Irreality Perception and Subject Making:
Melville's "Benito Cereno"

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Introduction: an American way of reality perception

After writing *Pierre* or *The Ambiguities* (1852), a novel tinged with incest, Herman Melville (1819–91) received a fatal wound from "the inhospitalities of the marketplace" (Gilmore 59). He was pressed for money in publishing *The Piazza Tales* (1856), the compilation that contained "Benito Cereno." To the "superficial skimmers of pages" ("Hawthorne" 418), meaning the reading public "directly calculated to [be] deceive[d]” (Gilmore 59), the implied narrator in "Benito Cereno" describes what happens in a Spanish slave ship after she has been superseded by black slaves and has received a call from an American, Captain Amasa Delano. The narrator reports the story through the eyes of Delano, the captain of a general trader and large sealer, and the only character that happens to occupy the position of surveillance and speculation—the panoptic position of knowing/power: subject. Melville seems to suggest that despite—and because of—his position of knowing/power, Delano is no exception to the "superficial skimmers" of the reality. The author makes us wary in accepting the reality recounted by Delano, and quotes Delano's buoyant, nonchalant remarks to the hapless Spaniard Benito Cereno: "[T]he past is passed; why moralize upon it? Forget it. See, yon bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky; these have turned over new leaves" (116). His remark echoes to Nathaniel Hawthorne's in the Preface to *The Marble Faun* (1860): America is "a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight" (3). Coincidence or not, two Americans, Hawthorne's implied narrator
and Melville's Delano, share a certain naivety about the way they realize their reality. Both of them are apparently innocent of, insensitive to, and complacent with, the social surroundings and their postures as the perceiving agents/subjects. Hence, the purpose of this thesis is to consider the effect of the American captain's naïve reality perception upon his own subject making.

I. Delano's position and the socio-historical surroundings

I. A. Historicizing Delano's privileged subject position

Let us start by considering Delano's privileged position of subject as an informant of the facts he observed on the Spanish slave ship San Dominick. The author, though expanding and altering the original story to a large extent, takes the idea of "Benito Cereno" from A Narrative of Voyages and Travels (1817) by the actual Amasa Delano, previously a soldier in the Revolutionary War. The historical Delanos were "the prominent New England family" whose "ancestor, Phillipe de la Noye, came to America in 1621, and whose descendants would eventually include Franklin Delano Roosevelt" (Zagarell 139, 132). Adopting only the white male point of view, the historical Delano was born, entitled to occupy position in the American mainstream and to formulate a part of an American history—his, man's not woman's—Delano's history/story. Melville seems to suggest that his Amasa Delano also occupies and enjoys exactly the same position as the historical one, i.e., the position of a "superior American moral referee" (Vanderbilt 72), or an inquisitor who cannot resist the "vagary that in the black he saw a headsman, and in the white, a man at the block" (85). As a "moral referee" Delano in the novella reminds us of Melville's father-in-law, Lemuel Shaw, who compromised his own abolitionist ideals, noted though he was for his liberal mind as a judge of the Massachusetts Supreme Court. Shaw applied the separate but equal doctrine to Boston public schools in Roberts v. The City of Boston, favored the Southern slaveholders with the pretext of preserving the union, and ruled on Sims’s case in accordance with the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Incidentally, this act "refused to accept testimony of accused slaves in proceedings against them" and effectively muzzling them (Thomas 124),
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just as the novella muzzles Babo, the former slave who has exploited the whites’ slavery discourse, virtually silenced his master, foiled Delano, and tried to run out the clock before his summons before the court. In the novella it is Delano and only Delano who is qualified to speak and to deliberate as a “moral referee.”

From the conversation between Delano and Cereno, we can gather that the former is engaged in the exchange of sealskins for the teas and silks of China, and that he is deeply tied with the growing spinning industry in America by supplying its material, silk. The industry required cotton as well, and relied entirely on the slave force in the South to procure it. Hence, it might be safe to say that the profit-minded Delano depends on the slavery in the South both for his own subsistence and for his social posture as a member of elite merchant class. In 1840s, ten years before the author wrote the novella, the United States was beginning to show signs of imperialism. At about this time, Evert Duyckinck and Cornelius Matthews initiated a nationalistic movement in favor of cultural and spiritual severance and independence from England, and John L. O’Sullivan braggingly advocated Manifest Destiny, justifying American expansion to the western part of the continent. In the novella of *The Piazza Tales* (1856), Captain Delano of 1799 partly shares the go-go Yankee spirit of the 1840s’. We see “the power [money]-lust of Western man” (Martin 126) look out of the benign mask—the mask that Delano adopts, counterfeiting the Christian love and norm of helping troubled neighbors, Cereno and his slaves, in the nearly shipwrecked San Dominick. Delano is never oblivious of the imperative of the market economy, “intending to say something to his host concerning the pecuniary part of the business he had undertaken for [Cereno],” while homoerotically proposing to Cereno a mock clandestine meeting, following his natural “prefer[ence] to conduct such affairs in private [presumably homosexual sex],” and “desirous that the servant should withdraw” (90) (my italics). Unlike the paranoiac Ahab in *Moby Dick*, Delano is not obsessed with defying and revenging the monstrous white whale that the former mistakes for the God embodied; nor is the latter so romantic (foolhardy) as the former as to forget the crux of his task, i. e., gaining profit. Delano sends his men
to catch seals, the small animals, the ones it is safe to catch. He does not dare to run a risk: only after does he ascertain whether "[the San Dominick] could be no wonted free-booter," he "pulled away" (47). He is, in a way, the undersized, and anti-romantic Ahab; but practical, conscious of the capitalistic rule.

I. B. Delano's American innocence to be questioned

In reflecting the way reality is perceived by Captain Delano, a man who can wield "a dictatorship beyond which, while at sea, there was no earthly equal" (53), we can refer to de Lauretis, the feminist, who quotes Foucault as saying "it is the power...that is the positive condition of knowledge [reality perception/making]" (Technologies 35), and concludes that the representation of racial/sexual reality in western culture "is defined from the frame of reference of 'man,' the white man, who has enforced his claim to be the subject of knowing" (Practice 111). He does not, however, seem aware of his own "positive condition of knowledge," either moral or legal, or his social advantage over his men in his American ship, the Bachelor's Delight or over the black slaves in the Spanish ship, the San Dominick. Sure enough, though he is a person difficult to regard as a bearer of ill will towards others, though his "good—nature" and "singular guilelessness" are compared to "the mild sun" (65, 67, 65), he sometimes looks upon the confidential talks between Cerenio and Babo with distrust, uneasily wondering whether they are conniving to trap him. Being an innocent victim paradoxically strengthens him, and he conceals, from those around him, including the readers, the wicked deeds he might have committed. Though as a captain he must be middle-aged, he gets vocal in reminiscing back to his childhood and emphasizes that "[h]is conscience is clean": "Jack of the Beach, as they called me when a lad—I, Amasa; the same that, duck—satchel in hand, used to paddle along the waterside to the school—house made from the hulk..." (77). He sanctimoniously displays remorse for having "betrayed an almost atheist doubt of the ever—watchful Providence above" (97). His other aspects are outshined by his plausible innocence combined with the beam of "the mild sun" radiating from him. It is with his apolitical politics that he unwit-
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...ly makes “the superficial skimmers of pages” unaware of the possibility that he is deceiving them. If Delano glimpses at Cereno’s identity and suspects him, under the aspect of infantile weakness, to be either befuddled by “innocent lunacy” or to be a “wicked impostor” (64), then the latter is stripped by the readers of his ridded innocence. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick hurls a spate of accusatory words at the innocent/ignorant: “an enemy,” if Delano is tentatively defined as such, wields a power that “is implicated not in [his] command of knowledge, but precisely in [his] ignorance” (7). This unknowing/innocence is Delano’s apolitical politics. Even worse, his apolitical politics rest on an “ideology [that] works most effectively through its unconscious hold on the subject and resists being conscious or explicit” (Kavanagh 353); and an ideology contributes to reality perception/making, as shown later in this thesis. Here we can resort to the Althusserian-Marxism-based concept of ideology: “ideology structures ‘seeing’ and ‘feeling’ before...‘thinking,’ and appears...to be simply the natural way of perceiving reality (Kavanagh 353) (my italics).

Let us now examine further the argument of Delano’s innocence in connection with his being an American by borrowing R. W. B. Lewis’s concept of the American Adam: “an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry...”; “self reliant and self-propelling”; “fundamentally innocent” (5). This was basically a myth of American innocence and an American consensus as well: if one is a [middle-class Anglo-Saxon] American, one should crow over “a single, omnivorous mission,” that is, “progress through consensus” (Bercovitch 56). This innocence contributed to the buildup of a middle-class Anglo-Saxon American homogeneous society that brutally precluded those un-Americans and brought about collective amnesia about what they did to un-Americans (non middle-class Anglo-Saxons).

I. C. The black rebellions and their impact on the white

Before elaborating on the innocence with which Delano puts his privilege into practice, to endow the novella with flesh and blood, we will instantiate some black rebellions, their impact on the white, and the resultant reinforcement of the ideology about the black. Although he sets
a time frame on 1799, the author bears in mind the stirrings, both domestic and foreign, of the first half of the nineteenth century. Domestically, the southern planters were cowed into defensive terror by Nat Turner’s revolt (1831), where almost sixty people, young and old, man and woman, were brutally murdered. On behalf of the planters, Thomas R. Dew, a professor at the College of William and Mary, likened black slaves to Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein in asserting his opinion on emancipation: “To turn ‘the negro’] loose in the manhood of his physical passions, but in the infancy of his uninstructed reason, would be to raise up a creature resembling the splendid fiction of a recent romance; the hero of which constructs man, and with the thews and sinews of a giant, but... finds too late that he has only created a more than mortal power of doing mischief...” (qtd. in Ginsberg 103). Let us turn our eyes toward some slavery riots in the Caribbean Islands, for instance, Hispaniola. Geopolitically, Hispaniola is located in an important place because of its first large-scale importation of blacks into the Western Hemisphere (Horsley-Meacham 94). The eastern part of the island was originally known as San Domingo or Saint-Domingue, and later as the Dominican Republic. Melville intentionally christens the Spanish ship San Dominick after the island or the father of its founder, Columbus (Sundquist 164). In 1804, the black general, Toussaint L’Ouverture declared Haiti, on the western third of the island, independent from France, and adopted a policy of terrorism to dominate the new country. It is in 1805, a year after Haiti’s declaration of independence by L’Ouverture, that we witness the historical incidence of Delano’s actual encounter with, and rescue of, Cereno from the mutinous blacks; yet, it is in 1799 that the author fixes the time frame of the novella so the sensible reader may discern a foreboding of the black festering rage threatening to explode at any moment. Equally important is Faustin Souloque, who gained power over Cuba in 1847, declared himself emperor in 1849, embarked on a reign of “assassination, torture, and massacre,” and invaded Sant Domingo (the Dominican Republic). In 1853, an article of the Democratic Review called Souloque the “despot of a horde of black savages” and warned the Americans that “[Souloque] would...readily exterminate every white man” (qtd. in
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Sundquist 160). On the arrival of the expansionist administration of the Democrat Pierce (presidency: 1853-57), this fear drew "the call for American intervention," and brought about "a new ideology of progress that paternalized the remnants of Spain's American empire" and held that "expansion was necessary to complete the dying European monarchy" (Sundquist 160, 163). Opportunity enough, the serialization of "Benito Cereno" started to appear in Putnam's Monthly Magazine in 1855, so some of the Melville's sensitive contemporary readers must have recalled the Cuba incident in 1840s.

II. Subject making and unmaking

II. A. 1. Subject making ①: manipulating the Sambo ideology

The terror-stricken white American elite class, North and South, must have been compelled to brace themselves for a possible black rebellion and consolidate slavery, while the Southern planters surely were eager to justify and fortify themselves against the abolitionists' attack. The following Sambo logic satisfied the Northerners as well as the Southerners, both of whom were suffering the post-black-rebellion syndrome. "Unlike the exploited and miserable white workers of the free labor society, slave workers were 'comfortable,' 'docile,' 'submissive,' and 'happy' Sambos" who greatly shored up peace and order in the South (Takaki 124). Sambos, like pets, are always faithful to and dependent on their masters, and hence preservative of their masters' privileged position of subject; in other words, slaves were the feeders to the ideology of the Sambo "child/savage animal." Lesley Ginsberg indicates that pro-slavery ideology relied on "the supposed animal-like nature of black people" and that it repeatedly alluded to the "cloying imagery bond between humans and domesticated animals, especially pets" (104-05). Carroll Smith-Rosenberg argues that the ideology of the black child/savage/animal helped the whites to establish their own narcissistic self image as the masters over the supposedly inferior blacks (841-73). In due course this Sambo ideology was romanticized and changed into the domestic fiction [discourse] of the happy slave-holding patriarchal family: "the slave generally loves the master"; "all dependents are slaves"; "children are
the slaves to their parents, guardians and teachers”; so are “wives and apprentices” “not only in theory, but often in fact” (qtd. in Ginsberg 105). In the nineteenth-century American society, whether North or South, the whites held peculiar notions about the blacks, reductively stereotyping them as “a Sambo—childlike, docile, irresponsible, given to lying and stealing, lazy, affectionate, and happy” (Takaki 116). Because “blacks had only the most minimal control over the mass production and dissemination of information,” this ideology of the black “child/savage, forged under the influence of Jackson (presidency: 1829-37) and the Market Revolution, perpetuated incorrigibly for many years. In fact, according to Gates, “[t]he largest percentages of [the Sambo] image appeared between 1880 and 1920” in the commercial world (327, 339-40). There were astonishing differences between the portraits of blacks (fig. 1, 2 vs. 3, 4): figures 1 and 2 are the portraits of blacks by blacks, while 3 and 4 are portraits that appeared in teapot covers on breakfast tables, magazine advertisements, and popular postcards in drugstores, targeting middle-class whites.

Despite and because of his innocence, Delano, the white American elite merchant, suffers some repercussions from these surroundings. We will analyze how Delano perceives the reality about the blacks in the Spanish ship, the San Dominick, how his reality perception is fabricated with the contemporary American ideology of the black, and how he corroborates his subject position. Delano “took to negroes, not philanthropically, but genially, just as other men to Newfoundland dogs” (84). When seeing a young black female with her child, he is fascinated and romanticizes them: the former is “like a doe in the shade of a woodland rock,” “[u]nsophisticated as [a] leopardess,” and “loving as [a] dove,” and the latter a “fawn” with “its hands, like two paws, clambering upon her [its mother],” “its mouth and nose ineffectually rooting to get the mark” (73). “[S]urveying, not without a mixture of admiration, the colossal form,” he cannot suppress his homoerotic desire for Atufal who is conspicuous among the general crowd in “the Ghetto” (62, 71). He feels terrified by Atufal: “with clenched jaw and hand, he passed Atufal” only to find himself “unharmed” (96) when he encounters him in his furtive leave of the
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Fig. 1. From John H. Adams, Jr., "A Study of the Features of the New Negro Woman," *Voices of the Negro* 1, no. 8 (August 1904): 326.

Fig. 2. From John Henry Adams, "The New Negro Man," *Voices of the Negro* 1, no. 10 (October 1904): 451.

Fig. 3. Postcard, 1907.

Fig. 4. Cover from Black Art Issue, *Judges Library* (February 1901). (qtd. in Gates 332-33, 345, 341)
San Dominick for his own ship. Moreover, when he walks between the black hachet polishers, he feels threatened and "an apprehensive twitch in the calves of his legs" (59)—a euphism for sexual assault. The black's supposedly fierce feature described here could be greatly attenuated if the pet-like Sambo figure was effectively deployed as a kind of prophylaxis, replacing the terrible image of "hypermasculinized" black rapist (Wiegman 96)—the image stipulated in the essentializing white fantasy of the black male's intensified biological potency and virility.

The way Delano and other whites observed and represented the reality about the blacks confirms to us that they imposed on the black "an extreme corporeality that defined [their] distance from the privileged ranks [the subject status]" of "the [western] societies of civilization," "whose order depended on the public acknowledgment of consensual fictions" holding that "contact with the body becomes the mark of barbarism" (Wiegman 94; Bryson 159). The whites deployed, we should not overlook, their deeply rooted Christianity that "devalues bodily constraints to focus on the soul" (Sánchez-Eppler 249). If derived from baboon, the name of Cerenos's private servant, Babo, grabs our attention in that, according to Webster's Dictionary, baboon is a large monkey or a person who "combines the qualities of great physical strength, low intelligence, and brutal appearances," though Babo's actual character, both physical and mental, does not testify to these qualities. "As for the black [Babo]—whose brain, not body, had schemed and led the revolt, with the plot—his slight frame, inadequate to that which it held at once yielded to the superior muscular strength of his captor [Delano], in the boat" (116). The possibility that Babo is derived from baboon is not altogether unfounded: the 1855 issue of Putnam's Monthly which inserted the serialized "Benito Cereno" also published an article on the San Domingo revolution that commented, "nigger is a man, not a baboon" (qtd. in Sundquist 154). The name Babo, if coming from baboo, becomes a little truer to its wise possessor. A baboo is "an Indian having some education in English," though Babo in the novella presumably speaks in Spanish and is not an Indian.

Delano seems confined in the traditionally western metaphysical
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thinking, the logic of either/or combined with that of negation: if it is either black or white and it is not white, then the conclusion is that it is black (Fisher 102). In other words, what the blacks lack, the whites have: "incentive to industry, 'moral restraint,' the principle of 'accumulation,' and 'control' over the 'animal part' of man" (Takaki 126). By putting the blacks in a category where the whites apparently do not belong, i.e., a category of supposedly low intellectuality and uncontrollable physicality (sexuality), and thus by consolidating the identity of the blacks, Delano can apply to himself the formula of $A = \text{not-}B$, and certify his own identity and subjectivity as a Northern white in a status equal to or even overriding slave-holding Southerners and Spaniards.

Perceiving the reality about the blacks according to the ideology the elite whites have formulated, Delano misuses "the realm of the eye and the [Emersonian] self-reliant 'I'" (Williams 152): to cite, for instance, "the stranger [the Spanish slave ship], viewed through the glass"; "on first seeing the stranger"; "not long in observing"; "at least in the blunt-thinking American's eyes" (46, 47, 51, 57) (my italics). He "look[s] on others [the blacks] with 'contempt and pity'" and "occup[ies] the place of the non-'racialized' (because non-specularizable) master of the gaze" (Edelman 50). Through gazing, as well as the ideology of the black, he corroborates his own erroneous subjectivity.

II. A. 2. Subject making ②: politicizing the master-slave discourse

Delano does not, however, simply remain sated by these imaginings. He applies to Babo and Cereno the discourse fabricated by the white ideology about the slave-master relation, and unwittingly indulges himself by confirming his subjectivity. According to Michel Foucault (170), discourse by definition has and is a power that should not be confused with the ability of a person to compose a story or to make a grammatical sentence at his own will; it is not that kind of ability, but a power anonymous, historical, socio-economical, and, geopolitical, and lays down various conditions on the linguistic field. Delano finds the relationship between Cereno, the captain of the Spanish slave ship, and his faithful private servant, beautiful.
No wonder that, as in this state [Cerenó] tottered about, his private servant [Babo] apprehensively followed him. Sometimes the negro gave his master his arm, or took his handkerchief out of his pocket for him; performing these and similar offices with that affectionate zeal which transmutes into something filial or fraternal acts in themselves but menial; and which has gained for the negro the repute of making the most pleasing body servant in the world; one, too, whom a master need be on no stiffly superior terms with, but may treat with familiar trust; less a servant than a devoted companion (52) (my italics).

Delano wants to believe there is a laudable and affectionate relationship between master and slave, to take it for the reality, and to extract the pleasure from viewing them—the pleasure that comes from, according to Norman Bryson (141-42), repetition. From Bryson's following logic of repetition, the secured viewer, Delano, could rest convinced and content that slavery would remain intact forever: "the image will not interrupt or break with the comfortable familiarity of the already-known [i.e., slave-master relationship]," in which "nothing can be advanced—except the cause of cultural identity and enjoyment (enjoyment of cultural identity), the soothing recital of doxology, [and confirmation of putatively superior Delano's subjectivity]." It is natural that, until the very last critical moment when Babo tries to stab Cerenó, Delano should not suspect the possibility of a mutiny by the slave or of a fraud by the slave and Benito Cerenó in collusion. Delano instead speculates: "[C]ould... Don Benito be any way in complicity with the blacks? But they [the blacks] were too stupid" (75) (my italics). In his preference to the comfort given exclusively to the elite/master class (though he is an American Northerner and not an actual slave-holding master) over the perception of a reality of the reversed role relation between Cerenó and Babo in the San Dominick, Delano gets caught up in a kind of fetishism. His enslavement to fetishism is explained away if we avail ourselves of the theory submitted by Teresa de Lauretis, and if we replace two words she uses, "female body," with "the master-slave relationship" in moribund slavery: "the fetish... stand[s] in... rather for the denied and longed-for [the master-slave..."
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relationship in America/female body],""the object of desire—the intrapsychic or fantasmatic [sic] image of [the master-slave relationship doomed to be subverted/female body] but found again and again in the metonymic fetish-signs [the affectionate master-slave discourse]" (Practice 275). This maneuver of exchanging words is within the bounds of possibility because "racism and sexism are interlocking systems of domination" (qtd. in Edelman 48). Actually, Lydia Maria Child, the popular female sentimental writer, abolitionist, proto-feminist, and contemporary of Melville's, said in her *Appeal in favor of that class of Americans called Africans*: "The comparison between women and colored race is striking. Both are characterized by affection more than by intellect"; "both, comparatively speaking, have tendency to submission" (qtd. in Lang 206).

Delano is, however, too naïve, innocent, and ignorant to realize that the above-quoted apparently beautiful master-slave relationship is far from the reality but a phantasm, a sheer product of the slavery discourse. Nor does he hit upon the essence of discourse: discourse, according to Foucault (185), makes a wager, a butt in severe political struggle. In the novella, Melville takes up the question of who speaks through whom and of who controls or manipulates the discourse of the other. Babo is merely "performing the officious servant with all the appearance of submission of the humble slave" (110), in order to palter, disarm, and rob of the American ship, the gullible Delano. Unlike the latter, the former is appreciative of the function of ideological power, just as some feminists are, including Elspeth Probyn, who is forthright in saying, "[White] patriarchy pre-empts any self-representation on the part of [the blacks]/women: their 'meaning' is already assigned" (94). Despite the echo of baboon (meaning a fool) that comes from his name, Babo is well informed of the rhetoric in which the subaltern is excluded from the process of self-representation (the process of becoming a subject) and discourse production (story/meaning making). He forgoes his right to devise from scratch some kind of method for discourse of freedom from the slavery, and instead appropriates contentedly the preexisting discourse and the degrading stereotype imposed on and determined for the black by the white ideology. He thus virtually usurps the theory of Spivack, the post-colonial-
ist and translator of Derrida's works. While "smoothing [Cereno's] hair along the temples as a nurse does a child's" (91), Babo takes advantage of the ambiguity or flaw inherent in the slavery discourse, in which the master would "become effete and enfeebled," and is made to backslide into the nurse/mother dependent child "by the cunning and disempowering daily care of their slaves" (Fisher 105). "[E]vincing the hand of a master" in the razoring scene (87) (my italics), he makes Cereno's toilet diligently and assumes the role of Pygmalion, the master, the subject, the assigner of his own taste/meaning to the object, the assigned, the weaker, and the carved ivory statue of the girl named Galatea. Incidentally the symbol of Galatea was in "wide currency in nineteenth-century American literature" (Bartley 461-62). This master-slave role reversal through Babo's appropriation of the western Pygmalion discourse, "the good captain [Delano]" intuitively senses but rules it out (47).

II. B. Subject unmaking: Delano's uncertain masculinity exposed

Now we are sure of the following. First, Delano, in his elite subject position, depends on the invalidated Sambo ideology and cleaves to the phantasmagoric master-slave sentimental discourse. Second, from the (ir)reality which he has fabricated and whose factitiousness he has refrained from investigating, he draws some merits: consolidating his intellectual status as the white subject gazing and dominating the blacks. We have been analyzing the effect of Delano's (ir)reality perceiving upon his own subject making; it is now about time to clinch our primary question of this thesis. The remaining task is to explore whether Delano's (ir)reality backfires on his own essential personality.

Probably Delano has slightly sensed the fatal flaw inherent in the method of his reality making, the method he has been enslaved by. In the world of his own phantasm, he abides himself and lives alone in the domination/exclusion of others. From a different angle, he is canceled out and (a)voided by others. He desperately needs to be merged, de-differentiated, homogenized, and homosexualy united with them, but who are they? Cereno and Babo. In his own American ship, Delano and his men, especially his high-ranking officers, are "connected with their interests
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and those of the voyage, and a duty owing to the owners," and nothing else (100). His men are not genuinely respectful to him; still less befriended with him. They are just obsequious to the dehumanizing rule of capitalism. His solitary state recalls his little boat, named Rover [wanderer]. He feels forlorn, it seems, and desperately craves for an affectionate bond with mates—a "mate" being of double entendre, meaning first, a deck officer on a merchant ship below the captain, and second, a companion, a marriage partner. He feels excluded and, moreover, jealous over Cereno and Babo since "[Cereno's] reserve was shown towards all but [Babo]" and since Babo is on "a sort [-] of [-] love-quarrel" terms with Cereno (53, 88).

Delano's ship, the Bachelor's Delight, lies at anchor in the harbor of St. Maria. The names of both the ship and the harbor accentuate Captain Delano's unmarried and therefore virgin state. They also can be construed to intimate hidden homosexuality, if we consider that by the middle of the nineteenth century, Americans had been warned of the danger that "the bachelor represented"—"the transgressive triple threat of masturbation, whoremongering, and that nameless horror—homosexual sex" (Bertolini 20). Beneath a disguise of "supply[ing] in their immediate bodily needs" (58) (my italics), Delano darts an eroticized look at the Spanish ship and at her captain Cereno and tries to withdraw the command—indicative of unmanning—from a "young man [Cereno]" "dressed with singular richness" but "never" "robust" (51, 52), or "a homophobically suspect (because scrawny and underdeveloped) bod[ied]" man (Edelman 205). Delano turns out to be homoerotically attracted to Babo as well, for he cites the examples of Johnson and Byron, who "took to their hearts, almost to the exclusion of the entire white race, their serving men, the negroes, Barber and Fletcher" (84) (my italics). Anti-abolitionist though he is, Delano in this story taking place in 1799 seems fully conscious of the contemporary antislavery social environment, in which, "[b]etween 1790 and 1820, antislavery writings represented intimacy between a black man and a white man with the sentimentalist vocabulary of benevolence: affection, attachment, brotherhood, disinterestedness, friendship, heart, intimacy, love, sentiment, sympathy, and tender-
ness” (Saillant 102). More endeared by Cerenon than by Babo, however, he sits down at the table in the cuddly with no companions but Cerenon, the two men “like a childless married couple” (89) (my italics). Seeing that Cerenon “is like one flayed alive,” Delano desires his body and blurs out: “where one may touch him without causing a shrink?” (93)

Reposed to see the benign aspect of sea and sky, Delano invokes in his mind Abraham, whose Hebrew meaning, Father of many, is an inscription to the impossibility of producing babies by gay union. Here lies a scathing irony: Delano plans to send to Conception [a city in Peru] the Spanish ship San Dominick; having supposedly escaped shipwreck off Cape Horn, the name of which evokes the image of phallic fertility, she has sailed to St. Maria, suggesting her still maintained virginity or barrenness. The impossibility of becoming a biological father symbolically renders him an expecting mother suffering from morning sickness. Unable to solve the riddle about the meaning of “gordian knots,” s/he stands mute with “knot in hand, and knot in head,” feeling “a qualmish sort of emotion... as one feeling incipient sea-sickness” (76), trained and experienced sailor though s/he is. Like an expecting mother, s/he feels relieved to see his/her symbolic expected child, that is, his/her “household boat” (77). The boat, Rover by name, suggestive of a straying child, “had often pressed the beach of Captain Delano’s home, and... had familiarly lain there” (77) (my italics), like a toddler in its mother’s bosom. As if offering encouragement to his/her child, s/he says to him/herself, “you are a child indeed” (77) (my italics). Delano is mired in the dire gender trouble where he becomes uncertain in terms of male gender, and unintentionally proves that like the (ir)reality we have found him fabricating about the blacks and their relationship with their master, “gender itself [is] a free-floating artifice,” “with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one” (Butler 6). He has lost the status of subject, unable to contain his sexuality within the (sexists’) norm, the male gender norm, the hallmark of the subject position that the subject must be always a male.
Conclusion: Delano enslaved and acting in his own irreal world

Indeed, the elite white Delano ought to be not only superior to the black slaves, but also professionally established, rational, dignified, matured, middle-aged, hence, paternal, heterosexual, and procreative; but the fact is that all of these qualities are forced on him, leaving him no choice but to innocently accept them, to play the expected role, and to make a(n) (ir)reality. He is and is not a subject. He is a(n) (illusory) subject who subjects the blacks to his ideologically perceived/made (ir)reality for his own subject making: a mere maneuverer of (the image of) the black (the black as the object). In a genuine sense, however, he is not a subject or Emerson's "self-reliant" man, but a victim of his own naïveté. He is subject (obedient) to a naïveté of his own breeding, in innocently "following" [his] leader," i. e., the innocent American Adam of the collective unconscious. On the surface level, as we have shown, he has half succeeded in making a(n) (ir)reality, a(n) (ir)real world based on the stereo typed blacks; but on the deeper level he has failed utterly. His exposed sexual propensity and queer—if one prefers to call such—male gender prove him less qualified as a(n) (ir)reality maker. Nor can he be a masculine role model for the coming Manifest Destiny believers or American imperialists in the 1840s. That he cannot solve the riddle of the gordian knots, the riddle that assured the correct answerer Alexander the Great of a promising future as a conqueror, a being synonymous to an American imperialist, means that he will not realize the "Manifest Destiny" of Alexander the Great but undertake the curse of the poor slave owner Alexandro Aranda, who overestimates the myth of his slaves' tractability and is brutally murdered by the mutinous blacks. From his behavior and mentality, we could anticipate what has not been explicitly unfolded yet in the novella: "wonted to the quiet orderliness [capitalistic hierarchy well organized like slavery] of the sealer's comfortable family of a crew" [the reminder of the docile Sambo and of his relationship with his master in the sentimental slave-holding family discourse], Delano would be supplanted and cruelly killed by his own men, though "a person of a singularly undistrustful good nature, not liable... to indulge in personal
alarms, any way involving the imputation of malign evil in man” (54, 65, 47).

These results lead to the conclusion that literally and figuratively, all three men are in the same boat. They forfeit subjectivity, i.e., the freedom to create in their own right their way of living under the racial or gender (ir)reality. Each of them is enslaved: Babo in slavery, Cereno in the master’s role imposed on him by his own slave Babo, Delano in his own (ir)reality and the paternal male role established under the “compulsory heterosexual” society, to borrow the phrase from the lesbian critic Adrienne Rich (23-75). As for perceiving/reporting/making/representing/describing a(n) (ir)reality to the implied narrator, Delano is merely one of those anonymous North American elite white co-authors of this discourse. With the authors’ consensually formulated ideology of the homogeneous (androcentric) society, Delano complies innocently and unwittingly, deprived of subjectivity (his own independent will). Correctly speaking, he is not a positive author (English)/auctor (Latin); but rather a servile actor (English)/actor (Latin spelled same). His innocence forces him to enact a scene. If he is an actor, he gets closer to the status of Babo and Cereno, both of whom outwit him with their collaborated performance. To iterate the phrase used in the novella, it can be said that Delano follows his leaders, Cereno and Babo. Like the two, he is de-throned from the position of genuine—if called as such—subject, and becomes an actor. Though he outlives the two, he is enslaved in the (ir)real world, waiting to be killed just like them.

Note
1. All subsequent references to this novella will be parenthetically included in this thesis. Herman Melville, The Piazza Tales ed. Harrison Hayford et al. (1856; Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern UP, 1987).

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Eitetsu SASAKI

In writing “Benito Cereno” of The Piazza Tales, Herman Melville, in a sense, transcribes what is perceived or fabricated as reality by the main character, Amasa Delano, a naïve Captain of an American sealer who happens to board a Spanish slave ship virtually under the command of a black leader Babo. In this thesis, clarifying the process of reality fabricating and using historical facts where necessary, I have tried to consider the effect of Delano’s reality perception upon his subject making.

When I come to think of the historical Amasa Delano, to whom the author owes the story, I find Delano privileged enough to be an apparently reliable reality-perceiver. The actual Delano descended from the prestigious family that contributed to the Revolutionary War and that would eventually include Franklin Delano Roosevelt. We also find that Delano occupies the position of a moral referee when we recall Melville’s father-in-law, Judge Shaw, who compromised his liberal policy to keep the South from seceding in the antebellum days. In the novella, Delano proves to be dependent on the slavery of the South for the mill industry he seems involved in. He is not, however, well aware of his advantage; rather, too innocent to realize the reality, he unwittingly helps build up a middle-class Anglo-Saxon homogeneous society.

To the scene of the novella in 1799, the author inserts the social turmoil in the 1850s: America was starting to expand its territory under the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, and this expansionism was conflated with the threat of the black rebellion that occurred both in America and in Caribbean countries. The ideology of the black savage and of the black childlike Sambo was useful in justifying the whites’ domination of the
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slaves, in confirming their civilized status as the whites, and in trumping up the discourse of the benign master and the submissive slave. In the novella, entirely dependent on this ideology and the ideologically made master-slave discourse for the reality perception, Delano is deceived by Babo, who acts out an obedient slave role and bears a plot of looting the American ship, and by Cereno, who looks like a master but actually is enslaved by his own slave.

Because of this method of reality perception (reality fabrication), Delano becomes not self-reliant but autistic, and bears a hidden desire to be united with others, to be specific, to be homosexually united with Babo and especially Cereno. Since gender abides by compulsory heterosexuality, this exposed desire threatens to unsettle his male gender and render him less qualified as a masculine role model for the American expansionists (imperialists) in the 1840s.

All of this amounts to saying that, enslaved in the reality of his own fabrication with the elite white ideology, Delano has had no way but to conform to the gender in order to let himself appear an adult male subject, fostering and paternal to the slave Babo and to the debilitated master Cereno as well. Like the two, he turns out enslaved, (forced to be) acting, and robbed of subjectivity (freedom to create one’s own way of life).