literary works have derived from this such as, Secret History; or The Horrors of St. Domingo and Laura (1773), written by Leonora Sansay, which narrates from a white perspective, a slave revolt taking place there. The Fugitive Slave Law and the Compromise of 1850 are also in the context of Melville’s work due to Benito Cereno being published in 1855. The novella brings the historical and legal context together with the intellectual and moral realities of slavery in both Spanish and Anglo-America. DeLombard uses Melville’s discussion of legal personhood to show that “neither rebellion nor escape automatically conferred independence – much less than an autonomous voice with which to affirm and enact independence” (36). This sheds light on how difficult attaining freedom was prior to the Emancipation in 1865.

Historical Events in the Context of Benito Cereno

Addressing Melville’s authorial intentions is crucial to understanding why the novella is effective. Heavy research on the topic brings forth the conclusion that literary techniques that are only available for fictional work justify Melville’s Benito Cereno. DeLombard claims that Melville “investigates the temporal dimensions of unfreedom with a plot whose logic—and dramatic tension—centers on characters who move in and out of various states of captivity, rebellion, and fugitiveness” (36). This phenomenon is called “retractable personhood,” a term coined by Joan Dayan (DeLombard 36). Explaining social dynamics such as retractable
personhood cannot be effectively communicated via nonfiction work because the author does not insert interpretation or commentary on the experiences of other people. On the contrary, Melville is able to insert interpretation, and furthermore, an exaggeration of the social dynamics at play in the novella by drawing out the temporal status of freedom for the people on the ship. One assumes that the Spanish are in control, and the slaves are subdued aboard the slave ship; this is clearly not the case due to the slaves having taken over the ship. The mutiny implements the temporal status of freedom because the Spanish become subdued, and the slaves grant themselves temporary freedom by overtaking Cereno and his crew. At the end of the story the roles are again reversed when the Spanish and Delano’s men recapture the ship, and enslave Babo and the rest of the rebellious slaves. This is particularly interesting when considering the Fugitive Slave Law and Compromise of 1850 had been interested just five years prior to Melville’s publication of *Benito Cereno*. A fugitive slave also had a temporal status of freedom depending on what part of America he or she was in, and could gain or lose freedom according to location until the stricter limitations in the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 were brought into legislation. Melville opposed slavery throughout his life, but American perceptions of slavery were mixed at this time, which is why Melville uses characters to reinforce the evils of the slave trade. Melville uses Delano’s narrative to tempt the American reader, which reveals how racially blind one may be. The novella foreshadows that Delano is missing the whole reality on the ship, but reassures the reader that the situation is in fact under control. According to DeLombard, “narrative is the literary and often legal means by which we understand, order, and assign authority to the past” (37). Furthermore, “the past is primarily a source of authority, especially in precedent oriented Anglo U.S. law where history is not only a source of authority but of legitimacy” (36).
Authority and legitimacy are important aspects of both *Benito Cereno* and Captain Delano’s nonfiction work because of the way they shape the public’s perception of slavery going forward; furthermore they go to explain why Captain Delano was not able to understand that a mutiny was occurring aboard the San Dominick. Captain Delano represents the American and Spanish populations in the novella, and response to Cereno’s ship is relevant because he “seeks to authorize and order the criminal cause against the slave rebels through an officially sanctioned retrospective narrative” (DeLombard 37). Captain Delano’s response to the slave revolt is inaccurate because he is unable to perceive the raw nature of the events because his “retrospective narrative” blinded him from realizing it was a mutiny at all. Captain Delano’s reaction delineates the American and Spanish perception of slavery in this sense, and Melville uses his reaction to show the temporal transitioning of legal personhood and distinguishing innocence from evil.

*Captain Delano’s Romantic Racialism*

Other critics have concluded that Captain Delano’s ignorance of the mutiny can be explained by “romantic racialism,” which is the largely Northern, sentimental belief that blacks were childlike and good natured” (1). The idea of romantic racialism was later further expanded to become part of what is known today as “blackface minstrelsy” (Richards 1). Jason Richards goes on to say that “Delano’s prejudice derives from stereotypes fostered by minstrelsy, and that Babo, in his role as a devoted servant, dons a figurative blackface mask by playing to the Yankee’s racial fantasies,” or racial expectations (1). Melville reinforces this dynamic in his novella through his description of Babo literally maneuvering and supporting Benito Cereno’s body, as “Babo uses Cereno as a kind of surrogate body, through which he occupies, burlesques, and menaces colonial authority” (Richards 1). Also in a literary context, “it is only logical that
Babo’s implicit act of whiteface is balanced by Delano and Cereno, who are sea captains on one level, yet given Delano’s stupidity and Babo’s mockery of Cereno, resemble blackface buffoons” (Richards 1). The balance of characters in Melville’s novella reinforces the racial blindness and social dichotomies at issue; these aspects are unable to be discussed in nonfiction works such as Delano’s personal account, however. Babo demonstrates his power over Cereno through his actions and dress more so than through words. When Babo is captured and later executed, he continues his silence. Melville discusses Babo’s power through appearance in examples such as the pants, “which are made out of some old top-sail,” and furthermore serve as “a potent symbol of colonial conquest – the white sail” (Richards 3). Richards deepens the connection to blackface minstrelsy in saying that Cereno is Babo’s white mask. Babo is “forced to play the humble servant, but he wholly contradicts minstrel stereotypes, for behind his exterior lies ruthless ambition” (Richards 3). Babo “has a Napoleonic capacity to achieve revolution, but he does not have Napoleon’s imperial skin,” which means that “he must masquerade as a slave to cozen white authority” (Richards 3). Melville plays on this relationship between Cereno and Babo, where “Babo accumulates power and erects a virtual empire by leaning on Cereno, who ironically labors for his body-servant” (Richards 4).

Delano’s Intentions as an Important Aspect to Benito Cereno

In addition to the complex intermingling of the power structure between Cereno and Babo with regard to notions of romantic racialism, Daniel Hannah discusses the roles of a host and guest in Benito Cereno. His article further supports the literary need for Melville’s novella, and goes to show the importance of rewriting the nonfiction work as a fiction. According to Hannah, the situation in which Delano and Cereno meet is complicated in regard to determining who is the host because “Cereno welcomes the American aboard but he boards in order to come
to the aid of the Spaniard” (4), which foregrounds Delano as a host as well. Delano thinks of himself as host in the sense of his providing aid to the Spanish ship, yet he wants to be treated as a guest aboard the San Dominick. Additionally, Babo’s charade of being a faithful servant also has host-like attributes toward Cereno, and “the text’s sustaining of Babo’s illusion up until the moment of Cereno’s escape…depends upon Delano” (Hannah 4). This aspect of the situation necessitates a fictional account of the event, as Delano is not able to write about his own part in a larger social scheme happening around him, especially when he was not aware of it even taking place. Not only does Babo’s charade depend on Delano’s believing that Cereno is in charge of the ship, but Delano also demands that the slaves are subdued out of his racial blindness; “Delano’s almost manic attachment to the social order, the conditional hospitalities promised by a code of gentility, and of his belief in a racialized order” make it impossible for him to see outside of the charade. Babo uses Delano’s ignorant assumption of Africans to be “natural, noble, stupid, docile, and exotically available” (Hannah 4) to his own advantage in assuring that he will not realize that Cereno is actually being held captive aboard his own ship.

Hannah effectively discusses the relationship between Delano, Cereno, and Babo in terms of host, guest, and hospitality. The theory is important to the larger discussion of Melville’s novella because it illuminates for the reader Delano’s perspective and expectation of Africans in the nineteenth century, which serves to explain why Delano was not able to realize the mutiny. Additionally, Benito Cereno provides a deeper insight to the cultural causes and effects that the event had on society. Melville balances the characters of Delano, Cereno, and Babo in his work so that they necessitate one another. Cereno and Babo’s relationship is ironic because Cereno literally leans on Babo, while Babo figuratively uses Cereno’s body. Additionally, Melville intentionally uses Delano’s racial blindness to speak to his American readership in order to show
the prevalence of one’s ignorance even in moments such as the apparent slave mutiny. As Hannah says, “Melville plots, like Babo, to deceive, to play upon the reader’s desires for racialized and sexualized order, and narrates an experience of uncanny, erotic pleasure in the disorder of the ship-space” (4). This is to say that Melville uses the reader’s racial blindness and expectations to hide the real plot of the novel as Babo uses Delano’s racial blindness in the story itself. Melville also emphasizes in the beginning of the novella that Delano goes aboard to offer aid but “refuses to immediately come” out of his “no small interest in the act of observing, [which] freezes his capacity to act” (Hannah 5). Hannah is pointing out that Delano’s intention was mostly altruistic, but his selfish curiosity impeded from effectively aiding the men in need on the ship. This further complicates the host and guest theory but also entangles good and evil in Delano; he does not come aboard solely out of sincere intentions, but also for the satisfaction of his pleasure at observing the sailors and slaves. Delano was a Northerner, which means he would not have had slaves himself, but it does not remove him from the American selfishly curious frame of mind.

**Benito Cereno as a Response to Melville’s Skepticism**

The racial blindness that Melville draws attention to in his novella reflects his own perception of his readership during the mid-nineteenth century, in which he thought Americans to be ignorant of cultural and social issues. According to Dana Luciano, Melville’s “skepticism in 1855 about the capacity for critical thought…is well known” (4). When one couples the relentless reminder of Delano’s racial blindness with Melville’s general skepticism during this time, it becomes clear that his novella is just as much a work for his readers as it is an avenue for Melville to insightfully examine the social dynamics and Delano’s role in them aboard the San Dominick. According to Luciano, *Benito Cereno* can be considered a “product of that
skepticism, [and] is a kind of shock treatment— an attempt to jolt the reader out of received thought patterns,” (Luciano 4). Furthermore, Melville’s novella is considered a Counter-monumentalist work because of the way it treats the realities of the slave trade.

Counter-monumental works are similar to postmodernist works; however, they originated much earlier. Counter-monumentalists believed that the “past, present and future are linked not in a single linear narrative but in an ever-evolving multiplicity of ways” (Luciano 4). In this context, Benito Cereno presents itself as a timeless insight into the problematic social dynamic of slavery even when the slaves are actually the captive sailors. The novella does work for the counter-monumentalist movement in this regard in ways that Captain Delano’s account could not have done. As Luciano points out, “the past, as Delano knows it, is never very complex, its lessons are self-evident, its separation from the present is anchored by a few, select timeless truths” (4); on the contrary, the reality of Delano’s situation is due to an “inability to recognize the slave rebellion aboard the San Dominick…[due to] a temporal disability— an effect of what Nietzsche terms the historical damage sustained in the monumental mode of history” (4).

Benito Cereno illuminates for the reader the reality in which Captain Delano approached Cereno’s ship in ways that the nonfiction account does not convey. In his novella, Melville claims that while Cereno “seems hardly to appreciate his charity, Delano’s approval of himself makes up for the Spanish captain’s indifference” (Luciano 5), which illuminates the tendency of Americans to gratify themselves for kind acts regardless of the receiver’s appreciation. In other words, one performs benevolent deeds to validate that he or she is good; the receiver’s appreciation of the deed is irrelevant, which ultimately negates the kindness of the deed. When the reader learns that Delano boarded Cereno’s ship not out of consideration for the men in need but for his own gratification, his ignorance seems more appalling than ever. For Delano, acting
as a moral person can be accomplished through deeds such as boarding Cereno’s ship, even if it is out of selfish intention: “Ah, thought he, after good action one’s conscience is never ungrateful, however much so the benefited party may be” (Luciano 5). Even after Delano has boarded the ship and provided aid, he finds himself too intrigued to leave. This goes to show that not only was he satisfied with his good deeds, but he also wanted to see the social dynamic on the ship in more detail. Although Delano could not perceive what about the San Dominick was unsatisfying, he was aware that the history was “unfinished” (Luciano 5). This connects to the counter-monumentalist movement because the “San Dominick no longer appears as an explained and contained fact but as a series of multiple possibilities bent upon perpetuating themselves in his own moment” (Luciano 5). Melville embodies the Counter-monumentalist narrative because he intends for the story to become larger than the historical event in itself.

Melville’s Use of Slave Mutiny Cases in Benito Cereno

In order to emphasize the social consequences that his novella would have on American readers, Melville integrated other sources about slave mutinies aboard ships such as the Amistad and the Creole. According to Alfred Konefsky, the Amistad brought the “legality and morality of the slave trade into stark relief” (22), which speaks to the skepticism that Melville was trying to shock his readers out of in the mid-nineteenth century. Additionally, integrating other slave mutiny cases into Benito Cereno also differs from the nonfiction work in regard to content, and heightens the realism for the reader. When writing a fictional work, the author is free to use other sources in order to emphasize a point in the work, whereas nonfiction works must adhere to factual information. Like other critics, Konefsky argues that Delano was unable to recognize what was happening on the ship due to “conventional racial stereotypes that kept him from apprehending social reality” (25). Benjamin Reiss goes as far as to say that Delano can also be
considered insane in the way he rejects reality on its face: “Delano sees only a knot; the knot is, in fact, produced by his own mind, but is no less real for being so” (2).

Reiss also discusses an important aspect of the *Benito Cereno* story that is not often discussed. After Captain Delano and his men recapture the boat and enslave the mutinous men, Babo “surrenders his body to the Chilean tribunal that sentences him to execution, but he carries his voice with him into death” (Reiss 3). As discussed, Melville makes Babo powerful in his actions, facial expressions, and dress, but the true identity of Babo is unknown in any version of the story (Reiss 3). Whereas “Cereno’s silence indicates the collapse of his mind, Babo’s voicelessness is a willed message of mute defiance to this former captor and to the law” (Reiss, 3). Babo’s defiance in this manner is what “almost drives Delano mad,” and “enforces a code of tactical silence on his followers and captives alike” (Reiss 3). His actions are considered to be a part of his “camouflage: a social resistance that takes the shape of acceptance, a masking of silent subversive intent with the chatter of normality (Reiss 3). This phenomenon connects to black minstrelsy in the way that blacks “imitated slavery in order to undo it” (Reiss, 3), and also because they needed whites to believe they were enslaved so they would not be captured as rebels. In addition to Babo’s “camouflage,” Babo also “understands that Delano expects obedience even if Benito cannot command it” (Konefsky 30), which is to say that Babo understands the white mask culture enough to perform the charade on the parts of himself and Cereno. Melville makes this apparent in a way that Delano cannot in his account because it is a hidden tactic in which Babo is received as “reassuring and nonthreatening” (Konefsky 30). Delano is “satisfied as long as the forms of slavery are vindicated” (Konefsky 33). Even though Delano is a Northern Yankee, he is not exempt from the notions of romantic racialism. Delano is “so engaged by the placid operation of slavery” (Konefsky 33) and with Babo’s devotion that he
tries to buy him from Cereno. Delano not only goes against his Northern American expectation, but he also clearly falls deeply into the tempting trickery of Babo, as Melville tempts his reader to believe Delano throughout *Benito Cereno*.

**Melville’s Treatment of Racial Blindness**

Melville emphasizes the agency of Delano’s ignorance in the novella, which makes the mutiny effective until Cereno jumps into the American boat. Aviam Soifer uses legal fictions to explain Delano’s psychological treatment of the slave mutiny. According to Soifer, a legal fiction is “a kind of scaffolding” to support law without “giv[ing] essential support nor to deceive” (Soifer 6). Legal fictions are meant to “channel thought” (8), and create awareness of particular issues in the legal system. William Page’s article on the “Ideology of Law and Literature” helps to explain Soifer’s use of legal fiction in studying Melville’s *Benito Cereno*. According to Page, “law and literature…centers on some aspect of law or the legal system; [the] application of the techniques of literary criticism to legal interpretation” (4). Furthermore, Page argues that Melville wrote *Benito Cereno* because it was a historical background that concerned him (5). The novella has significant cultural and social issues at play, and addressing them in an ideological legal way forces the reader to question the morality of the current legal system. Soifer and Page’s argument on *Benito Cereno* as a legal fiction that examines controversial topics reinforces the importance of the work as a whole.

Delano’s “insistence on his own common sense” and how it “helps blind him to what is really going on” (Soifer 14). This is brought about by the novella because it is a legal fiction; legal fictions “influence or even control how we think or refuse to think about basic matters” (8). According to Soifer, Delano cannot imagine the “possibility of a successful slave revolt” (Soifer 14). This means that for Babo to successfully overthrow the ship without Cereno intervening, he
only has to continue persuading Delano that Cereno has control. Delano’s ignorance makes him instrumental in Babo’s plan, and this demonstrates the involvement of nonparticipating Americans during the nineteenth century. Soifer claims “Melville might have been motivated by the need… to comment upon the general blindness surrounding the unraveling law and politics in the mid-1850’s” (15). In other words, Melville used Delano’s ignorance to challenge the stereotypical Spanish and Anglo-American treatment of slavery.

Delano’s ignorance on aboard the San Dominick shows that he is naïve, however, it does not follow that he is moral. The notion of romantic racialism throughout the novella also intermingles good and evil. According to Lee Bollinger, “the story is about the omnipresence of evil and injustice” (10). Each of the characters is good and evil, and Delano mistakenly assumes Babo and the rest of the slaves are wholly good. In reality, “good and evil are inextricably linked…with evil always ready to push forth and dominate at the first opportunity” (Bollinger 10). The slaves’ ambiguous morality represents “innocence and evil in the circumstances surrounding the slaves’ revolt and the American recovery of the San Dominick from the slaves” (Bollinger 10). While the villains in the novella seem to be the slaves, the morality of Captain Cereno and Delano is also in question because of their involvement in slavery. For Bollinger, the good and evil in the slaves and the captains “illustrate how close to the surface lies the evil within man and how innocence blends almost unnoticeably into evil” (11). Furthermore, “Don Benito’s complicity in the unfolding events of evil is as deep as any,” “as captain of a slave ship he is hardly innocent” (Bollinger 11). These are important points to understanding the necessity of Melville’s Benito Cereno because the ambiguous morality in the story is central to its theme of perception and the struggle against evil. Melville forces the reader to question what events
and which people are evil in the novella, which brings forth the reality that the seemingly innocent characters are indeed also evil, and the villainous slaves are also innocent.

Studying the importance of Melville’s fiction has brought forth compelling conclusions regarding American ignorance and notions of romantic racialism; these conclusions can only come from fictional literature. A central theme of *Benito Cereno* is the power of perception, in how it can be manipulated by outside forces, and also how it hinders one from understanding reality. According to the Honorable Barry Schaller, Melville uses this novella to further communicate a common theme of “the human struggle against injustice and evil” (38). Schaller points out that Delano himself is not a wholly moral man, and neither is Cereno, considering that the latter is the captain of a slave ship, and the former attempted to buy Babo despite his being a Northern Yankee. While many critics have attributed Delano’s ignorance to racial blindness and the power of blackface minstrelsy, Schaller goes further to point out that “Delano is not simply naïve or conditioned by a positive outlook on the world… he is unable to envision a world where blacks are not slaves and whites are not masters” (38). This reality makes him the most dangerous character in *Benito Cereno* because of his “inability to perceive evil in… the basic inequality and servitude of the Africans” (Schaller 39). Melville’s theme of the struggle against evil is illustrated continuously in his novella because of the “ambiguity of good and evil as well as the dangers of complicity in evil” (Schaller 39). Additionally, the struggle for justice against evil is somewhat lost in *Benito Cereno* when one questions the good and evil attributes of each character. Captain Delano and Cereno are both involved in evil acts, and Babo is responsible for a slave mutiny aboard the ship along with murdering several people. According to Schaler, “the captains regain power and authority, and Babo and slaves are subdued and returned to their world of subjugation” (396); in other words, the “moral blindness prevails” (396) over Babo and
the slaves. One can argue that Babo’s cause is just, and fighting the slave industry is respectable, but Babo was never given an outlet to tell his story as Delano and Cereno have been. This reality complicates the consequences of the event in reality, and Melville writes his novella to emphasize the ambiguity of good and evil in a person, and how entangled they really are when trying to determine if someone is good or bad.

Conclusion

The novella is powerful to the American readership as evidenced by the fact that critics are still discussing its consequences today. Furthermore, although Babo was ultimately put to death for his crimes, the successful mutiny that he led drew attention to the slave industry. It also helps to examine the perspective of Captain Delano, a seemingly kind Northern Yankee, who turns out to be ignorant and willingly evil throughout the novella. Captain Benito Cereno is a weak, sickly figure in the novella, but in reality he is the captain of a slave ship carrying valuable cargo. Melville uses Delano’s tempting narrative to make the reader complicit in accepting the existence of slavery. Consequently, the reader sympathizes with Cereno because he is held hostage on the ship, but this does not, however, change Cereno’s character or moral actions. The story goes to show how dangerous an ignorant person can be when confronted with the evils of the slave industry, though if he or she does not explicitly condone it. As discussed throughout this paper, the realities that Melville draws out of his novella are unable to be effectively communicated to the reader in Delano’s nonfiction account of his experience because he is part of the problem. Delano could not have possibly been able to write about his own ignorance playing a role in the slave mutiny, and his falling to the evil of slavery when he tries to buy Babo from Cereno. His account is necessary for a reliable retelling of the factual information from the event, but Melville’s Benito Cereno effectively draws out the important
intellectual and social realities at play in the work that are not possible in Delano’s account. Melville instrumentally changes aspects of the story such as the name of the ship and the date it occurred to reinforce the contextual background of the event, and he uses literary techniques to reinforce for the reader the social challenges and failures of American perspectives during this time. Melville’s skepticism was justified during this time, and *Benito Cereno* is an outlet for Melville to demonstrate his skepticism of his readership. In this case, Melville uses Delano as a reflection of the American people as a whole, and an insightful reader will be able to point this out. This is Melville’s victory over the racial blindness that he was up against during the nineteenth century in writing *Benito Cereno*.
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