### **Performing Blackness**

Herman Melville's Benito Cereno

We define race as a **symbolic** category, based on **phenotype** or **ancestry** and constructed according to **specific social and historical contexts**, that is **misrecognized as a natural category**. ...

A symbolic category belongs to the realm of ideas, meaning-making, and language. It is something actively created and recreated by human beings rather than pregiven, needing only to be labeled. ...

Racial taxonomies are bound to their specific social and historical contexts. The racial categories that exist in America may not exist in other parts of the globe. ...

Racial categories, therefore, are place-specific, bound to certain geographic and social contexts. They also are time-specific, changing between different historical eras. As a historical product, race is quite new. Before the sixteenth century, race, as we know it today, did not exist. ...

Racial categories are naturalized when these symbolic groupings—the products of specific historical contexts—are wrongly conceived as natural and unchangeable.

Desmond & Emirbayer, "What Is Racial Domination?," 2009

## **US** Racializations

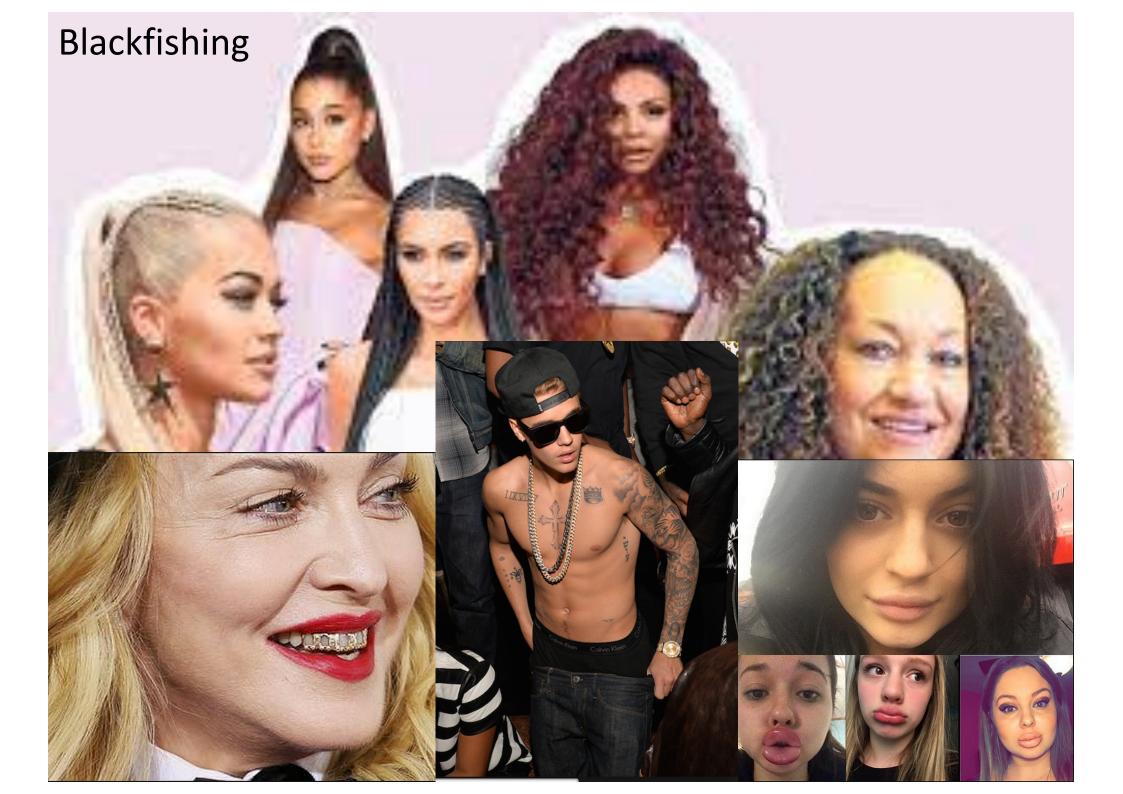


- Genotype vs phenotype
- One drop rule (partus sequitur ventrem)
- White/black binary
- Passing
- blackface









### The problem with «black cool»

"What happens as the connection between black bodies and black cultural expression becomes not only more diverse but more disconnected, when blackness travels on its own, separate and distinct from black people?... it remains exceedingly attractive and possible in this postblack, postsoul age of black cultural traffic to love black cool and not love black people"

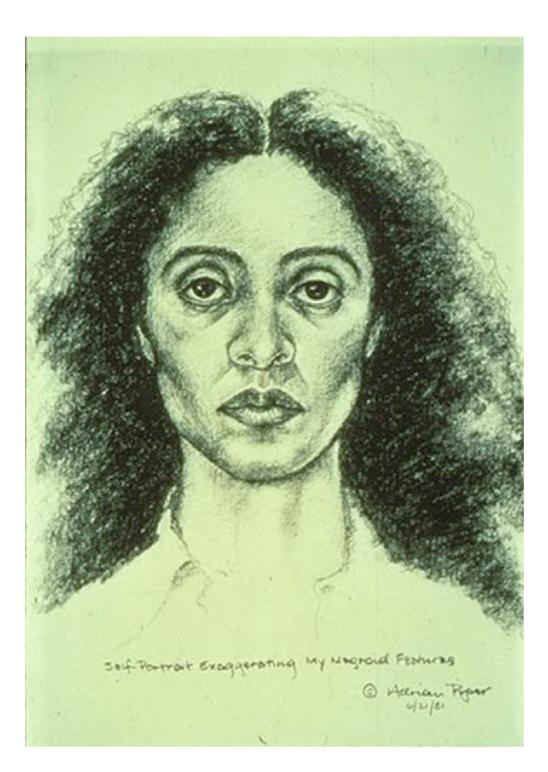
Harry Elam, "Change Clothes and Go: A Postscript to Postblackness"



Jesy Nelson, *Boyz* (2021), featuring Nicki Minaj https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u884fEIPY3g

"blackface performance, the first formal public acknowledgment by whites of black culture, was based on small but significant crimes against settled ideas of racial demarcation... The very form of blackface acts – an investiture in black bodies – seems a manifestation of the particular desire to try on the accents of 'blackness' and demonstrates the permeability of the color line"

Eric Lott, Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class





Adrain Piper Self-Portrait as a Nice White Lady, 1995 Photograph altered with oil crayon, 10 x 8 inches. Collection of the artist

# IN THE SHADOW OF THE NEGRO: MINSTRELSY, RACE AND PERFORMANCE IN HERMAN MELVILLE'S *BENITO CERENO*

#### **KRISTIN MORIAH**

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Author and literary critic Toni Morrison has written that 'the literature of the United States, like its history, represents a commentary on the transformations of biological, ideological, and metaphysical difference' (66). Her thesis can be expanded to include other forms of American cultural production, including theatre. Morrison has also explained that a deep-seated sense of racial division and otherness across a colour line became fundamental to the workings of popular forms of black minstrelsy, so that

a layer of blackness applied to a white face released it from law. Just as entertainers, through or by association with blackface, could render permissible topics that otherwise would have been taboo, so American writers were able to employ an imagined Africanist persona to articulate and imaginatively act out the forbidden in American culture. (66)

. . . . . . . . . .

them to mock manners, mores and behaviour. Blackface minstrely is closely related to mimicry in that it can allow subjugated people to take on images of themselves that have been created by the dominant culture: black minstrels mimic the images of themselves that occupy the imaginations of their oppressors. In addition, the forms of satire created by black blackface minstrels are highly complex. Minstrelsy is a form of mimicry whose locus is found on the black body. Black blackface minstrelsy calls attention to slippage, the identity between stereotypes, which is transformed through repetition. The slippage between the real body of the black actor and the burnt cork mask is different to the slippage that occurs when white actors put on the cork mask. The falseness of the mask is even more heightened by the proximity of the black body to the black mask which is certainly not of themselves. Like mimicry, black blackface minstrelsy offers its performers a means of critiquing both the abstract and the concrete: the racialist thought that engendered theories about blackness as well as the social practices and legal discourses that emerged from those theories.

### **Slave Rebellions**

In the United States, differently from other experiences of slavery in the Americas, slavery offered few episodes of slave revolts. For many decades historians interpreted the relative lack of rebellions, in comparison with the many revolts happened in the Caribbean and Brazil, as a consequence of the submissiveness of US slaves. Although their acceptance of bondage was explained in opposite ways, as either allowed by the a milder type of slavery or brought about by a totalitarian, violent system that destroyed their personality and effectively turned them into infantilized subjects, historians agreed that most US slaves had accepted bondage. Up to the early 1970s, when works by Blassingame, Genovese, Berlin and others launched a new era in the historiography of slavery, expanding the notion of what counts as resistance and bringing to light the existence of slave cultures, the theory of the subservience of US slaves gave legitimacy to the Sambo figure popularized by the 19th-century minstrel show.



#### Hale Woodruff, Mutiny on the Amistad (1939)

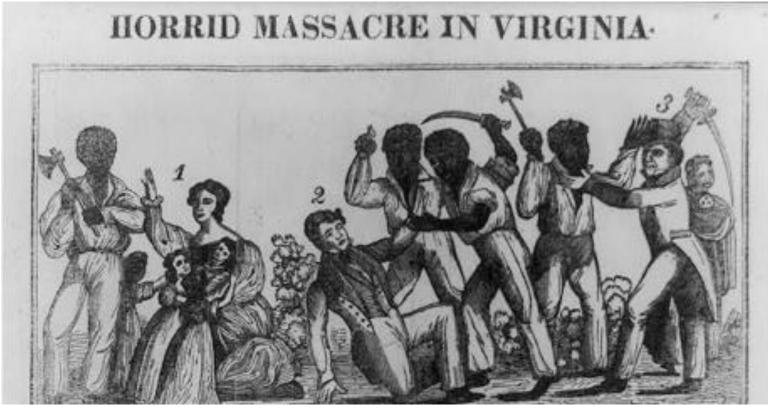


The revised historiography of slavery of the last five decades, however, is undermined by popular culture's representation of slaves as passive victims, which has wide currency especially among young blacks. This mythology of black subservience is specifically US-American. In the United States, differently from other experiences of slavery in the Americas, slavery offered only a few episodes of armed slave revolts and most ended in the death or violent punishment of the insurgents. But the fear of rebellions, especially after the success of the Haitian Revolution, the first successful black uprising of the modern world, was widespread in the US South, and many protocols of surveillance were enacted. Laws restricted enslaved people's assembly, travel, worship, literacy and more.

White abolitionist rhetoric, exemplified by the well-known image of the kneeling slave pleading for help, had forged a narrative of victimhood where emancipation was a gracious gift to passive blacks in bondage by enlightened white saviors, which was deeply ingrained in the national memory and dominated accounts of the past in textbooks, literature, films, as well as monuments to the "Great Emancipator," such as Thomas Ball's bronze statue in Lincoln Park, Washington, DC. Slavery was inscribed also in the black collective imagination, and it still is to a certain degree, as a past of subjection to be ashamed of and a story "not to pass on" (Toni Morrison, *Beloved*).



#### **Rebellious Slaves**



In 1934 Joel A. Rogers identified 33 slave revolts in his *100 Amazing Facts*. And nine years later, the historian Herbert Aptheker published his pioneering study, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, where he defined a slave revolt as an action involving 10 or more slaves, with "freedom as the apparent aim [and] contemporary references labeling the event as an uprising, plot, insurrection, or the equivalent of these." In all, Aptheker says, he "found records of approximately two hundred and fifty revolts and conspiracies in the history of American Negro slavery." The most important were: **1. The Stono Rebellion**, **1739; 2. The New York City Conspiracy of 1741; 3. Gabriel Prosser's Conspiracy, 1800; 4. The German Coast Uprising, 1811; 5. Denmark Vesey's Conspiracy, 1822; 6. Nat Turner's Rebellion, <b>1831** 

#### Herman Melville (1819-1891)

Herman Melville was born in New York City in 1819. His family was wealthy and also historically influential. Grandfathers on both sides were heavily involved in the American Revolution. in 1830, Melville's father had to file for bankruptcy, and he died in 1832, leaving Melville and his brothers to support the family. Melville went to work at the age of thirteen and had very little formal education but a great passion for literature and philosophy. In 1840 Melville embarked on a whaling ship and spent the next several years at sea, with a short stint living with the indigenous Taipis tribe in Marquesas Islands. After serving briefly with the U.S. Navy, Melville returned home and published novels about his adventures, Typee (1846) and Omoo (1847), which were his most widely accepted and critically acclaimed works during his lifetime. He lost much of his reading audience, who wanted plain exciting stories of adventures among the savages, with the publication of *Mardi* (1849) and especially the work that is arguably the greatest American novel ever written: *Moby Dick* (1851), because of the symbolical and philosophical style he adopted in his writing. Publishers were no longer eager to print his long works but they were still willing to pay for shorter works, which he did not want to write. By the time of the publication of *Benito Cereno* (1855), Melville was publishing exclusively through mag-azines. Many of his stories deemed "too intellectual" by his contemporaries are today among the most studied stories in American fiction. Benito Cereno is an example of a work by Melville that was not appreciated in his lifetime but is now well regarded. When Melville died in 1891, the only public remembrance was a few brief obituary notices published in New York newspapers. It was not until 1919, the centennial anniversary of Melville's birth, that a few scholars initiated a large revival of Melville's works, which are now recognized as major contributions to American literature.

## Benito Cereno (1855)

- Herman Melville's only work dealing with slavery
- Published first in a magazine (Putnam's), then in the collection *The Piazza Tales*
- Based on a real episode, narrated by Captain Amasa Delano in A Narrative of Voyages and Travels (1817)
- *Voyages and Travels* focuses on his experiences in the Pacific and Indian Oceans from 1790 until 1807, during which time Delano several times circumnavigated the globe. Delano gave significant space to the account of his capture of the Spanish ship Tryal off the coast of Chile in 1801 and to the events subsequent to the capture. Seeing the ship in apparent difficulty, Delano went aboard, was told that the ship was long without provisions, remained on board while a boat went for food and water, and learned that the slaves had revolted and captured the ship only when its captain, Benito Cereno, jumped into his boat as it was leaving.

### Reception of Benito Cereno

For much of the twentieth century, critics read *Benito Cereno* as having not much to do with the political context of the 1850s United States, deep in the controversy about slavery that would lead to the Civil War. They read it as dealing with abstract questions of morality and evil. For some of them, the story is focused on Delano's innocent naiveté and his ability to survive in the face of evil. For others, on Delano's moral blindness in not being able to recognize evil and in his ability to forget. From such a perspective, the slaves and their leader, Babo, symbolize humankind's immorality, its tendency to violence. Black and white are only symbols of evil and innocence and are not related in any way to race.

In the past few decades, however, many critics, such as Michael Paul Rogin and Eric Sundquist, have argued that Melville's changes to Amasa Delano's narrative of his re-taking of a mutinous ship reveal that he intended this story as a probing of the moral and political issues of American slavery, not as an abstract investigation of humanity's potential for evil. Now the work is interpreted as Melville's response to the most troubling issue of his times, even though whether he condemned or justified violence as a means toward freedom is much debated. Brian Yothers, "Introduction," in H. Melville, *Benito Cereno* (2020)

Carolyn Karcher's Shadow Over the Promised Land (1979) and Eric Sundquist's "Benito Cereno and New World Slavery" (1986), which was later expanded and incorporated into his massive study To Wake the Nations (1993), served to indicate that the tide had turned in relation to how "Benito Cereno" was read with regard to racial issues and slavery. Karcher found that Melville had dealt explicitly with the psychology of slave revolt in "Benito Cereno," playing with Delano's misperceptions quite deliberately, and, as noted above, Sundquist pointed out the echoes of the Haitian Revolution in Melville's story. Michael Paul Rogin had also noted the Haitian connection in his 1983 study Subversive Genealogy, but Rogin saw "Benito Cereno" less as a full-blown critique of slavery than as a cautionary tale about slave revolt that had affinities with both pro- and anti-slavery discourse, concluding with regard to Babo's execution that "[t]he raised head of the slave may portend the end of slavery, but it is a portent of violence, and it does not promise the liberation of the slave" (220). Nonetheless, the Sundquist/Karcher view of "Benito Cereno" as primarily a critique of slavery prevailed. By 2009, Sterling Stuckey could point to the ways in which African culture influences Melville's artistry in "Benito Cereno," and, in 2015, Greg Grandin built a full-length study of slave revolution in the Americas around Melville's story. For Grandin, Melville's adaptation of the story

#### From Delano's Voyages and Travels to Melville's Benito Cereno

Melville introduced few changes but, precisely because they are few, they are important cues to how he wanted to connect the historical episode to the situation of the US on the verge of the Civil War:

Date: he antedated the revolt from 1805 to 1799, moving the tale to the context of the Age of Revolutions and connoting it as a fight for freedom on the part of the oppressed

Ships' names: he changed the name of Delano's ship Perseverance to Bachelor's Delight, which was the name of a pirate ship, turning the Americans' recapturing of the slave ship into an ambivalent action; by changing the Tryal to St. Dominick he made an obvious reference to Haiti, the site of the "other" American revolution in the New World in 1791 and the unspeakable, repressed nightmare of the American South

Leader of the rebellion: he combines the two leading characters of the rebellion, Mori and his father Babo into a single character, modelled according to many scholars on representations of Toussaint Louverture, the leader of the Haitian Revolution. This enables him to create a master/slave couple that Delano interprets according to a paternalist view of slavery. According to C. Karcher, Benito Cereno is "an exploration of the white racist mind and how it reacts in the face of a slave insurrection."

### Three sections

- First (and longest): Delano's attempt to solve the riddle of the St. Dominick: Pirates or just unfortunate sailors? Cereno a poor lunatic or an impostor?; third person narrator / Delano's limited point of view (often blurred, at times narrator is ironically detached from what Delano thinks)
- Court depositions; documents (no point of view)
- Epilogue: Delano and Cereno's final conversation

### Main themes and symbols

- Appearance vs truth
- Darkness vs light
- Emotion vs reason
- Old World vs New World
- Despotism vs democracy
- Chaos vs order
- Slavery vs paternalism
- Blackness vs whiteness
- Savagery vs civilization

#### Incipit: a mysterious ship

In the year 1799, Captain Amasa Delano, of Duxbury, in Massachusetts, commanding a large sealer and general trader, lay at anchor with a valuable cargo, in the harbor of St. Maria—a small, desert, uninhabited island toward the southern extremity of the long coast of Chili. There he had touched for water.

On the second day, not long after dawn, while lying in his berth, his mate came below, informing him that a **strange sail** was coming into the bay. Ships were then not so plenty in those waters as now. He rose, dressed, and went on deck.

The morning was one peculiar to that coast. Everything was mute and calm; everything gray. The sea, though undulated into long roods of swells, seemed fixed, and was sleeked at the surface like waved lead that has cooled and set in the smelter's mould. The sky seemed a gray surtout. Flights of troubled gray fowl, kith and kin with flights of troubled gray vapors among which they were mixed, skimmed low and fitfully over the waters, as swallows over meadows before storms. **Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come.** 

# Delano as the innocent American: unreliable point of view – narrator's distrust of Delano's understanding

To Captain Delano's surprise, the stranger, viewed through the glass, showed no colors; though to do so upon entering a haven, however uninhabited in its shores, where but a single other ship might be lying, was the custom among peaceful seamen of all nations. Considering the lawlessness and loneliness of the spot, and the sort of stories, at that day, associated with those seas, Captain Delano's surprise might have deepened into some uneasiness had he not been a person of a singularly undistrustful good-nature, not liable, except on extraordinary and repeated incentives, and hardly then, to indulge in personal alarms, any way involving the imputation of malign evil in **man**. Whether, in view of what humanity is capable, such a trait implies, along with a benevolent heart, more than ordinary quickness and accuracy of intellectual perception, may be left to the wise to determine.

#### **Gothic imagery**

Upon gaining a less remote view, the ship, when made signally visible on the verge of the leaden-hued swells, with the shreds of fog here and there raggedly furring her, appeared like a white-washed monastery after a thunder-storm, seen perched upon some dun cliff among the Pyrenees. But it was no purely fanciful resemblance which now, for a moment, almost led Captain Delano to think that nothing less than a ship-load of monks was before him. Peering over the bulwarks were what really seemed, in the hazy distance, throngs of dark cowls; while, fitfully revealed through the open port-holes, other dark moving figures were dimly descried, as of Black Friars pacing the cloisters.

Upon a still nigher approach, this appearance was modified, and the true character of the vessel was plain—a Spanish merchantman of the first class, carrying negro slaves, amongst other valuable freight, from one colonial port to another. A very large, and, in its time, a very fine vessel, such as in those days were at intervals encountered along that main; ... which, like superannuated Italian palaces, still, under a decline of masters, preserved signs of former state.

Battered and mouldy, the castellated forecastle seemed some ancient turret, long ago taken by assault, and then left to decay. Toward the stern, two highraised quarter galleries—the balustrades here and there covered with dry, tindery sea-moss—opening out from the unoccupied state-cabin, whose deadlights, for all the mild weather, were hermetically closed and calked—these tenantless balconies hung over the sea as if it were the grand Venetian canal. But the principal relic of faded grandeur was the ample oval of the shield-like stern-piece, intricately carved with the arms of Castile and Leon...; uppermost and central of which was a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked.

Whether the ship had a figure-head, or only a plain beak, was not quite certain, owing to canvas wrapped about that part, either to protect it while undergoing a re-furbishing, or else decently to hide its decay. Rudely painted or chalked, as in a sailor freak, along the forward side of a sort of pedestal below the canvas, was the sentence, "Seguid vuestro jefe" (follow your leader); while upon the tarnished headboards, near by, appeared, in stately capitals, once gilt, the ship's name, "SAN DOMINICK," each letter streakingly corroded with tricklings of copper-spike rust; while, like mourning weeds, dark festoons of sea-grass slimily swept to and fro over the name, with every hearse-like roll of the hull. Climbing the side, the visitor was at once surrounded by a clamorous throng of whites and blacks, but the latter outnumbering the former more than could have been expected, negro transportation-ship as the stranger in port was. But, in one language, and as with one voice, all poured out a common tale of suffering; in which the negresses, of whom there were not a few, exceeded the others in their dolorous vehemence. The scurvy, together with the fever, had swept off a great part of their number, more especially the Spaniards. Off Cape Horn they had narrowly escaped shipwreck; then, for days together, they had lain tranced without wind; their provisions were low; their water next to none; their lips that moment were baked.

While Captain Delano was thus made the mark of all eager tongues, his one eager glance took in all faces, with every other object about him. The oakum-pickers

Perhaps it was some such influence, as above is attempted to be described, which, in Captain Delano's mind, heightened whatever, upon a staid scrutiny, might have seemed unusual; especially the conspicuous figures of four elderly grizzled **negroes**, their heads like black, doddered willow tops, who, in venerable contrast to the tumult below them, were couched, sphynx-like, one on the starboard cat-head, another on the larboard, and the remaining pair face to face on the opposite bulwarks above the main-chains. They each had bits of unstranded old junk in their hands, and, with a sort of stoical self-content, were picking the junk into oakum, a small heap of which lay by their sides. They accompanied the task with a continuous, low, monotonous, chant; droning and drilling away like so many gray-headed bag-pipers playing a funeral march

The hatchet-polishers

The quarter-deck rose into an ample elevated poop, upon which, lifted... some eight feet above the general throng, sat along in a row, separated by regular spaces, the cross-legged figures of six other blacks; each with a rusty hatchet in his hand, which, with a bit of brick and a rag, he was engaged like a scullion in scouring; while between each two was a small stack of hatchets, their rusted edges turned forward awaiting a like operation. Though occasionally the four oakum-pickers would briefly address some person or persons in the crowd below, yet the six hatchetpolishers neither spoke to others, nor breathed a whisper among themselves, but sat intent upon their task, except at intervals, when, with the peculiar love in negroes of uniting industry with pastime, two and two they sideways clashed their hatchets together, like cymbals, with a barbarous din. All six, unlike the generality, had the raw aspect of unsophisticated Africans. But that first comprehensive glance which took in those ten figures, with scores less conspicuous, rested but an instant upon them, as, impatient of the hubbub of voices, the visitor turned in quest of whomsoever it might be that commanded the ship.

Master and slave

But as if not unwilling to let nature make known her own case among his suffering charge, or else in despair of restraining it for the time, the Spanish captain, a gentlemanly, reserved-looking, and rather young man to a stranger's eye, dressed with singular richness, but bearing plain traces of recent sleepless cares and disquietudes, stood passively by, leaning against the main-mast, at one moment casting a dreary, spiritless look upon his excited people, at the next an unhappy glance toward his visitor. By his side stood a black of small stature, in whose rude face, as occasionally, like a shepherd's dog, he mutely turned it up into the Spaniard's, sorrow and affection were equally blended.

Struggling through the throng, the American advanced to the Spaniard, assuring him of his sympathies, and offering to render whatever assistance might be in his power. To which the Spaniard returned for the present but grave and ceremonious acknowledgments, **his national formality** dusked by the saturnine mood of ill-health.

Shut up in these oaken walls, chained to one dull round of command, whose unconditionality cloyed him, like some **hypochondriac abbot** he moved slowly about, at times suddenly pausing, starting, or staring, biting his lip, biting his finger-nail, flushing, paling, twitching his beard, with other symptoms of an absent or moody mind. ... He was rather tall, but seemed never to have been robust, and now with nervous suffering was almost worn to a skeleton. A tendency to some pulmonary complaint appeared to have been lately confirmed. His voice was like that of one with lungs half gone—hoarsely suppressed, a husky whisper. No wonder that, as in this state he tottered about, his private servant 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.

While left alone with them, he was not long in observing some things tending to heighten his first impressions; but surprise was lost in pity, both for the Spaniards and blacks, alike evidently reduced from scarcity of water and provisions; while long-continued suffering seemed to have brought out the less good-natured qualities of the negroes, besides ...impairing the Spaniard's authority over them. But, under the circumstances, precisely this condition of things was to have been anticipated. In armies, navies, cities, or families, ... nothing more relaxes good order than misery. Still, Delano was not without the idea, that had Benito Cereno been a man of greater energy, misrule would hardly have come to the present pass. But the debility, constitutional or induced by hardships, bodily and mental, of the Spanish captain, was too obvious to be overlooked. A prey to settled dejection, as if long mocked with hope he would not now indulge it, even when it had ceased to be a mock, the prospect of that day, or evening at furthest, lying at anchor, with plenty of water for his people, and a brother captain to counsel and befriend, seemed in no perceptible degree to encourage him. His mind appeared unstrung, if not still more seriously

Once more the faintness returned—his mind roved—but, recovering, he resumed:

"But it is Babo here to whom, under God, I owe not only my own preservation, but likewise to him, chiefly, the merit is due, of pacifying his more ignorant brethren, when at intervals tempted to murmurings."

"Ah, master," sighed the black, bowing his face, "don't speak of me; Babo is nothing; what Babo has done was but duty."

"Faithful fellow!" cried Captain Delano. "Don Benito, I envy you such a friend; slave I cannot call him."

As master and man stood before him, the black upholding the white, Captain Delano could not but bethink him of the beauty of that relationship which could present such a spectacle of fidelity on the one hand and confidence on the other. The scene was heightened by, the contrast in dress, denoting their relative positions. The Spaniard wore a loose Chili jacket of dark velvet; white small-clothes and stockings, with silver buckles at the knee and instep; a highcrowned sombrero, of fine grass; a slender sword, silver mounted, hung from a knot in his sash—the last being an almost invariable adjunct, more for utility than ornament, of a South American gentleman's dress to this hour. Excepting when his occasional nervous contortions brought about disarray, there was a certain precision in his attire curiously at variance with the unsightly disorder around; especially in the belittered Ghetto, forward of the main-mast, wholly occupied by the blacks.

The servant wore nothing but wide trowsers, apparently, from their coarseness and patches, made out of some old topsail; they were clean, and confined at the waist by a bit of unstranded rope, which, with his composed, deprecatory air at times, made him look something like a begging friar of St. Francis. The singular alternations of courtesy and ill-breeding in the Spanish captain were unaccountable, except on one of two suppositions—innocent lunacy, or wicked imposture. But the first idea, though it ... had not hitherto been wholly a stranger to Captain Delano's mind, yet, now that, in an incipient way, he began to regard the stranger's conduct something in the light of an intentional affront, of course the idea of lunacy was virtually vacated. But if not a lunatic, what then? ... The man was an impostor. Some low-born adventurer, masquerading as an oceanic grandee; yet so ignorant of the first requisites of mere gentlemanhood as to be betrayed into the present remarkable indecorum... Benito Cereno—Don Benito Cereno—a sounding name. One, too, at that period, not unknown, in the surname, to super-cargoes and sea captains... as belonging to one of the most enterprising and extensive mercantile families in all those provinces.... The alleged Don Benito was in early manhood, about twenty-nine or thirty. To assume a sort of roving cadetship in the maritime affairs of such a house, what more likely scheme for a young knave of talent and spirit? But the Spaniard was a pale invalid. Never mind. For even to the degree of simulating mortal disease, the craft of some tricksters had been known to attain. To think that, under the aspect of infantile weakness, the most savage energies might be couched—those velvets of the Spaniard but the silky paw to his fangs.

For the rest, whatever in a serious way seemed enigmatical, was now good-naturedly explained away by the thought that, for the most part, the poor invalid scarcely knew what he was about... Evidently for the present, the man was not fit to be intrusted with the ship. On some benevolent plea withdrawing the command from him, Captain Delano would yet have to send her to Conception, in charge of his second mate, a worthy person and good navigator—a plan not more convenient for the San Dominick than for Don Benito; for, relieved from all anxiety, keeping wholly to his cabin, the sick man, under the good nursing of his servant, would, probably... be in a measure restored to health, and with that he should also be restored to authority.

Such were the American's thoughts. They were tranquilizing. There was a difference between the idea of Don Benito's darkly preordaining Captain Delano's fate, and Captain Delano's lightly arranging Don Benito's. Nevertheless, it was not without something of relief that the good seaman presently perceived his whale-boat in the distance His glance called away from the spectacle of disorder to the more pleasing one before him, Captain Delano could not avoid again congratulating his host upon possessing such a servant, who, though perhaps a little too forward now and then, must upon the whole be invaluable to one in the invalid's situation.

## "Tell me, Don Benito," he added, with a smile—"I should like to have your man here, myself—what will you take for him? Would fifty doubloons be any object?"

"Master wouldn't part with Babo for a thousand doubloons," murmured the black, overhearing the offer, and taking it in earnest, and, with the strange vanity of a faithful slave, appreciated by his master, scorning to hear so paltry a valuation put upon him by a stranger. But Don Benito, apparently hardly yet completely restored, and again interrupted by his cough, made but some broken reply.

Soon his physical distress became so great, affecting his mind, too, apparently, that, as if to screen the sad spectacle, the servant gently conducted his master below.

From something suddenly suggested by the man's air, the mad idea now darted into Captain Delano's mind, that Don Benito's plea of indisposition, in withdrawing below, was but a pretense: that he was engaged there maturing his plot, of which the sailor, by some means gaining an inkling, had a mind to warn the stranger against; incited, it may be, by gratitude for a kind word on first boarding the ship. Was it from foreseeing some possible interference like this, that Don Benito had, beforehand, given such a bad character of his sailors, while praising the negroes; though, indeed, the former seemed as docile as the latter the contrary? The whites, too, by nature, were the shrewder race. A man with some evil design, would he not be likely to speak well of that stupidity which was blind to his depravity, and malign that intelligence from which it might not be hidden? Not unlikely, perhaps. But if the whites had dark secrets concerning Don Benito, could then Don Benito be any way in complicity with the blacks? But they were too stupid. Besides, who ever heard of a white so far a renegade as to apostatize from his very species almost, by leaguing in against it with negroes? These difficulties recalled former ones.

The place called the cuddy was a light deck-cabin formed by the poop, a sort of attic to the large cabin below. Part of it had formerly been the quarters of the officers; but since their death ... the whole interior converted into one spacious and airy marine hall; for absence of fine furniture and picturesque disarray of odd appurtenances, somewhat answering to the wide, cluttered hall of some eccentric bachelor-squire in the country, who hangs his shooting-jacket and tobacco-pouch on deer antlers, and keeps his fishing-rod, tongs, and walking-stick in the same corner....The floor of the cuddy was matted. ...On one side was a claw-footed old table lashed to the deck; a thumbed missal on it, and over it a small, meagre crucifix attached to the bulk-head. Under the table lay a dented cutlass or two, with a hacked harpoon, among some melancholy old rigging, like a heap of poor friars' girdles. **There were** also two long, sharp-ribbed settees of Malacca cane, black with age, and uncomfortable to look at as inquisitors' racks, with a large, misshapen arm-chair, which, furnished with a rude barber's crotch at the back, working with a screw, seemed some grotesque engine of torment.

Here the servant, napkin on arm, made a motion as if waiting his master's good pleasure. Don Benito signified his readiness, when, seating him in the Malacca arm-chair, and for the guest's convenience drawing opposite one of the settees, the servant commenced operations by throwing back his master's collar and loosening his cravat.

There is something in the negro which, in a peculiar way, fits him for avocations about one's person. Most negroes are natural valets and hair-dressers; taking to the comb and brush congenially as to the castinets, and flourishing them apparently with almost equal satisfaction. There is, too, a smooth tact about them in this employment, with a marvelous, noiseless, gliding briskness, not ungraceful in its way, singularly pleasing to behold, and still more so to be the manipulated subject of. And above all is the great gift of goodhumor. Not the mere grin or laugh is here meant. Those were unsuitable. But a certain easy cheerfulness, harmonious in every glance and gesture; as though God had set the whole negro to some pleasant tune.

When to this is added the docility arising from the unaspiring contentment of a limited mind and that susceptibility of blind attachment sometimes inhering in indisputable inferiors, one readily perceives why those hypochondriacs, Johnson and Byron—it may be, something like the hypochondriac Benito Cereno—took to their hearts, almost to the exclusion of the entire white race, their serving men, the negroes, Barber and Fletcher. But if there be that in the negro which exempts him from the inflicted sourness of the morbid or cynical mind, how, in his most prepossessing aspects, must he appear to a benevolent one? When at ease with respect to exterior things, Captain Delano's nature was not only benign, but familiarly and humorously so. At home, he had often taken rare satisfaction in sitting in his door, watching some free man of color at his work or play. If on a voyage he chanced to have a black sailor, invariably he was on chatty and halfgamesome terms with him. In fact, like most men of a good, blithe heart, Captain Delano took to negroes, not philanthropically, but genially, just as other men to Newfoundland dogs.

Among other things, he was amused with an odd instance of the African love of bright colors and fine shows, in the black's informally taking from the flag-locker a great piece of bunting of all hues, and lavishly tucking it under his master's chin for an apron. The mode of shaving among the Spaniards is a little different from what it is with other nations...The preliminaries being somewhat novel to Captain Delano, he sat curiously eying them, so that no conversation took place, nor, for the present, did Don Benito appear disposed to renew any. Setting down his basin, the negro searched among the razors, as for the sharpest, and having found it, gave it an additional edge by expertly strapping it on the firm, smooth, oily skin of his open palm; he then made a gesture as if to begin, but midway stood suspended for an instant, one hand elevating the razor, the other professionally dabbling among the bubbling suds on the Spaniard's lank neck. Not unaffected by the close sight of the gleaming steel, Don Benito nervously shuddered; his usual ghastliness was heightened by the lather, which lather, again, was intensified in its hue by the contrasting sootiness of the negro's body.

Meantime the agitation of the Spaniard had a little loosened the bunting from around him, so that one broad fold swept curtain-like over the chair-arm to the floor, revealing, amid a profusion of armorial bars and ground-colors—black, blue, and yellow—a closed castle in a

blood red field diagonal with a lion rampant in a white.

Altogether the scene was somewhat peculiar, at least to Captain Delano, nor, as he saw the two thus postured, could he resist the vagary, that in the black he saw a headsman, and in the white a man at the block. But this was one of those antic conceits, appearing and vanishing in a breath, from which, perhaps, the best regulated mind is not always free.

"The castle and the lion," exclaimed Captain Delano—"why, Don Benito, this is the flag of Spain you use here. It's well it's only I, and not the King, that sees this," he added, with a smile, "but"—turning towards the black—**"it's all one, I suppose, so the colors be gay;"** which playful remark did not fail somewhat to tickle the negro. "Now, master," he said, readjusting the flag, and pressing the head gently further back into the crotch of the chair; "now, master," and the steel glanced nigh the throat. Again Don Benito faintly shuddered.

"You must not shake so, master. See, Don Amasa, master always shakes when I shave him. And yet master knows I never yet have drawn blood, though it's true, if master will shake so, I may some of these times. Now master," he continued. "And now, Don Amasa, please go on with your talk about the gale, and all that; master can hear, and, between times, master can answer."

"Ah yes, these gales," said Captain Delano; "but the more I think of your voyage, Don Benito, the more I wonder, not at the gales, terrible as they must have been, but at the disastrous interval following them. For here, by your account, have you been these two months and more getting from Cape Horn to St. Maria, a distance which I myself, with a good wind, have sailed in a few days. True, you had calms, and long ones, but to be becalmed for two months, that is, at least, unusual. Why, Don Benito, had almost any other gentleman told me such a story, I should have been half disposed to a little incredulity."

Here an involuntary expression came over the Spaniard, similar to that just before on the deck, and whether it was the start he gave, or a sudden gawky roll of the hull in the calm, or a momentary unsteadiness of the servant's hand, however it was, just then the razor drew blood...: immediately the black barber drew back his steel, and, remaining in his professional attitude, back to Captain Delano, and face to Don Benito, held up the trickling razor, saying, with a sort of half humorous sorrow, "See, master—you shook so—here's Babo's first blood." No sword drawn before James the First of England, no assassination in that timid King's presence, could have produced a more terrified aspect than was now presented by Don Benito.

Poor fellow, thought Captain Delano, so nervous he can't even bear the sight of barber's blood; and this unstrung, sick man, is it credible that I should have imagined he meant to spill all my blood, who can't endure the sight of one little drop of his own? Surely, Amasa Delano, you have been beside yourself this day. Tell it not when you get home, sappy Amasa. Well, well, he looks like a murderer, doesn't he? More like as if himself were to be done for. Seating himself in the stern, Captain Delano, making a last salute, ordered the boat shoved off. ... The bowsmen pushed the boat a sufficient distance for the oars to be lengthwise dropped. The instant that was done, Don Benito sprang over the bulwarks, falling at the feet of Captain Delano; at the same time calling towards his ship, but in tones so frenzied, that none in the boat could understand him. But, as if not equally obtuse, three sailors, from three different and distant parts of the ship, splashed into the sea, swimming after their captain, as if intent upon his rescue.

The dismayed officer of the boat eagerly asked what this meant. To which, Captain Delano, turning a disdainful smile upon the unaccountable Spaniard, answered that, for his part, he neither knew nor cared; but it seemed as if Don Benito had taken it into his head to produce the impression among his people that the boat wanted to kidnap him.

"Or else—give way for your lives," he wildly added, starting at a clattering hubbub in the ship, above which rang the tocsin of the hatchet-polishers; and seizing Don Benito by the throat he added, "this plotting pirate means murder!" Here, in apparent verification of the words, the servant, a dagger in his hand, was seen on the rail overhead, poised, in the act of leaping, as if with desperate fidelity to befriend his master to the last; while, seemingly to aid the black, the three white sailors were trying to clamber into the hampered bow. Meantime, the whole host of negroes, as if inflamed at the sight of their jeopardized captain, impended in one sooty avalanche over the bulwarks.

Glancing down at his feet, Captain Delano saw the freed hand of the servant aiming with a second dagger—a small one, before concealed in his wool—with this he was snakishly writhing up from the boat's bottom, at the heart of his master, his countenance lividly vindictive, expressing the centred purpose of his soul; while the Spaniard, half-choked, was vainly shrinking away, with husky words, incoherent to all but the Portuguese.

That moment, across the long-benighted mind of Captain Delano, a flash of revelation swept, illuminating, in unanticipated clearness, his host's whole mysterious demeanor, with every enigmatic event of the day, as well as the entire past voyage of the San Dominick. He smote Babo's hand down, but his own heart smote him harder. With infinite pity he withdrew his hold from Don Benito. Not Captain Delano, but Don Benito, the black, in leaping into the boat, had intended to stab. The following **extracts, translated** from one of the official Spanish documents, will, it is hoped, shed light on the preceding narrative, as well as, in the first place, reveal the true port of departure and **true history of the San Dominick's voyage**, down to the time of her touching at the island of St. Maria.

But, ere the extracts come, it may be well to preface them with a remark.

The document selected, from among many others, for partial translation, contains the deposition of Benito Cereno; the first taken in the case. Some disclosures therein were, at the time, held dubious for both learned and natural reasons. The tribunal inclined to the opinion that the deponent, not undisturbed in his mind by recent events, raved of some things which could never have happened. But subsequent depositions of the surviving sailors, bearing out the revelations of their captain in several of the strangest particulars, gave credence to the rest. So that the tribunal, in its final decision, rested its capital sentences upon statements which, had they lacked confirmation, it would have deemed it but duty to reject.

"You generalize, Don Benito; and mournfully enough. But the 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."

"Because they have no memory," he dejectedly replied; "because they are not human."

"But these mild trades that now fan your cheek, do they not come with a human-like healing to you? Warm friends, steadfast friends are the trades."

"With their steadfastness they but waft me to my tomb, Señor," was the foreboding response.

"You are saved," cried Captain Delano, ... "you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?" "The negro."

There was silence, while the moody man sat, slowly and unconsciously gathering his mantle about him, as if it were a pall. But if the Spaniard's melancholy sometimes ended in muteness upon topics like the above, there were others upon which he never spoke at all; on which, indeed, all his old reserves were piled. Pass over the worst, and, only to elucidate let an item or two of these be cited. The dress, so precise and costly, worn by him on the day whose events have been narrated, had not willingly been put on. And that silver-mounted sword, apparent symbol of despotic command, was not, indeed, a sword, but the ghost of one. The scabbard, artificially stiffened, was empty.

As for the black—whose brain, not body, had schemed and led the revolt, with the plot—his slight frame, inadequate to that which it held, had at once yielded to the superior muscular strength of his captor, in the boat. Seeing all was over, he uttered no sound, and could not be forced to. His aspect seemed to say, since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words... During the passage, Don Benito did not visit him. Nor then, nor at any time after, would he look at him. ...When pressed by the judges he fainted. On the testimony of the sailors alone rested the legal identity of Babo. Some months after, dragged to the gibbet at the tail of a

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