



## Radical Configurations of History in the Era of American Slavery

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**W**riting in 1849, critic Theodore Parker notes one spot of originality amid what he deems the bleakness of the American literary landscape: “There is one portion of our permanent literature, if literature it may be called, which is wholly independent and original. . . . So we have one series of literary productions that could be written by none but Americans, and only here; I mean the lives of the Fugitive Slaves. But as these are not the work of men of superior culture they hardly help to pay the scholar’s debt. Yet all the original romance of Americans is in them, not in the white man’s novel.”<sup>1</sup> Parker’s praise is undercut by the consideration that the slave narrative diminishes America’s stature in two ways: the very existence of slave narratives indicts the principle of freedom that makes America exemplary among the nations of the world; and slave narratives, because they are “not the work of men of superior culture,” hardly seem monuments of national triumph for entry onto the world literary stage. Narratives which reveal severely compromised democratic principles fail to provide foundations stable or patriotic enough for a swaggering cultural monumentalism. Instead of signifying a cornucopia of originality—consistent with a limitless landscape or an unparalleled experiment in democracy—the testimony of fugitive slaves exposes the hollowness of freedom and the failure of white American writers.

To safeguard the purity of national literature, Parker implies that an inseparable gulf lies between the slave narratives and the writings of white Americans, but I would argue that such a demarcation is false. Slavery pervades nationalism as an ever-present reminder of political sin, a repressed context always threatening to return and unsettle the foundations of a monumental American culture.<sup>2</sup> Abolitionists cited founding prin-

principles in their denunciations of political immorality. Even slaves inscribed radical selves with appeals to the words and actions of original American patriots, thereby assuring that racial politics entered into dialogue with a legacy ironically authorized by American history itself. In short, as Toni Morrison has insisted, “miscegenation” informs rather than detracts from a sacred body of American texts. Interpreters of texts, writes Morrison, have “made wonderful work of some wonderful work,” finding in the novels of Melville, Twain, and others a pure aesthetic that transcends race and culminates in a monument of “‘universal’” literature. But an awareness of miscegenation argues against any imagined purity of literary tradition, reinvesting American literature with “unspeakable things unspoken,” suggesting how words, images, metaphors—in short, meaning—derive from an African American presence that has been repressed through the wonders of interpretation.<sup>3</sup>

Encouraging critics towards a “re-examination of founding literature of the United States,”<sup>4</sup> Morrison’s strategy seems a not-too-distant echo of mid-nineteenth-century works whose commitment to republican theorizing reconceives the founding principles of a nation. In sharp contrast to both abolitionists and proslavery thinkers who used juxtaposition to lament the present as a degradation of a coherent past, republicans do not seek to explain how an ordered past indicts the present; for they do not accept the idea of an ordered or consistent past. Rather, republicans understand that contradiction invests the very moments of founding, that the meaning of American history is found in a legacy already riddled with irony and inconsistency. William Wells Brown, Herman Melville, and Abraham Lincoln all act as republicans, not by ironically positioning nineteenth-century slavery against the legacy of 1776 but by reading slavery into that legacy. In the same way that Machiavelli in the *Discourses* writes a republican history by not shrinking from states’ origins in bloodshed and deceit, Brown’s autobiographies, Melville’s tale “The Bell-Tower,” and Lincoln’s most famous speeches all acknowledge the impurity and imperfection of American origins. Each re-examines the political traces of race within the foundations of America and discovers a set of national origins permanently disfigured by freedom coupled with slavery, by political sin cloaked with civic virtue, and by a conception of liberty shot through with rapacity. Their critical approach does not simply bemoan the degeneration of the virtue of the past into the vice of the present; instead the republican criticism of Brown, Melville, and Lincoln configures America’s origins within a radical irony by juxtaposing founding history not against the corrupt present but against itself. These American republicans decry

national origins that are their own moral aberration, a history at variance with its own sanctified authority.



Before pursuing these thinkers' ironic construction of national history, it is necessary to examine the racial dimensions, often repressed, of America's monumentalism. Jasper Cropsey painted a sublime Niagara Falls to evoke the tremendous and savage beauty of Nature, and Herman Melville heard within Hawthorne's writings "the far roar of his Niagara." Along with engravings and lithographs of Virginia's Natural Bridge, popular representations of Niagara Falls provided the antebellum public with grand, powerful images of their country. When ex-slave Austin Steward stopped at the Falls, he—like Jefferson awed by the Natural Bridge—experienced an inspirational contact with the *terribilita* of the sublime. Listening to "the ceaseless thundering of the cataract," Steward mused in *Twenty-Two Years a Slave* (1856), "How tame appear the works of art, and how insignificant the bearing of proud, puny man, compared with the awful grandeur of that natural curiosity." Although the natural power that dwarfs humans paradoxically elevates Steward to a conventional meditation on existence, his narrative re-implants itself in the social world to structure an accusation. Unlike art patrons who purchased images of Niagara Falls, and unlike Melville who made the cataract a sign of native literary talent, Steward's thoughts contain no ether of national pride. He does not find himself impelled to a transcendental appreciation of republican institutions; instead, he returns to consider humanity in an even more debased manifestation:

There [at Niagara Falls] you will find the idle, swaggering slaveholder blustering about in lordly style; boasting of his wealth; betting and gambling; ready to fight, if his slightest wish is not granted, and lavishing his cash on all who have the least claim upon him. Ah, well can he afford to be liberal—well can he afford to spend thousands yearly at our Northern watering places; he has plenty of human chattels at home toiling year after year for his benefit . . . and should his extravagance lighten [his purse] somewhat, he has only to order his brutal overseer to sell—soul and body—some poor creature; perchance a husband, or a wife, or a child, and forward him the proceeds of the sale.

Once slavery enters the big house of monumentalism, a culture's sublime pretensions reveal themselves vulnerable to contradiction. Steward's slaveholder struts across the Falls, sullyng its greatness, leading

the citizen not to a rhapsodic tribute to America but to a more archaic history that supposedly had been left in the Old World among dissolute aristocrats. Steward's slaveholder shows embarrassing continuity with a tradition of seigneurial privilege which America believed itself to have escaped forever in 1776.<sup>5</sup>

Concerned with attacking business rivals and with the political imbroglions of a Negro settlement in Canada, Steward does not elaborate his portrait of an American sublime whose magnificent splendor harbors licentious tyranny. Monumentalism met with a more extended and severe critique in the lectures, memoirs, and fictions of William Wells Brown. The sublime, for Brown, could never transcend slavery. Even though the virgin character of the landscape seemed to invest national history with innocence, Brown saw that both the land and the patriarchal mythos suffered the corruptions of race slavery. Drawing upon that common image of the sublime, Niagara Falls, Brown asked in an 1848 verse entitled "Jefferson's Daughter,"

Can the tide of Niagara wipe out the stain?  
No! Jefferson's child has been bartered for gold.

In the same way that Emerson in "The American Scholar" pursues "the sublime presence" in that "one design [which] unites and animates the farthest pinnacle and the lowest trench," so too Brown conjoins the lofty cataract with a mundane newspaper notice announcing that Jefferson's slave daughter fetched \$1000 at a New Orleans auction. Whereas Emerson uncovers an underlying principle of unity, Brown's conjunction emphasizes disjunction within American monumentalism. The "tide of Niagara," though it inspires sublime paintings from the Hudson River School, is ineffectual in washing away the stain of slavery.<sup>6</sup>

In both speeches and writing Brown argued against slavery and racial prejudice, not by appealing to religious tenets—as many white abolitionists and slave narrators did—but by manipulating the discourses of American politics and history. His slave narrative and memoirs rival Douglass's classic autobiographies, recalling how he bribed white schoolboys with candy to teach him to read, thus linking, as Douglass does, literacy and freedom. Brown continued to improve his literacy, producing histories of African Americans' cultural contributions and, with the publication of *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter* (1853), becoming the first African American novelist. Soon after his escape from slavery, Brown emerged as an articulate spokesman for black emancipation, suggesting

that just as white revolutionaries demanded liberty in 1776, so too would black patriots demand theirs. Hesitant to cater to the complacent pacifism of many Northern whites, Brown used American founding principles to advocate violent overthrow of the slave power. In *St. Domingo: Its Revolutions and its Patriots* (1855), he no doubt both thrilled and shocked audiences with graphic scenes of Haitian blacks killing so many whites that “the waters [were] dyed with the blood of the slain.” He concluded the work by forecasting a similar scene south of the Mason-Dixon line: “Who knows but that a Toussaint . . . may some day appear in the Southern States of this Union? That they are there, no one will doubt. That their souls are thirsting for liberty, all will admit. The spirit that caused the blacks to take up arms, and to shed their blood in the American revolutionary war, is still amongst the slaves of the south; and, if we are not mistaken, the day is not far distant when the revolution of St. Domingo will be reenacted in South Carolina and Louisiana.”<sup>7</sup>

While these not-so-subtle whisperings of slave rebellion assailed the present by exploiting white fears of Babo-like patriots armed with cunning and razors, Brown also staged an insurrection against the monumental past. Throughout his writings, he critically remembers the sacred founding principles of America. He pledges himself to civic virtue without paralyzing himself with a docile acceptance of ideological consensus. Brown understands the lesson of Melville’s *Israel Potter*—that a citizen must actively interrogate America’s monumental legacy if the ideals of participation and independence are to be preserved. Yet, unlike Israel, who took up arms in the name of American independence and had his actions on the battlefield sanctified by the Bunker Hill Monument, Brown has no legacy from the founding fathers. As a slave, the fact that his father “was a white man, a relative of [his] master, and connected with some of the first families of Kentucky” only circulates as rumor, a spurious form of history.<sup>8</sup> Genealogy, for the slave, confers little more than an illegitimate legacy. Brown nevertheless authorizes himself as a historical subject able to comment upon the history of a nation that has denied him history from the outset.

Brown’s autobiographical prefaces to *Clotel* and *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* (1863) accord him a personal history that authorizes him to construct both fiction and history about slavery and the position of blacks in the United States. Although the audiences of slave narratives demanded that they adhere to the historical truth—a concern that led to doubts about their authenticity—Brown’s

autobiographical sketches serve a larger function than merely satisfying a readership's demands for accuracy. In constructing his own past, Brown constructs national history as well, demonstrating how shibboleths of monumentalism validate racial injustice. Details vary in Brown's memoirs of slavery and his escape to freedom; for instance, he records three different birthdates and gives contradictory accounts of his family genealogy, one claiming his mother was Daniel Boone's daughter.<sup>9</sup> The various narratives highlight different scenes from Brown's life in slavery and afterwards. *The Narrative of William W. Brown* records the author's quest for freedom and a name; the autobiographical preface to *Clotel* shifts the drama in order to focus on a slave bribing children to teach him how to read; the memoir of the author introducing *The Black Man* documents the slave's ingenuity in surviving, and his greater ingenuity in escaping. These diverse autobiographical accounts do not so much constitute a complete life, inviolable in the authority of its own experiences, as they subtly reconstitute history, implying its mutable and selective aspects.

Having formulated an autobiographical narrative from privileged instances of memory, Brown suggests how a similar logic of construction shapes narratives of American history. *The Black Man* devotes a chapter to Crispus Attucks, "the first martyr to American liberty," who ignited a crowd and emboldened resistance to British soldiers in a riot memorialized as the Boston Massacre. This episode glorifying the past concludes by censuring the present, whose faculty of memory is impaired by an ethic of historical construction that resists incorporation of nonwhite elements: "No monument has yet been erected to him. An effort was made in the legislature of Massachusetts a few years since, but without success. Five generations of accumulated prejudice against the negro had excluded from the American mind all inclination to do justice to one of her bravest sons. When negro slavery shall be abolished in our land, then we may hope to see a monument raised to commemorate the heroism of Crispus Attucks."<sup>10</sup> Brown practices a strategy which pits history against itself, disrupting the narratives it tells. Monumental history touches up, alters, or omits segments of the past, as Brown was not the first to discover. Nor is his perception that such alterations follow a race-biased logic particularly revolutionary. Rather, the comments of this fugitive slave are critically republican, articulating from within a counter-narrative to historical monumentalism.

A sly addition from the mouth of a fugitive slave can dispel the sublime

sanctity of tradition. While Brown complains of Crispus Attucks's omission from monumental history, he elsewhere fills the American heroic tradition with instructive touches of irony: "Some years since, while standing under the shade of the monument erected to the memory of the brave Americans who fell at the storming of Fort Griswold, Connecticut, I felt a degree of pride as I beheld the names of two Africans who had fallen in the fight, yet I was grieved but not surprised to find their names colonized off, and a line drawn between them and the whites. This was in keeping with American historical injustice to its colored heroes."<sup>11</sup> Certainly, Brown repeats his criticism of a legacy that denigrates blacks either by exclusion, as with Attucks or, as here, by grudging inclusion. Still more significantly, this passage unearths the ideological foundations of America's projects to fabricate a national history. Brown's use of the word "colonized" reveals how a consideration of race wrests monumental history from its nativist innocence and situates it within another unacknowledged and destabilizing past. Two different connotations reside within "colonized," echoing the oppositions which constitute the monument as well as monumental history. On the one hand, within the context of revolutionary remembrance "colonized" elicits the Colonies' struggle for independence; on the other, in the antebellum era "colonized" meant not simply to settle a new land in quest of greater freedom but to separate, and it was applied to the "Negro question" when discussing plans to transport emancipated blacks to Africa.<sup>12</sup> Brown mocks the staggering mass of the monument, pointing to subtle fractures that threaten the coherent narrative it encodes. In Brown's representation, the monument's double meanings—its promise of inclusive freedom and its practice of exclusive injustice—bear a mutinous relation to the narrative it presents.

Just as Brown's search for personal freedom causes him to flee to England, so too his search for a foundational history that is critical rather than blindly monumental sends him abroad.<sup>13</sup> In London Brown visits Nelson's Column, which depicts a heroic black man at the admiral's side, and reflects, "How different, thought I, was the position assigned to the colored man on similar monuments in the United States." That a comparison to English public monuments prompts his analysis is especially damaging to America's efforts to remember a national history unconnected and superior to Old World traditions. In fact, for Brown a consideration of the narratives encoded on ancient Roman monuments further illustrates the irony of American historical construction: "I once stood upon the walls of an English city, built by enslaved Britons when Julius Caesar

was their master. The image of the ancestors of President Lincoln and Montgomery Blair, as represented in Britain, was carved upon monuments of Rome, where they may still be seen in their chains. Ancestry is something the white American should not speak of, unless with his lips to the dust." Brown prefaces his conclusions with an ironic apology, "I am sorry that Mr. Lincoln came from such a low origin." Such conclusions question nationalist exceptionalism, which basks in declarations of America as the stage of a new historical era, a *novus ordo seclorum*. The history of the fugitive slave here denies that any rupture has ever occurred, and within the continuity Brown uncovers a foundational history of an older republic, Rome. His archaeological endeavor denies the myopic American construction of history by resituating national origins within a larger historical context which reveals the American citizen to be descended from slaves.<sup>14</sup>

Brown thus challenges not the past which America remembers but the ways in which it remembers that past. Like Nietzsche, Brown understands the role monuments play in forging a national consciousness. The word "monument" is derived from *monere* meaning "to remind" or "to warn," and monuments have an instructive purpose, ensuring that America's post-Revolutionary sons do not lapse into the irreverence of forgetfulness. Again like Nietzsche, Brown sees that forgetfulness inevitably accompanies the monument's admonition to remember. The root *monere* also implies "to say with authority"—and it is this authority Brown questions by reminding America how its monumental history, sanctioned by nationalism, both emerges from ignoble origins and effaces the contradictions in its legacy. In writing his autobiographical history, Brown intimates that America's monumental history forgets that it has strayed from aspects of its foundations. Near the close of his 1848 autobiography, he reflects: "While the people of the United States boast of their freedom, they at the same time keep three millions of their own citizens in chains; and while I am seated here in sight of Bunker Hill Monument, writing this narrative, I am a slave, and no law, not even in Massachusetts, can protect me from the slave-holder."<sup>15</sup> Here, *The Narrative of William W. Brown* rebels against the narrative of American history. The statement, "I am seated here in sight of Bunker Hill Monument," is immediately followed by qualifications that imply syntactically the fugitive slave's attitude toward monumental history by modifying the original statement. The reader must negotiate the contradiction which structures not simply the sentence but the fugitive slave's tenuous hold upon

freedom. At first glance, the sentence defines Brown's physical position relative to that icon of freedom, the Bunker Hill Monument; yet his act of "writing this narrative" is an act of historical remembering sharply opposed to the mode of history embodied by the Monument. Though he can see Bunker Hill, Brown is "colonized off" from the securities the Monument symbolically promises. Brown makes his segregation part of the American narrative; he divisively integrates his autobiography into the legacy encoded by the Bunker Hill Monument, an edifice Melville in *Israel Potter* suspiciously termed "the Great Biographer" of American history. Inscribing his separation into the architecture of the past, Brown makes inequality and contradiction part of America's monumental history. National narratives rise up triumphantly, only to be discredited by an unmasking of the chain of inconsistencies and exclusionary clauses feebly supporting the structure.



Although Brown critically evaluated how racial politics fractured monumentalism's configuration of history, not all post-Revolutionary sons were perceptive—or ideologically motivated—enough to note the fissures in the past. While Brown juxtaposed American foundations with his own slave history and artifacts from classical antiquity, George Lippard published a lengthy patriotic volume, *The Legends of the American Revolution*. As Brown did repeatedly throughout his career, Lippard inscribed a black figure into the revolutionary past. He tells the story of Black Sampson, who comes upon a "hideous object among the embers"—the burned body of his master—and swears vengeance against the British regimentals who committed the murder. Further incensed by the rape of his young mistress, Black Sampson takes up his scythe, calls his faithful dog, and wreaks havoc among the British lines at Brandywine: "The British soldiers saw him come—his broad black chest gleaming in the sun—his strange weapon glittering overhead—his white dog yelling by his side, and as they looked they felt their hearts grow cold, and turned from his path with fear."<sup>16</sup>

Lippard understands that the inclusion of a black figure into the sacred history of the Revolution may appear inappropriate and shock his audience. He advises the reader, "Start not when I tell you, that this hero was—a Negro!" Although Black Sampson fights for the memory of white patriarchy and the honor of white womanhood, the narrator fears that the miscegenation of a slave within a tradition of freedom may blem-

ish the patriotic legacy and call attention to the political contradictions of the present. These fears are not allayed by Lippard's invocation of racist physiology, making Black Sampson a "white" negro descended from African kings: "A Negro, without the peculiar conformation which marks whole tribes of his race. Neither thick lips, flat nose, receding chin or forehead are his." A direct and lengthy address from the author, intended to dispel any unintentionally subversive implications, is needed:

Do not mistake me. I am no factionist, vowed to the madness of treason, under the sounding name of—Humanity. I have no sympathy—no scorn—nothing but pity for those miserable deluded men, who in order to free the African race, would lay unholy hands upon the American Union.

That American Union is a holy thing to me. It was baptized some seventy years ago, in a river of sacred blood. No one can count the tears, the prayers, the lives, that have sanctified this American Union, making it an eternal bond of brotherhood for innumerable millions, an altar forever sacred to the Rights of Man. For seventy years and more, the Smile of God has beamed upon it. The man that for any pretence, would lay a finger upon one of its pillars, not only blasphemes the memory of the dead, but invokes upon his name the Curse of all ages yet to come. . . .

So the American Union may be the object of honest differences of opinion; it may be liable to misinterpretation, or be darkened by the smoke of conflicting creeds; yes, it may shelter black slavery in the south, and white slavery in the north. Would *you* therefore destroy it?"<sup>17</sup>

This authorial intrusion seeks to guard against a racial fracturing of America's monumental narrative by "colonizing off" with a series of apologies and explanations any trace of blackness within the Revolutionary legacy. Sensing that his introduction of Black Sampson into the "sanctified" Union may inadvertently perpetrate a subversive irony, Lippard fortifies his narration by appealing to the Union as a transcendental entity. Convinced that race slavery is unjust, he nevertheless refuses to urge its abolition and thereby to jeopardize the "baptized" body politic. The memory of the fathers in the legend of Black Sampson narrates a foundational structure stable enough to contain sectional crisis. Yet the span of temporal continuity between 1776 and the 1850s degenerates into an unbridgeable gap of temporal alienation. What Lippard omits is that the

“seventy years and more” that link a people to its legacy also act to divide a people from its legacy.

Although Lippard convinces himself this address to the reader has warded off the specter of “feverish philanthropy,” making it safe to proceed with the narrative of Black Sampson, he nevertheless calls attention to the fractures he has covered with rhetoric and patriotic zeal. In the background of his denunciation of those who would repeat “the leprosy of Arnold’s Treason,” one can hear the voice of more militant proponents of abolition who hold the patriotic legacy as a mere shibboleth. In 1844, William Lloyd Garrison pronounced a sentiment that must have sounded like blasphemy to Lippard: “If the American Union cannot be maintained, except by immolating human freedom upon the altar of tyranny, then let the American Union be consumed by a living thunderbolt, and no tear be shed over its ashes. If the Republic must be blotted out from the roll of nations, by proclaiming liberty to the captives, then let the Republic sink beneath the waves of oblivion, and a shout of joy, louder than the voice of many waters, fill the universe at its extinction.” In contrast to Lippard, Garrison could not proceed with the narrative of American Union. Whereas God told Lippard to honor the creation of his fathers at all costs and contradictions, Garrison was instructed to slay the unfaithful. The range between these two passages alarmingly illustrates how God, like William Wells Brown, could also speak with an irony inimical to historical continuity. While some Americans like Lippard ritually reaffirmed the Puritan promise of a blessed community, others, perhaps not all as extreme as Garrison in his call for heavenly retribution, looked at the present and doubted the future. Or, as Lincoln did in 1861, they saw an “almost chosen people.”<sup>18</sup>



The divine teleology of an America born to conquer a New Canaan now ironically threatened to unravel. The antebellum present seemed an exception, a political and moral aberration. In terms of rhetoric, we can understand this aberration within the national narrative by the trope of parenthesis.<sup>19</sup> In *The Estrangement of the Past*, Anthony Kemp uses the term “parenthesis” to describe a temporal consciousness in which the immediate past stands as an abyss between the distant past and the present.<sup>20</sup> The structure of parenthesis Kemp applies to religious history can describe the political culture of the antebellum era as well; 1776 became the pure, originary past, allowing America to remain in continuous

temporal and ideological harmony with its own genesis.<sup>21</sup> So close was that unassailable past, a citizen could count with certainty back to the moment of founding; as Lincoln began at Gettysburg, "Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty." Yet in the context of increasing talk of disunion, unity with 1776 seemed illusory; 1776 ceased to form part of the recent past and retreated into a mythically pure distant era. Parenthesis cordoned off the factional slaveholding present and thereby preserved historical foundations, ensuring that the contaminated 1850s did not infect either the past or the future *telos* of America. Although "Fourscore and seven years ago" indicated a connection with the past, it also marked the dimensions of the temporal abyss.

Parenthesis asserts that the origins remain pure precisely because it places the present in an ideological, temporal quarantine. Parenthesis deems the past virtuous and the present politically impure; America supposes its past a political virgin, refusing to see that it has spawned an ignoble present. Here, parenthesis resonates with the meaning of irony as ignorance purposefully affected. Bred with careful regard for their legacy, social reformers decried the incongruity of a nation at odds with its own founding. Few critics, however, evaluated how scorn and outrage over present practice acted as an ideological buffer insulating the founding ideals from censure. The present absorbed all of the abolitionists' contempt; the present became a scapegoat in order to preserve the unsullied reputation of 1776. In this sense, then, criticism of the present merely reinforces the foundations of America; or, as Sacvan Bercovitch has written, dissent actually acts as consent. Yet Brown, Melville, and Lincoln, as critical republicans, dissent from the foundings, not simply the present. Their acts of dissent evade the containment of the dissent/consent relation which for Bercovitch is so pervasive. Both Melville and Lincoln not only perceive that proclaiming a disjunction between past and present safeguards the past but also make their way beyond an ideological dissemblance that centers all dissent around the present in order to interrogate American foundings.<sup>22</sup>

While Brown's sketches of American monumentalism critique the present's remembering of the past and not the past itself, Melville's "The Bell-Tower" resolutely examines the origins from which monumentalism erects itself. Just as Brown implies that the colonizing off of Negro patriots on a revolutionary battle monument is inconsistent with the ideals they died for, Melville's story begins within an ironic disjunction: "In the

south of Europe, nigh a once-frescoed capital, now with a dark mould cankering its bloom, central in a plain, stands what, at a distance, seems the black mossed stump of some immeasurable pine, fallen, in forgotten days, with Anak and the Titan." In addition to implications of decline and ruin, the structure of the sentence parallels the image of the crumbling tower. The sentence falls from "once" to "now," an empty, poisonous gulf separating the two eras. Lincoln repeatedly adopts this structure in his "Address Before the Young Men's Lyceum" of 27 January 1838 in order to forecast the imminent erosion of America's political foundation. He tells his audience that the foundational principles "are a legacy bequeathed us, by a *once* hardy, brave, and patriotic, but *now* lamented and departed race of ancestors." The echoes of Titanic greatness on the Italian plain Melville imagines dwindle to a castrated stump; for Lincoln, a vigorous patriotic presence lapses into absence. In each instance, the parenthesis of present forms a vacuum of incongruity and intervenes between the "once" and the "now."<sup>23</sup>

This ironic incongruity, however, performs an instructive political function as an admonition to recuperate a vanishing past. Lincoln hopes to rededicate his audience to his ancestors' republican faith; for example, consideration of Washington's greatness can lead to an act of *monere*, of reminding or warning those of the present generation not to backslide into civic forgetfulness. Although not designated as a monument, the bell-tower of Melville's story—in its present state of decay—similarly returns the narrator to the history of a once resplendent small Italian republic. Imbued with an air of magical realism anchored by political allusions to Melville's America, the story promises to deliver a satirical allegory reminiscent of *Mardi*. Just as *Mardi's* narrator Taji witnesses the severe contradictions within the liberty-loving nation of Vivenza which enslaves the tribe of Hamo, "The Bell-Tower" transmits a critique of a republic that authorizes the erection of an overtopping edifice adorned with a mechanical slave named Haman.<sup>24</sup> But rather than shuttling between past principles and the present monumental project, Melville keeps his attention focused upon the founding moments, refusing to digress from his interrogation of the past with a denunciation of the present. That is, he does not succumb to the dissembling nature of parenthesis; he does not affect a purposeful ignorance about the foundations of a legacy in order to conserve its sanctity.

First published in August 1855, Melville's story narrates the prideful demise of the architect Bannadonna. Commissioned to construct "the

noblest Bell-Tower in Italy," Bannadonna watches the edifice rise, resolving to "surpass all that had gone before" (819, 821). He constructs a mechanical figure representing a manacled slave that advances along a track and strikes the bell upon the hour. On the consecration day of the tower, absorbed in some final adjustments to the bell, Bannadonna forgets the time, and at one o'clock the slave advances to strike the hour and smites and kills its creator instead. This homicide echoes an earlier murder in the narrative of the monument. As further proof of his ingenuity, Bannadonna creates a "great state-bell" destined for the top of the tower; the narrator thus designates him a "founder," accenting his dual role as one who establishes the foundation of the republic's tower and one who melts the metals and casts the bell (820).<sup>25</sup> Yet, at the moment of founding a murderous taint infects the design: "The unleashed metals bayed like hounds. The workmen shrunk. Through their fright, fatal harm to the bell was dreaded. Fearless as Shadrach, Bannadonna, rushing through the glow, smote the chief culprit with his ponderous ladle. From its smitten part, a splinter was dashed into the seething mass, and at once was melted in" (821). From this original sin, a host of other offenses against the spirit of republicanism emerge. Not wishing to compromise the glory that the great bell will bring to the republic, the magistrates and citizens ignore the homicide. Once the bell is finished, the civil authorities grow restless, pressing Bannadonna to determine the day when the republic can baptize the tower in a public ceremony. The magistrate tells the architect the city officials are "anxious to be assured of your success. The people too—why they are shouting now. Say the exact hour when you will be ready" (824). The republic shares in both the guilt of the founder's crime and the glory of his creation. It forgets the scandal of the past to triumph in the ritual of the present. Caught up in a narrative of denial, the republic ineluctably continues to erase the flaws within its history; it accords the murderer-founder a state funeral while, under the cover of night, it hustles the "rebellious slave" out of its dominions and sinks it in the depths of the ocean. The republic, intent on conserving the nobility of foundations that were never noble, effaces the blemishes in its representation of the past. Indeed it literally re-presents the past, altering its composition and structure, exiling unpleasant memories to the realm of amnesia by repairing the ruined tower and recasting the defective bell.

Melville's story acts against the body politic and records a genealogy of sin which the populace seeks to deny through specious historical constructions. Wishing to obscure Bannadonna's crimes as well as its own

complicity, the public discards uncomfortable memories in the abyss of purposeful amnesia; it declares it knows nothing about any crimes in order to fabricate an unadulterated legacy. Yet the narrator counteracts and exposes the bad faith of the community's dissembling ignorance by sketching a repressed connection between the "once" and the "now" and illuminating how the republican pomp of the city-state stems from the "cankering" bloom of Bannadonna's tyrannical license. Incongruity in the narration causes history to rupture against itself, laying bare how the magistrates and citizens place the sins of their own history in the parenthesis of forgetfulness to deny a temporal continuity that would indict their state.

The community's fraudulent representation of history coincides with Bannadonna's fraud in concealing a defect in the bell's composition. The fragment from the murderous ladle thrown into the molten mass spawns a hardly noticeable but significant defect in the bell's composition: "Next day a portion of the work was heedfully uncovered. All seemed right. At length, like some old Theban king, the whole cooled casting was disinterred. All was fair except in one strange spot. But as he [Bannadonna] suffered no one to attend him in these inspections, he concealed the blemish by some preparation which none knew better to devise" (821). Bannadonna certainly acts in his own self-interest; and, at the same time, he performs a civic duty by insulating the community from any memory of the homicide they have condoned. Using "some unknown compound," the architect smooths over his defective founding, forging a monumental history whose key element is forgetfulness (833). Standing on the Florentine plain, the tower promises to acquire symbolic prominence, to serve as an icon of republican openness. This promise, however, is as false as Bannadonna's bell is imperfect. Although the state bell perched atop the campanile could serve as a monument and recall a past laced with the flaw of the slain artisan, Bannadonna forestalls such an act of *monere*. The republic sees no reminder of past injustice in the bell, but only confirmation of its own affluence. The narrator works against Bannadonna's and the republic's construction and again insists on temporal continuity, even though that continuity jeopardizes ideological cohesion. A legacy of violence resonates within a tradition of republican glory. Although Melville asserts continuity, linking the splintering of the bell with the homicidal splintering of the ladle, the community resolves to place history in an alembic of amnesia and refine away any impurities. Soon the bell and the campanile require repair, but rather than follow Bannadonna and hide

the defect, the republic improves upon his methods and re-founds the bell as though nothing—not the artisan’s murder, the architect’s “accidental death,” or the mechanical slave’s revolt—had taken place: “The remolten metal soon reassumed its place in the tower’s repaired super-structure” (833).

We can better understand the significance of “The Bell-Tower” for the American republic if we restore the story’s context in the antebellum era and trace its allusive import. The defective bell evokes another icon of public freedom, the Liberty Bell.<sup>26</sup> Like Bannadonna’s creation, the State House bell in Philadelphia cracked during its founding, was recast, and then, according to tradition, fractured irreparably as it tolled for Washington’s birthday 22 February 1846.<sup>27</sup> Even though the crack in the bell might on some metaphoric level suggest the distance between the Founding Fathers’ generation and its descendants, for much of antebellum America the Liberty Bell served as a relic of a patriotic legacy, bringing together the fathers and sons in a paternal embrace. The same volume containing the story of Black Sampson, Lippard’s *Legends of the American Revolution*, initiates a sacramental status for the Liberty Bell by narrating a story that would be construed as fact by thousands of Americans.<sup>28</sup> Lippard’s most famous legend begins when on 4 July 1776 an old bell-ringer tries to make out the inscription on the bell of the State House. His tired eyes fail him, so he calls, “Come here, my boy; you are a rich man’s child. You can read. Spell me those words, and I’ll bless ye, my good child!” Reading the verse from Leviticus, “Proclaim liberty to all the land and all the inhabitants thereof,” the boy invokes a democratic spirit that levels the class distinctions between himself and the bell-ringer. The old man requests another favor from the youth, asking him to wait in the street and listen for the decision of the Congress debating the resolution for independence. As though he were part of the expectant citizen mob described in Bannadonna’s republic, the old man waits anxiously, doubting that the boy has remembered his promise: “Moments passed, yet still he came not. The crowds gathered more darkly along the pavement and over the lawn, yet still the boy came not. ‘Ah!’ groaned the old man, ‘he has forgotten me! These old limbs will have to totter down the State House stairs, and climb up again, all on account of that child.’” Much as Lincoln does in his speech to the Young Men’s Lyceum, the bell-ringer distrusts the sons, suspecting a weakness in their civic faith that will cause them to become distracted by the present and ignore their obligations to the past. The stakes of this legend are enormous;

liberty is jeopardized if gaps arise between generations. As Lincoln put it in 1838, if America forgets the “task of gratitude to our fathers, justice to ourselves, duty to posterity,” then the national fabric of founding principles could well unravel.<sup>29</sup>

Since Lippard was more fortunate than Lincoln and could rely upon conventions of narrative closure to dispel the threat of amnesia, the rich man’s son, of course, dutifully awaits the outcome of the Congress’s deliberations. Hearing the acceptance of the Declaration of Independence, the boy, “swelling his little chest . . . raised himself on tip-toe, and shouted a single word—‘RING!’” Only a reverential civic memory can realize the verse inscribed upon the Liberty Bell. Later versions of Lippard’s tale stress the importance of genealogical continuity by discovering a blood relation between the boy and the old man and culminate in the cry, “Ring! Grandpa, ring!” The boy’s shout disproves Lincoln’s admonition “that the scenes of the revolution . . . must fade upon the memory of the world, and grow more and more dim by the lapse of time.” As the old man translates the boy’s “RING!” into the “terrible poetry in the sound of that State House Bell,” his body is rejuvenated with the honest Yankee resilience of independence. Liberty does not fall into the abyss of forgetfulness but is rescued by a tenacious link between the bell-ringer and the boy, between founding fathers and their sons. Liberty is renewed, made eternal, as young as the fathers once were: “Do you see that old man’s eye fire? Do you see that arm so suddenly bared to the shoulder, do you see that withered hand, grasping the Iron Tongue of the Bell? The old man is young again; his veins are filled with new life. Backward and forward, with sturdy strokes, he swings the Tongue. The bell speaks out! The crowd in the street hear it, and burst forth in one long shout!”<sup>30</sup>

In contrast, “The Bell-Tower” hardly acquiesces in the assertion of republican renewal ensured by the genealogical continuity Lippard’s legend evokes. Although the republic refurbishes the tower and remelts the bell, the renewal lasts only until the first anniversary of the tower’s completion, when an earthquake reduces the edifice to an impotent stump. The campanile does not resonate with the lusty sounds of liberty that echo through the Philadelphia State House; instead, Bannadonna’s death muffles the peal, emitting only “a dull, mangled sound—naught ringing in it; scarcely audible, indeed, to the outer circles of the people—that dull sound dropped heavily from the belfry” (827). The orchestrated ritual to inaugurate the bell-tower merely renews the cycle of violence begun when Bannadonna’s “esthetic passion” took the life of the workman. It

is not the slave who deadens the sound; he faithfully performs his office. The founder himself, Bannadonna, impedes with his skull the execution of the design. The monumental history of the fathers slays itself in its own contradictions. Absorbed in concealing the murderous flaw in the bell of liberty, the founder forgets to watch his back and looks up to see his slave bludgeon him. Intimations of slave insurrection dropped by Brown reappear in Melville's tale; and yet the rebellion staged is not simply one of slave against master but of founder against himself. Melville adopts the logic of the fugitive slave: like Brown's subversion of nationalist historical narrative through the exposing of contradictions embodied in the Fort Griswold battle monument, "The Bell-Tower" discloses the fissures that belie monumental representations of republican foundings. In the hands of the narrator, the trope of parenthesis no longer protects the past; nor does the decayed tower stir up idealized memories of a glorious founding. Rather, the narrative of "The Bell-Tower" focuses critically on the founding moments and insists on the continuity of political history, even at the cost of uncovering atrocities within sacred origins. The fissures, cankers, and ruin that mark the tower are nothing new; murder, fraud, and contradiction disfigure the republic's self-representation from its inception. Melville's skeptical re-examination of the past removes national origins from their dignified and unassailable foundation and regrounds the noble republic in deception and forgery. Such ironic historiography cripples monumental narrative, for a generation cannot inherit a coherent legacy if that legacy was never coherent in its origin.

Only forgetting can fashion a narrative stable or coherent enough to support the accumulated layers of history from the origins to the present. The citizens of "The Bell-Tower" contract to remember the past, but—desirous of erecting a monumental body politic—they also contract to forget the past. In the *Second Treatise of Government*, John Locke acknowledges the necessity of political memory, declaring that citizens "begin to look after the history of their founders and search into their original when they have outlived the memory of it." Lincoln echoes this point in his speech to the Young Men's Lyceum, registering Americans' befuddlement as they sit at the crossroads of memory and forgetting. Whereas the previous generation once embodied "a *living history*" in the memories of those patriots who stood as a "forest of giant oaks" and witnessed Revolutionary triumphs, the post-Revolutionary sons find their forebears' memories destroyed by death and time: "the all-resistless hurricane has swept over them, and left only, here and there, a lonely trunk,

despoiled of its verdure, shorn of its foliage; unshading and unshaded, to murmur in a few more gentle breezes, and to combat with its mutilated limbs, a few more ruder storms, then to sink, and be no more." Memory replaces "*living history*," but it seems to be a paltry substitute. As Lincoln looks around the American republic, he notices mob violence and racial bigotry, indications that memory fails to adhere to the revolutionary legacy. Lincoln hopes to stave off an apocalypse of amnesia by imploring the current generation to restore its weakened legacy with sober reverence for the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution designed to protect it.<sup>31</sup>

After describing the search for origins, Locke checks any enthusiasm for it by issuing a caution: citizens "would do well not to search too much into the original of governments" or else they might find a foundation whose secrets and instabilities would de-authorize their current government's legitimacy. But unlike Locke, Lincoln does not include a measure of amnesia in his political faith. Lincoln insists on remembering the foundations of liberty, even if uncovered ironies make that liberty appear contradictory and incongruous; he does not acquiesce in a strategy of bad faith in which the citizens of a republic overlook the flaws in the founding just so they can erect a bell-tower or state that will "surpass all that had gone before." Objecting to the small print in Locke's contract that sanctions amnesia within the project of memory, Lincoln resembles the narrator of "The Bell-Tower" who retells the history of a republic, including events and rumors the citizens would rather had sunk into the sea with the rebellious slave. Both renounce a parenthetical version of memory that would forget the sins of the past by concentrating on the "dark mould" of the present. While many opposed to slavery decried America's flagrant disregard for its sacred origins, both Lincoln and the narrator of "The Bell-Tower" unflinchingly question that sacredness. Surveying the history of the ruined capital, the narrator does not shrink from representing a founding contaminated by murder, fraud, and slavery, but undertakes a genealogical investigation bearing him back to the origins. And Lincoln, examining the history of a prosperous republic, steadfastly confronts the principles of the founding fathers. Acknowledging that the origins of American republicanism contain sanctified principles, Lincoln nevertheless understands that many of these principles are flawed. Imperfection resides within the tradition of liberty begun in 1776; a genealogy of sinful continuity, not political virtue, links the "once" and the "now."

Speaking in Baltimore on 18 April 1864, Lincoln praises the soldiers

marching through the city and observes “that three years ago, the same soldiers could not so much as pass through.” Lincoln’s words create a parenthetical structure in which the Civil War’s past is “colonized off” both from its present and from what preceded it, the distant days of antebellum harmony. Parenthesis would render the war a bad memory, a hiatus better forgotten in a temporal quarantine protecting the purity of the past. Lincoln, however, undercuts the very parenthesis he has set up by subtly betraying America’s complicity with its past: “But we can see the past, though we may not claim to have directed it.” Despite the present republic’s predilection for affecting innocence about past cultural chaos, Lincoln’s remark exposes the desire to deny temporal continuity (and thus ideological responsibility). Foreclosing the possibility of a reassuring parenthesis, he discourages a reverential view of an untouchable past and announces his findings even though they unsettle hallowed foundations. His representation of the past discovers a founding, like Bannadonna’s, fractured in its origins:

The world has never had a good definition of the word liberty, and the American people, just now, are much in want of one. We all declare for liberty; but in using the same *word* we do not all mean the same *thing*. With some the word liberty may mean for each man to do as he pleases with himself, and the product of his labor; while with others the same word may mean for some men to do as they please with other men, and the product of other men’s labor. Here are two, not only different, but incompatible things, called by the same name—liberty.<sup>32</sup>

Never, even within its origins, has America had an uncontested definition of liberty. When “liberty” authorizes some people to dominate others, it is divided against itself, engendering an inconsistent narrative which lapses into forgetfulness in order to guarantee a coherent *telos* for the nation. In the same way that “The Bell-Tower” erects a history ruptured by the ironies it houses, Lincoln’s America rests upon a fractured cornerstone. Though heralded as a sacred new order with a unitary ideological foundation, America, as Lincoln reveals, has always been politically schizophrenic, marked by an element of the “incompatible,” and in debate about its fundamental, authorizing principles.

Acknowledging the inconsistencies of founding narratives can radically alter our conception of national history. Lincoln opens the Gettysburg Address by remembering the birth of the American republic: “Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new

nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." Here, the newborn nation seems whole, immaculately conceived in a liberty which Lincoln does not mark as inherently fractured or contradictory. Still, Lincoln does not call for a rebirth of this liberty; instead, he resolves that America "shall have a new birth of freedom." Though subtle, the difference between a rebirth and a "new birth" implies that citizens should not strive to replicate the past. Nor is the project to restore and refurbish the past as the citizens of "The Bell-Tower" do, devising a strategy even more effective at concealing the murderous crack in the bell. A "new birth" would not establish itself as pure and uncontaminated or invent ways to forget and recast imperfection as perfection; it would devote itself to its own memory, even though that memory may record division and contradiction.

Without memory, any founding has as little legitimate authority as Bannadonna's design for a mechanical slave and any conception of liberty will accrue as much suspicion as the liberty achieved by Babo in "Benito Cereno." Murder infects Bannadonna's founding much as a history of bloodshed stains the liberty formulated by Babo aboard the *San Dominick*. The political message of both stories is that once authority effaces its past it can only be subject to the debilitating mistrust of all citizens, even ones as obtuse as Amasa Delano or as blindly patriotic as the populace of "The Bell-Tower." Melville could not conceive of a "new birth" of liberty; he could only see monstrous re-births in which the recessive traits of violence become increasingly dominant with each generation. Lincoln's "new birth" is articulated at a cemetery, a grisly site of memory ensuring that the liberty engendered will engage in none of the historical evasions and cover-ups of the Italian republic or Babo. A "new birth" of liberty must have none of the parenthetical bad faith that would characterize a "re-birth." Political hope for a severely tested republicanism appears in Lincoln's understanding of the solemn moments of Gettysburg. From a memory of cultural conflict and "incompatible" ideologies, he brings forth a sketch of civic faith committed to a narrative of foundations which, ironically, may be inconsistent, incongruous, even bloody. Such a narrative remembers the founder George Washington as well as the founder Bannadonna, and acknowledges the blood of the father in the face of the son, even if the son is a slave, even if that blood stains the father's hands.

## Notes

I am indebted to Michael Cowan, John Schaar, Hayden White, and the Editorial Board of *American Literature* for criticisms, suggestions, and support in writing this article.

- 1 Theodore Parker, *The American Scholar*, ed. George Willis Cooke (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1907), 44. Despite Parker's claim that slave narratives are "original," these works often adapted and cunningly manipulated more established literary forms, among them the picaresque tale, the sentimental novel, and the travel narrative.
- 2 A study of the intersection of monumentalism and race could also examine the United States government's attitude toward Native Americans. Beginning with the Hudson River School, art and literature portrayed Native Americans relinquishing the grandeur of nature to the white settler. Their actual dispossession from the land coincided with the symbolic inclusion of Native Americans within an iconic history. Treaties with Native tribes were often ratified with peace medals engraved with the President's image. (See, for instance, the medallion emblazoned with an image of Washington that Chingachgook wears in *The Pioneers*.) In addition, representatives from tribes took part in the formal ceremonies consecrating the Washington Monument, and some of its stones, whose inscriptions face inside, were donated by tribes.
- 3 Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28 (Winter 1989): 6, 12–13, 11, 13.
- 4 Morrison, 14.
- 5 Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," in *Pierre, or the Ambiguities; Israel Potter, His Fifty Years of Exile; The Piazza Tales; The Confidence-Man, His Masquerade; Uncollected Prose; Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 1165; Austin Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave, and Forty Years a Freeman: Embracing a Correspondence of Several Years, while President of Wilberforce Colony, London, Canada West* (1856; rpt., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), 303–04.
- 6 William Wells Brown, *The Anti-Slavery Harp: A Collection of Songs for Anti-Slavery Meetings, Compiled by William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave* (1848; rpt., Philadelphia: Rhistoric, 1969), 23; Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 69.
- 7 William Wells Brown, *The Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave, Written by Himself*, in *Four Fugitive Slave Narratives*, ed. Robin W. Winks, et al. (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969), 43; *St. Domingo: Its Revolutions and its Patriots; A Lecture Delivered Before the Metropolitan Athenaeum*,

London, May 16, and at St. Thomas' Church, Philadelphia, December 20, 1854 (1855; rpt., Philadelphia: Rhistoric, 1969), 25, 32.

- 8 Brown, *Narrative*, 1.
- 9 For the different editions and changing details of Brown's autobiography, see Larry Gara's introduction to *The Narrative of William W. Brown*, xi.
- 10 William Wells Brown, *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* (1863; rpt., New York: Johnson Reprint, 1968), 109–10.
- 11 William Wells Brown, "A Visit of a Fugitive Slave to the Grave of Wilberforce," in *Autographs for Freedom*, ed. Julia Griffiths (1853; rpt., Rochester: Wanzer, Beardley, 1854), 71.
- 12 William A. Craigie cites two examples particularly relevant to this latter meaning. In 1863, Thomas Prentice Kettel wrote in *History of the Great Rebellion*, "The President alluded to the efforts he had made in relation to emancipation, and also in relation to colonizing the emancipated blacks." In 1854, Maria Cummins wrote in the sensationally popular *The Lamplighter*, "'The house is pretty considerable full just now, to be sure, but maybe you can get colonized out.' . . . 'One room, in the next street!' cried the doctor. 'Ah, that's being colonized out, is it?'" (*A Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles*, 4 vols., ed. William A. Craigie, et al. [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960], 1:558–59).
- 13 On ideas of critical and monumental history, see Nietzsche's *The Use and Abuse of History*.
- 14 Brown, "A Visit of a Fugitive Slave," 71; *The Black Man*, 34.
- 15 Brown, *Narrative*, 46.
- 16 George Lippard, *The Legends of the American Revolution, or, Washington and His Generals* (1847; rpt., Philadelphia: Leary, Stewart, 1876), 360, 368.
- 17 Lippard, 361–62. This passage nicely illustrates Lippard's understanding of the ideological contradictions posed by the figure of the black slave, but even more contradictory for him was the figure of the white slave of industrial labor. David S. Reynolds writes, "Though painfully conscious of the southern Negro's plight, Lippard was more concerned with the white slavery in northern factories than with black slavery on southern plantations" (*George Lippard* [Boston: Twayne, 1982], 59).
- 18 Lippard, 361; William Lloyd Garrison, "No Compromise with Slavery," in *The Liberty Bell. By Friends of Freedom* (Boston: Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Fair, 1844), 216; Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols., ed. Roy P. Basler, et al. (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1953–1955), 4:236.
- 19 Parenthesis—from the Greek meaning "to put in beside"—implies a passage having no grammatical connection to the text into which it is inserted. Often the lack of connection is contextual as well, in the sense that the digression steps outside the supposed process of the discourse. Within a sentence, parenthesis destroys unity, producing a dislocation that interrupts the ex-

- pected progress of the sentence from beginning to end. Hugh Blair writes, "I proceed to a third rule for preserving the Unity of Sentences; which is, to keep clear of all Parentheses in the middle of them. . . . for the most part, their effect is extremely bad; being a sort of wheels within wheels; sentences in the midst of sentences, the perplexed method of disposing of some thought, which a writer wants art to introduce in its proper place" (*Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 2 vols., ed. Harold F. Harding [1783; rpt., Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1965], 1:222).
- 20 Anthony Kemp, *The Estrangement of the Past: A Study in the Origins of Modern Historical Consciousness* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991). See especially 82–83.
- 21 For instance, during his presidency James Monroe used to appear on ceremonial occasions dressed in his Revolutionary War uniform, even though the heroic days of 1776 had been past for nearly a half-century. See George B. Forgie, *Patricide in the House Divided: A Psychological Interpretation of Lincoln and His Age* (New York: Norton, 1979), 49. Forgie's book furnishes many examples of attempts to either preserve or throw off the founding past.
- 22 See Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1978).
- 23 Herman Melville, "The Bell-Tower," in *Pierre or, The Ambiguities . . .*, 819 (all subsequent references are to this edition); Lincoln, 1:108. Lincoln's Lyceum speech is motivated by outbreaks of mob violence which seem to indicate the present's distorted understanding of democracy. It is not insignificant that he takes as one of his examples the lynching of a black man in St. Louis.
- 24 Various critics have noted the dimensions of both wage slavery and race slavery in "The Bell-Tower." See especially Carolyn Karcher, *Shadow over a Promised Land: Slavery, Race, and Violence in Melville's America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1980); Marvin Fisher, *Going Under: Melville's Short Fiction and the American 1850s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1977), as well as his "Melville's 'Bell-Tower': A Double Thrust," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 200–07.
- 25 Earlier in his career, Bannadonna participates in another "founding." He reminds one of the magistrates, "Some years ago, you may remember, I graved a small seal for your republic, bearing, for its chief device, the head of your ancestor, its illustrious founder" (825).
- 26 Other commentators have noted the correspondence of Bannadonna's bell and the Liberty Bell. See, for instance, Karcher, 156; and Fisher, "Melville's 'Bell-Tower,'" 206.
- 27 Historical legends present dates other than Washington's birthday in 1846 for the cracking of the Liberty Bell. Among them are the arrival of Lafayette in 1824, the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1828, the death of John Marshall in 1835, and Washington's birthday in 1835. See Justin Kramer, *Cast*

*in America* (Los Angeles: Justin Kramer Inc., 1975), 77; Rev. John Baer Stoudt, D.D., *The Liberty Bells of Pennsylvania Presented to the Pennsylvania German Society at the Annual Meeting in the Pennsylvania Building at the Sesqui-centennial on Friday, October 8, 1926* (Philadelphia: William J. Campbell, 1920), 120–21.

- 28 David S. Reynolds discusses the veracity of Lippard's creations in *George Lippard*, 49.
- 29 Lippard, 392; Lincoln, 1:108.
- 30 Lincoln, 1:115; Lippard, 392, 393.
- 31 John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 54; Lincoln, 1:115.
- 32 Lincoln, 7:301–02.