Melville's Benito Cereno

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MELVILLE'S BENITO CERENO

By

Paul Michael Sorrentino

A THESIS

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Abstract

In this thesis I wish to consider three aspects of Benito Cereno, the problems of slavery, characterization, and symbolism. Using slavery as a means to an end, Melville makes his main theme the question of good and evil. Within this context he portrays Captain Delano as an overly optimistic American whose narration of much of the story is somewhat unreliable, Benito Cereno as a Spaniard spiritually and physically defeated by the onslaught of evil, and Babo as the essence of destruction as well as the vengeance of nature. Helping to unify the story are the symbols, whose dramatic quality is seen if one considers how they heighten the suspense and add to the irony. Their moral quality is found in the themes of religion (good and evil), the decline of Spain, and law and order.
Introduction

Today, over a hundred years after its initial publication in Putnam's Monthly in 1855, Benito Cereno ranks as one of Melville's most mature works stylistically and thematically. Only in the past twenty-five years, however, have critics begun to look at it seriously.

Prior to the appearance of Harold Scudder's famous article discovering one of Melville's sources, the tale was treated extremely superficially. Raymond Weaver found that Benito Cereno, along with "The Bell Tower" and "The Encantadas," "shows the last glow of Melville's literary career, the final momentary brightening of the embers before they sank into blackness and ash." Michael Sadlier considered it an example of Melville's "supreme artistry." And Van Wyck Brooks quickly labeled it one of the writer's "simple tales." Since the appearance of Scudder's article, however, critics have been more willing to view it as a work of art, as a brief mentioning of views since 1928 will show. The story has been called "the noblest short story in American literature"; "the culmination of Melville's art"; "one of the most sensitively poised pieces of writing that Melville had ever written"; and "one of Melville's best sustained allegorical essays, [showing] the profoundly disturbing conflicts which he perceived
at the heart of human nature." Relatively few views find the work wanting in aesthetic appeal, and only one, in calling it an "artistic miscarriage," attacks it scathingly.

Despite its obvious importance, though, some critics, misunderstanding the tale itself, do not consider Benito Cereno in their studies. Edward Rosenberry, for example, in his study of the comedy in Melville overlooks the satire and the verbal humor found in the story. Nathalia Wright in a discussion of Melville's use of the Bible shows her awareness of the existence of religious allusions in the story but does little else. Likewise, William Braswell in a general discussion of Melville's religious thought notices that Melville uses the beliefs of Manichaeism in his works, but he does not even mention Benito Cereno's use of it.

The important thing to note is that only within about the past twenty years has the criticism made substantial strides forward. Many of these approaches have either been excessively influenced by the fashionable theme of slavery, and occasionally with critically bad results. Consequently, certain key elements have gone untouched as far as criticism is concerned. Is, for example, the language used appropriately? Does it have thematic significance? Also, why did Melville ask that the contents of The Piazza Tales be arranged in a certain order? Was he trying to achieve
an aesthetic effect? Likewise, have critics been procrustean in their attempt to interpret the story? These and other questions will have to be the main concern of future critics.
Chapter 1

The 1850's: Melville's Life and the Question of Slavery

To understand Melville's attitude toward slavery in *Benito Cereno*—and the work in general for that matter—we should first of all try to recreate the circumstances under which Melville wrote the tale. Beginning at the middle of the nineteenth century will show some of the formative influences on his life prior to 1855, the date of the tale's publication.

Prompted by his wife's hay fever and the crowded house they were residing in in New York, Melville in 1850 decided to buy some land in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Also, the fact that other famous people, such as Hawthorne and Fanny Kemble, the actress, either lived there or frequented the area influenced his decision to move. In September, with the financial assistance of his father-in-law, Melville bought a farm near Pittsfield which he later named "Arrowhead."

The acquaintance between Hawthorne and Melville proved to be one of the most important friendships for the author of *Benito Cereno*. In a letter (June 27, 1850) to Richard Bentley, Melville had declared that *Moby Dick* was to be "a romance of adventure, founded upon certain wild legends in the Southern Sperm Whale Fisheries, and illustrated by
the author's own personal experience, of two years and more, as a harpooner." Encouraging him, Hawthorne had much to do in getting Melville to change his intention. A book which Melville had hoped to finish within a few months took almost two years to complete—the most time that he put into any of his books. He worked on it every day, spending the mornings and afternoons in writing and revising and using the night to read and collate material. In the process he injured his eyes.

The work was finally published in November, 1851, and received mixed reviews. Despite any adverse criticism, however, Melville could feel content because of Hawthorne's acceptance of the novel and because of its purgational qualities. In a letter (November 17[?], 1851) to Nathaniel, Herman wrote: "... A sense of unspeakable security is in me this moment, on account of your having understood the book. I have written a wicked book, and feel spotless as the lamb." Yet later on in the letter the tone changes noticeably, and the words suggest the hauntingly pessimistic outlook which bothered Melville throughout his life to one degree or another: "... the atmospheric skepticisms steal into men now, and make me doubtful of my sanity in writing you this. But, believe me, I am not mad, most noble Festus! But truth is ever incoherent, and when the big hearts strike together, the concussion is a little stunning." The pessimism suggested here will soon appear in Benito Cereno.
But Melville could not live by Hawthorne's praise alone. During the writing of *Moby-Dick* he had to borrow money; now, after its publication, he still found himself in financial difficulty. Again, therefore, he turned to writing. He decided that his novel, *Pierre*, would be written in order to appeal to his public. Nevertheless, the book, in considering the question of moral ambiguity, resorted to philosophical speculation.

Problems surrounded the writing of *Pierre*. Hawthorne had moved away, so his welcomed advice was no longer readily available. His wife, Elizabeth, after the birth of their second child, Stanwix in October, 1851, had become irritable and was thus unable to be Melville's secretary, as she had been earlier. Fearing that her husband was overworking himself, she tried to get him to slow down his work on the novel. More frustration occurred when Richard Bentley, Melville's London publisher, refused to print *Pierre* because of the money he had lost on Melville's other books. Eventually, in 1852, Harper's published it, but as with *Mardi*, the critics attacked it.

Despite the failure of another one of his books and the growing pressure from his relatives to give up his literary career, Melville persisted. In May and June of 1852 he rested on his farm, while a hired hand took care of the chores. During this period he built the piazza on the north side of his house which later gave him the title
and a sketch for The Piazza Tales. Later he journeyed with Judge Shaw, who like Elizabeth was concerned with Melville's health, to Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard islands.

Melville's health, however, continued to suffer, and the family noticed this. An attempt was made by his relatives and Hawthorne to obtain for him a consulship in Honolulu. The feelings of Maria Melville in a letter (April 20, 1853) to her brother Peter also expressed those of others: "The constant in-door confinement with little intermission to which Herman's [sic] occupation as author compels him, does not agree with him. This constant working of the brain, and excitement of the imagination, is wearing Herman out, and you will my dear Peter be doing him a lasting benefit if by your added excursions you can procure for him a foreign consulship." Nevertheless, their attempts failed. Melville experienced further difficulties when in March, 1853, he discovered that Pierre was in the red financially.

The interesting thing to note here is that Melville's bitterness was not so much the result of his inability to make money--for he did not suffer poverty--as it was the critics' distaste for his work. As Hillway suggests, "He was disappointed by the American public's plain lack of perceptiveness. For some time after 1852 one finds in his writings a peculiar preoccupation with characters who
are happy failures or who retain their pride and integrity in the face of undeserved misfortune."

Whether or not he needed money, he turned to magazine writing beginning in 1853 and contributed to *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* and *Harper's Magazine*. By the second half of 1854 he found himself receiving $50.00 a month from the serialization of *Israel Potter* in *Putnam's*. With this income, the money his wife received annually from her trust fund, the net profit from the farm, and small contributions from his mother, Melville was able to support his family. By March, 1855, *Israel Potter* had been published in book form, and he seemed to be approaching a financial security he had never had before.

During the same year, as Howard says, Melville had "recuperated his unintellectual energy and had also discovered another 'story of reality' which was 'instinct' with narrative as well as with all sorts of other 'significance.'" This story of reality was *Benito Cereno*, the basis of which is the eighteenth chapter of Captain Amasa Delano's *Narrative of Voyages and Travels* (1817). It is worth taking a close look at the facts surrounding the publication of *Benito Cereno*.

On April 17, 1855, W. Curtis wrote to J. H. Dix, the owner and editor of *Putnam's Monthly*, saying that he was anxious to see *Benito Cereno* "which is in his best style of subject." Two days later he wrote Dix praising Melville's
story, but found himself upset over Melville's destroying the unity by "putting in the dreary documents at the end." He confirmed his opinion the next day by writing Dix that Melville "does everything too hurriedly now." And on July 31 Curtis continued his concern by writing about the statistics: "I should alter all the dreadful statistics at the end. Oh! dear, why can't the Americans write good short stories. They tell good lies enough, and plenty of 'em." But by September 14 he seemed to have once again found something of merit in it: "The Benito Cereno is ghastly and interesting."

On October 1, 1855, publications of the first of the three installments appeared in Putnam's, with the other two appearing on the first day of the next two months. And on May 20, 1856, Benito Cereno appeared, with several other pieces, in The Piazza Tales, published in New York by Dix and Edwards. Despite its general critical acceptance from both British and American critics, both sides of the Atlantic either ignored Benito Cereno or viewed it, somewhat superficially, as being "painfully interesting" or as being a fresh specimen of his sea romances. Not until the renaissance in Melvillian scholarship in the 1920's did critics begin to understand Benito Cereno.

Melville may have once again temporarily pleased his audience, but personal problems continued to plague him. In February, 1855, Melville suffered an attack of rheumatism
in his back. On March 2 his fourth and last child, Frances, was born. For a man who had an ingrained sense of responsibility, these setbacks obviously affected him and put him "in a state bordering upon panic": "A farmer with a new baby and a stiff back was in no position to face the approach of spring with equanimity." "A farmer incapable of doing his spring plowing can feel more desperate than an author with a rejected manuscript, for neither extra labor nor a new judgment can provide him with a harvest once the season of planting has passed." By June Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Parkman Professor of Anatomy and Physiology of the Harvard Medical School, was called in to examine him. His physical sickness, however, also affected his mental disposition. Melville found himself becoming so moody and irritable during 1855 that he eventually decided to sell his farm, feeling that he probably would not be able to work as a farmer again. The important thing to note here is the probable condition of Melville around the time of his writing *Benito Cereno*. Despite the fact that towards the end of 1855 his health had slowly improved, he was obviously plagued by a sense of frustration caused by the critics' failure to accept all his work. Furthermore, as Merton Sealts suggests, Melville feared the need of money; this is perhaps the reason, he suggests, for the appearance of *The Piazza Tales*, a book whose selections, with the exception of one, had already been published in *Putnam's*. Conditions became bad enough
for his wife Elizabeth to borrow money from her father in
order to send Melville on a trip to Europe and the Holy Land.
In October, 1856, Melville left on the trip which, hopefully,
would ease his mind—the trip, which Howard aptly labels,
"The Quest for Confidence."

This, then, brings us up to the time of Benito Cereno.
It is important now, however, to explain Melville's atti­
tude toward slavery. By doing this, much of the criticism
on the problem of slavery in Benito Cereno can be dismissed.

Because of the abolitionist movement in the 1850's,
Melville obviously knew of the turmoil surrounding slavery—
the question is, though, to what extent it affected the
writing of Benito Cereno. Slave revolts, two of which he
must have been familiar with, had been occurring since the
eighteenth century. In 1839, shortly after leaving Cuba,
the slaves on board the Amistad revolted, leaving only two
whites alive to steer the ship to Africa. But before the
Negroes arrived there, the American Navy captured the ship
and brought them back to the United States, where they
were charged with piracy and murder. The incident received
so much publicity that Broadway turned it into an extremely
successful play, The Pirate Schooner or the Pirate Slaver
"Amistad." Sidney Kaplan notes that one of its stars was
Joseph Cinquez, the actual leader of the mutiny, whose
royal ancestry suggests Artufal, also of regal descent.
It is possible that Melville knew about the slave revolt
on the ship *Creole* in 1841. On the way to New Orleans the Negroes rebelled and demanded that the ship be steered to Nassau. After arriving there, they were captured by the British authorities, but soon all but nineteen of the hundred and thirty-five were freed. This started a protest movement in America against the action of the British, which resulted in a verbal battle between the two countries for the next twelve years.

Obviously, then, he was aware of the problem of slavery, and I think that Kaplan, in an article which shows the organic growth of Melville's attitude toward the Negro and slavery, puts Melville's outlook in its proper prospective:

> It would be a mistake to search in Melville for the intransigent humanitarianism of a Garrison or a Weld, or even for the milder yet consistent anti-slaveryism of lesser figures. Melville was never an abolitionist . . . nor was his writing, for the most part ever directly applied to influencing immediate events in the manner of an Emerson, a Lowell, a Thoreau or a Whittier. Indeed, if he was anything at all in the active political sense, he was a liberal Democrat in a period when the official Democracy was moving into stronger and stronger alliance with the Southern slavocracy.

Yet it must nonetheless be gladly admitted that in forms of fiction he uttered from time to time the most powerfully democratic words of his age on the dignity of the Negro as a part of American life.

If this is the case, why then is there so much debate over Melville's handling of the slaves in *Benito Cereno*? Simply stated, critics have either misread or let their own
views decide for them the meaning of the work. The simplest way to divide the critics is between those who see slavery as the important issue and those who do not.

Of those in the former group only one major critic, the Marxist-oriented John Howard Lawson, finds it as pro-slavery. His harsh words condemn the work in general:

"From an aesthetic point of view, the story is cheap melodrama, a distortion of human and moral values; few heroes in literature are as absurd as the delicate Don Benito, retiring to a monastery to die of grief over the inhumanity of the Negro. The portrait is a pitiful attempt to accomplish the task which Shelley rejected—to reconcile 'the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind.'"

Most of the critics concerned with the question of slavery, however, do not speak as rashly. Perhaps the three most influential voices in this field are those of Sterling Brown, F. O. Matthiessen, and Joseph Schiffman. Brown argues: "Although opposed to slavery, Melville does not make *Benito Cereno* into an abolitionist tract; he is more concerned with a thrilling narrative and character portrayal. But although the mutineers are bloodthirsty and cruel, Melville does not make them into villains; they revolt as mankind has always revolted. Because Melville was unwilling to look upon men as 'Isolatoes,' wishing instead to discover the 'common continent of man,' he came nearer to the truth in his scattered pictures of a
few unusual Negroes than do the other authors of the period." 26 Hopefully, by the end of this thesis I will have shown that Melville was doing more than merely telling a sea story and developing characters. Mattheissen, on the other hand, believes that although "the Negroes were savagely vindictive and drove a terror of blackness into Cereno's heart, the fact remains that they were slaves and that evil had thus originally been done to them. Melville's failure to reckon with this fact within the limits of his narrative makes its tragedy, for all its prolonged suspense, comparatively superficial." 27 Unfortunately, Mattheissen misinterprets part of the story. Melville does cope with this problem within the limits of his narrative. 28 Also, this critic assumes that the tragedy in Benito Cereno conveys an ideal order, but this is not the case. 29 Finally Schiffman builds his article on these two critical approaches. In looking at all of Melville's work, he argues that Babo is the moral victor and that Melville was thus condemning slavery in Benito Cereno: ". . . in selecting a theme of slave rebellion, and in treating Babo and his fellow slaves as able, disciplined people, as capable of evil as the white man, he treated the Negro as an individual. Both subject and treatment were conditioned by the 1850's, and both subject and treatment marked advances for American literature." 30 Schiffman, however, makes two fatal mistakes. First, he spends more time arguing from Melville's other works than from Benito
Cereno to show the writer's anti-slavery position. And second, he overemphasizes the sociological impact, as do many of the critics who are concerned with the slavery issue, by suggesting that Melville's handling of the tale was conditioned by the times. If there were two writers in the 1850's who seemed out of tune with the times, they would be Melville and Hawthorne, whose pessimistic outlooks were anachronistic in a period of American history when optimism was the country's weltanschauung. What I am implying here, then, is that if Melville's mind was "conditioned" by anything during the 1850's, it was because of his lapse in mental and physical health, not because of social conditions.

Other critics emphasizing the role of slavery have used the above comments as bases for their arguments. Warren D'Azevedo, for example, in agreeing with Brown, finds the theme as being "the psychological impact of slavery and revolt upon Captain Delano and particularly Don Benito." Allen Guttman, in accepting Matthiessen—though criticizing Schiffman for his insufficient treatment of Benito Cereno—argues that Babo was right to rebel and that Delano is a static character. Finally, John Bernstein, in an article which makes some particularly cogent remarks about Melville's handling of the Spanish Inquisition, overemphasizes the slavery issue: "Melville's tale is a warning to America to either 'keep faith with the blacks,' or be prepared to follow the leadership of Don Alejandro Aranda to ultimate
destruction." He concludes that the Negroes hold an inquisition because of the injustices done to them by the white man.

These, then, are some of the critics who emphasize slavery. Though they often make interesting remarks, they nevertheless mar them with their handling of the Negro insurrection. To see Melville's intention here, we should now turn to those critics who de-emphasize the problem of slavery and try to put it in its proper perspective.

Rosalie Fellenstein, Ivor Winters, Guy Cardwell, Nicholas Canady, and David Simboli agree that slavery is not the issue here. But if it isn't, then what is? And if the work is unified, how does the problem of slavery help to develop the theme? The answers to these questions are not easy to ascertain, as they involve a simultaneous acceptance and rejection of certain critics; that is, we must agree with certain parts of articles and disagree with others.

Melville's basic concern here is with the nature of evil and the ambiguity involved therein. During the 1850's the abolitionist movement was at its height. As is the problem today, so too then was there the tendency to oversimplify: the white man was completely wrong and the black completely right. But Melville's view of the universe could not accommodate such a view. Even though he opposed slavery, he saw that good and evil were intermingled in the world and that
anyone could be bad. Fogle offers an interesting analysis on this view by quoting from the cook's sermon to the sharks in *Moby Dick*: "The rebellious slaves are good and also evil, like other men, but they lack a principle of control. Natural goodness is no better thought of than in *Moby Dick* in the cook's sermon to the sharks: "Your voraciousness, fellow-critters, I don't blame ye so much for; dat is natur, and can't be helped; but to gobern dat wicked natur, dat is de pint. You is sharks, sartin, but if you gobern de shark in you, why den you be angel; for all angel is not'ing more than de shark will goberned." The cook, in other words, feels that man has both good and bad in him and that he must learn to control the latter. Farnsworth extends Fogle's observation by applying it more closely to *Benito Cereno*. The "dark side of the white man," symbolized by the Negro, must be controlled. But this self-control relies on self-honesty. One must accept "his own latent savagery. The psychological and moral insidiousness of slavery, especially when it is coupled with racial distinctions between black and white, is that it permits the white man to blind himself to his own savagery and project it as the exclusive quality of the other, the Negro slave. So long as the white man sees the Negro as other, a race apart, this comfortable, but dangerous, myth about the self is maintained."

It must be kept in mind that both the whites and the
blacks committed evil acts. By being subjected to slavery, the Negroes were losing their identity, but this was no justification for their mass slaughter of the whites. Likewise, the white race—symbolized by the white in the story, though especially by the Spaniards on the San Dominick—had been tortured unnecessarily, but this was no reason for their savage treatment of Babo's corpse at the end of the story. What Melville was getting at, then, was this. He was possibly showing to the abolitionists that there was no stereotyped way of viewing the blacks—or for that matter, the whites. Both races were capable of good and evil, and to attempt to simplify the moral ambiguity involved in the problem—to look for absolutes—was dangerous. Slavery is used as a means to an end. The main theme is the question of good and evil, and slavery is the subject used to convey Melville's thought on it.

Finally, if one considers slavery an important issue, one must reconcile this with Melville's handling of Delano's Narrative. Melville's slaves are much worse than those in the original story. If he were so concerned with the evils of slavery, why would he present the Negroes in a more unfavorable light? We do not have to be like Forrey and admit defeat when it comes to understanding Melville's attitude on slavery. Melville was against it, but he changed the Negroes simply to emphasize to the abolitionists the interrelation of good and evil.
Chapter II

Melville's Portrayal of Delano, Cereno, and Babo

Melville's conscious artistry can be seen in his handling of the characters. By comparing the two versions of the Benito Cereno story, we can see that Melville's alterations in character portrayal reflect an attempt to emphasize certain themes. In this chapter my aim is to single out the three main characters and show how each works in the overall structure of the story.

Captain Delano presents, perhaps, the most difficulty. A mere listing of some of the critical views in the last forty years will show the wide range of interpretation. He has been called "a Conradian figure in his simplicity and slightly exaggerated obtuseness"; "moral simplicity in a form that borders upon weak-wittedness"; "a bachelor" ("A bachelor is a man who would keep his freedom; if necessary, he will close his eyes and heart in order to avoid entanglement."); "the spokesman of the stock evaluations concerning the Negro people which were in general usage among the typical Northern whites of his day"; "a kind of Spenserian fairy hero, a temporarily becharmed Knight of civilization owing his survival to nothing less than his continual faith"; "the Revolutionary American, a spokesman for New-World innocence, vigor, and promise." Among those he has been compared to are...
Laertes, Giovanni (in "Rappaccini's Daughter"), and Candide.

All these views, varying in degrees of insight, are worth considering, even if only for their argumentative value. The point I wish to make, however, is that Delano is basically a static character whose portrait is a satire on the Emersonian Man. Carlisle is thus correct in his basic premise:

Thus Melville seems to have placed the extreme of Emersonian affirmation and hope for the future in the mind of a sea captain. In Moby Dick Ahab dramatizes self-reliance gone mad; in 'Benito Cereno' Delano reveals affirmation become foolish and blind. Instead of an American hero, who reveals the triumph of American innocence, benevolence, and goodwill, then, Melville's tale presents the American fool, or--to borrow a phrase from Daniel G. Hoffman--'The Great American Boob.'

This view can be proved by looking at the changes Melville made in the character of Delano and by considering the point of view of the novella.

Putzel suggests that Melville chose the story for two main reasons: first, because he saw in it the possibility of its conveying the dangers that the "American dream of philanthropic idealism" could bring; and second, because he was probably struck by the confidence that showed through in the portrait of the original Delano on the frontispiece of his book. Whatever the reason might have been, it is important to note that Melville did make significant changes.
The original Delano, judging from Chapter 18 of his autobiography, was somewhat self-centered and sure of himself. For example, after Benito Cereno refuses to have tea with him on board the Perseverance, he concludes with a sense of righteousness that he "knew he had seen nothing in . . . his conduct to justify it [Cereno's refusal] . . . and he felt certain that . . . Benito Cereno treated him . . . with intentional neglect . . . ." And in looking back at what has happened, he concludes: "I cannot find in my soul, that I ever have done anything to deserve such misery and ingratitude as I have suffered at different periods, and in general, from the very persons to whom I have rendered the greatest services." This self-exoneration by the original Delano somehow reeks of a morality wherein this speaker is the sole judge. Out of this dull and bitter character Melville makes an overly optimistic, good-natured captain.

The best way to see Melville's creation in action is to analyze the point of view. Critics within the last fifteen years or so have turned to this important aspect of the novella, hoping to find it the key which would unlock the story's mysteries. They generally point out that Delano serves as a central intelligence. Cardwell, for example, suggests that he is the "perceiving center" showing us that the world is not divided morally, as is Manichean dualism. The important point which Cardwell fails to
make, however, is that Delano does not come to understand the full impact of what this means. This crucial distinction will be developed later in the chapter. Likewise, Putzel argues that each of the three main characters perceives "the reality in a different light--the narrator giving it a subtle twist whose irony is alien to all of them."

More recent critics, however, have begun to see the point of view not only aesthetically, but thematically as well, as a functional literary tool shaping meaning. Berthoff contends: "What we are shown comes largely by way of Captain Delano, through what he notices about the strange Spanish ship and its stranger captain and through what he progressively thinks--or gets almost to the point of thinking." Fogle shows more insight by concerning himself with Delano's epistemological naivete: "Delano, the observer of the action, lacks the sense of evil. Without this key he cannot penetrate the meaning until Cereno forces it upon him, and its deeper implications are permanently closed to him. Consequently, the primary theme opposes the appearance, which Delano sees, to the reality, which Delano does not see. This theme requires that the reader possess the clue from the character." Though not mentioning Fogle directly, Keeler alters this view by suggesting that Delano is not so much intellectually naive as he is morally naive. He concludes that Delano is America's "cheerful axiologist." Finally, Mary Rohrberger, in proving how the point of view and theme--
"What is the real?"—interrelate, concludes that the story uses a dual perspective, an omniscient narrator and a central intelligence. Melville used this technique, she suggests, so that the omniscient author could practice the same brand of trickery on the reader as do the Negroes on Delano. The difference is that the reader comes to know more than Delano ever does.

This list could go on, but I wish to single out two critics in particular, who suggest the growing, contemporary opinion toward the point of view in *Benito Cereno*. Carlisle shows how the point of view is connected with the story's structural irony: what at first appear to be virtues—optimism, innocence, and benevolence—turn out to be weaknesses. "The ironic contrast, then, between Delano's lack of understanding and the reader's inevitable perceptions becomes one means of conveying Delano's inadequacy. The ironic narrative method is important in order to understand why Melville does not directly tell the reader the American is a fool; instead, Melville shows him by means of a dramatically ironic point of view." Jackson is thus incorrect in believing that Delano's optimism and obtuse perception are assets rather than faults. They may be able to save Delano from death while he is on the *San Dominick*, but insofar as he represents the New American Man, they spell disaster for a burgeoning nation.

The other critic who argues rather cogently is Barry
Phillips. He believes that

The critics of *Benito Cereno* fail for the same reason Amasa Delano fails. They place the problem of the story in the realm of concepts when all the concepts of the story point to the primary problem of perception. They assign absolute values when the only values are relative. They find objective meaning in experiences whose main significance is the ambiguous, multi-leveled, mysterious nature of experience, and the subjective, albeit emphatically empirical, nature of the only real meaning. A central emphasis in *Benito Cereno* is the focus on the elusive, ambiguous nature of reality, 'actual,' independent reality, the reality of the natural world.  

The world, in other words, is relative, and by using a point of view which focuses on the focusings, the author can show us things through the eyes of another. "Man had to see this world, the only world, had to encounter it experientially, before any real meaning could be derived from it. The evolution was exclusively inductive. And the meaning a man induced had to be relative to his own particular perception." I thus consider the problem of perception to be a vital element in the understanding of this novella, and a close look at the text will make this readily apparent. 

Early, the omniscient narrator tells us of Delano's character: "he was of a singularly undistrustful good nature, not liable, except on extraordinary and repeated incentives, and hardly then, to indulge in personal claims, any way involving the imputation of malign evil in man." Several pages later we learn that Delano is "a man of such
native simplicity as to be incapable of satire or irony" (p. 19). That the work itself is a satire whose point of view is ironic is therefore significant. As Carlisle correctly states, Melville dramatizes these assertions of character. Also, at the outset doubt is cast on the reliability of Delano as a narrator: "Whether, in view of what humanity is capable, such a trait [Delano's undistrustful good nature] implies, along with a benevolent heart, more than ordinary quickness and accuracy of intellectual perception, maybe left to the wise the reader to determine" (pp. 1-2). What all these quotations imply, then, is that while the reader's degree of perception increases as he goes through the story, that of Delano remains—with the exception of his "insight" at the epiphany—basically the same.

Throughout the story Delano's polarizing mind wavers between his trust in and distrust of Cereno. Citing examples will show this. Delano's fear that the Spanish captain is plotting to kill him is heightened by the appearance of a sailor with a marlinspike, who he concludes tries to warn him of Cereno's intention. He rationalizes: "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 ..." (p. 32). But after Benito falls into the
arms of Babo, he concludes emphatically that "he could not
but marvel at the panic by which himself had been surprised,
on the darting supposition that such a commander, who, upon
a legitimate occasion, so trivial, too, as it now appeared,
could lose all self-command, was, with energetic iniquity,
going to bring about his murder" (p. 37).

Perhaps it would now be best to quote the famous
passage between the two captains at the end of the story.

After the trial they are talking; their discussion concludes
the following way:

"You generalize, Don Benito; and mournfully
enough. But the past is past; 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, more
and more astonished and pained; "You are saved:
What has cast such a shadow upon you?"

"The negro."

There was silence while the moody man sat,
slowly and unconsciously gathering his mantle
about him, as if it were a pall.

There was no more conversation that day. (p. 74).

Two points should be made about this passage. First, it is
significant that the Negro has cast a shadow on Benito.
Perhaps Melville is here recalling a passage from the ori-
ginal Delano narrative which states: "I saw the man [Benito
Cerenó] in the situation that I have seen others, frightened
at his own shadow. This was probably owing to his having been effectually conquered and his spirits broken."

Literally, "The negro" refers to Babo, as Kaplan proves by quoting a sentence that appears only in the magazine version of *Benito Cereno*: "'And yet the Spaniard could, upon occasion, verbally refer to the negro, as has been shown; but look upon him he would not, or could not.'" But figuratively it means more than this. Because *el negro* in Spanish means not only "the negro" but "blackness" and "darkness" as well, Feltenstein, and later Kaplan, conclude that Melville's use of "The negro" symbolically refers to evil. For Kaplan this is the answer to the problem raised at the beginning of the story: "Whether, in view of what humanity is capable, such a trait [Delano's undistrustful good nature] implies, along with a benevolent heart, more than ordinary quickness and accuracy of intellectual perception, may be left to the wise to determine" (pp. 1-2).

And for Fogle "The negro," insofar as Babo is its symbol, is "everything untamed and demoniac--the principle of unknown terror."

This brings us to the second point about this crucial section. Following the Spaniard's "The negro," there is silence, or more precisely, the conversation ends for the day. Kaplan believes that Delano's silence here signifies his assent to what Cereno has said, that "he has at last discerned the blacks to be wolves in the wool of gentle
sheep." But this approach misinterprets the tonal significance of the whole work. Throughout Melville has been mocking the Emersonian New Man as symbolized by Delano. Discarding the past he is unable to draw conclusions as Cereno can. Consequently, in the final conversation of the story the two captains are thinking on two different levels, Amasa with a superficial, somewhat simplistic view and Benito on one higher and more incisive. This, then, is why the American is unable to continue talking. His overly optimistic mind cannot cope with and understand all that the phrase "The negro" implies. He finds himself lost for words. No, Amasa does not learn, and by extension nor does America. In December, 1855, this tale was Melville's Christmas present to an American public whose myopic vision threatened to destroy their own potential.

In general, then, what we have in this conversation between the two captains is this:

. . . each states his trust in a divine Providence, the Spaniard's based on faith, the American's on belief in good works; the American voices his hope in the future, the Spaniard his fear that the past will have its revenge on him and his kind. The American revels in the beneficence of nature; the Spaniard says that for him it holds only the promise of death.

. . . this poses the essential Adamic problem, confronting the Old World's guilt with the stubborn optimism of a young nation eager to cast off the past with its load of incurable hate and injustice; and . . . it poses also the existentialist dilemma of individual responsibility laboring under anxiety as it confronts the void of non-being . . .
Another aspect of Delano remains to be seen, and that is his attitude toward slavery and Negroes. Throughout he sees the male as "the most pleasing body-servant in the world" (p. 8) and the female and child as "naked nature . . . pure tenderness and love" (p. 30). However, this attitude is somewhat tinged by a racist proclivity. For example, Delano offers to buy Babo from Cereno. Also, he states rather nonchalantly that the "whites, too, by nature, were the shrewder race" (p. 32). And later when comparing the Negroes to "Newfoundland dogs," he speaks of the blacks' "limited mind" (p. 41). Only when Babo tries to kill Benito does he realize that he has been deceived. But his inability to comprehend the full impact of the "malign machinations and deceptions" (p. 74) of the Negroes that have fooled him is only further proof of his obtuse perception.

Though Delano is the main character, the character of Benito Cereno and that of Babo are worth considering for aesthetic and thematic purposes. Like the criticism on Delano, that on Benito is wide ranging. He has been interpreted as being Melville (with Babo being the "personification of malicious criticism" that had attacked much of Melville's writings up to 1855) ; "Conradian in his rich figure and mystery-making phrases and silences" ; "not only hopelessly unheroic, as an image of persecuted goodness, but . . . not even deeply pathetic" ; a monk (one who sees "too well that the world is evil and is forced to retire
from it") ; a "mock Christian host" (with Babo being a priest at a black mass) ; "the tortured conscience of those European whites who rationalized the existence of slavery as a necessary or unavoidable evil" ; "the old order, a feudal structure of caste and fealty fast losing its hold" (in contrast with the New World innocence symbolized by Delano) ; "with his husky whisper and nervous puppet-like gestures, a member of the Italian commedia dell'arte ; and a "passive resister . . . who is so appalled by the blackness of the world that he withdraws from it in fear." As can be seen, these views range from the purely autobiographical to the mythic.

Scudder says that Melville, in basing his story on the original Delano's book, "merely rewrote this chapter, including a portion of one of the legal documents appended, suppressing a few items, and making some small additions." Melville's handling of the character of Benito Cereno, however, proves this to be false. In the original narrative the Spaniard is a treacherous villain. A quoting of a passage will explain:

After our arrival at Conception I was mortified and very much hurt at the treatment which I received from Don Benito Sereno; but had this been the only time that I ever was treated with ingratitude, injustice, or want of compassion, I would not complain. I will only name one act of his towards me at this place. He went to the prison and took the depositions of five of my Botany Bay convicts, who had left us at St. Maria and were now in prison here. This was done by
him with a view to injure my character, so that he might not be obliged to make us any compensation for what we had done for him. I never made any demand of, nor claimed in any way whatever, more than that they should give me justice; and did not ask to be my own judge, but to refer it to government. Amongst those who swore against me were the three outlawed convicts, who have been before mentioned. I had been the means, undoubtedly, of saving every one of their lives, and had supplied them with clothes. They swore every thing against me they could to effect my ruin. Amongst other atrocities, they swore I was a pirate, and made several statements that would operate equally to my disadvantage had they been believed; all of which were brought before the viceroy of Lima against me. When we met at that place, the viceroy was too great and too good a man to be misled by these false representations. He told Don Bonito, that my conduct towards him proved the injustice of these depositions, taking his own official declaration at Concepcion for the proof of it; that he had been informed by Don Jose Calminaries, who was commandant of the marine, and was at that time, and after that affair of the Tryal, on the coast of Chili; that Calminaries had informed him how both Don Bonito and myself had conducted, and he was satisfied that no man had behaved better, under all circumstances, than the American captain had done to Don Bonito, and that he never had seen or heard of any man treating another with so much dishonesty and ingratitude as he had treated the American. The viceroy had previously issued an order, on his own authority, to Don Benito, to deliver to me eight thousand dollars as part payment for services rendered him.

Don Benito had been quibbling and using all his endeavors to delay the time of payment.

Elsewhere, the Spaniard tries to avenge himself on the Negroes by stabbing one of them with a dirk hidden in his shirt. Eliminating his evil proclivity, Melville turns him into a better, more pious man. Mumford's analysis of
the two themes is worth considering here:

The moral of the original tale is that ingratitude, stirred by cupidity, may follow the most generous act, and that American captains had better beware of befriending too wholeheartedly a foreign vessel. In "Benito Cereno" the point is that noble conduct and good will, like that Doh Benito felt when his whole inner impulse was to save Delano and his crew, may seem sheer guile; and, further, that there is an inscrutable evil that makes the passage of fine souls through the world an endless Calvary. Even the best men err, in judging the conduct of one with the recesses of whose condition he is not acquainted.

It might be worthwhile now to turn to **Benito Cereno**.

Like everything else that Delano sees, Benito is masked. But this masking—and the others as well—is more the result of the narrator's internal erroneous rationalizations rather than external circumstances. A few examples will show this. When the American first sees the Spaniard, he describes him as "a gentlemanly, reserved-looking, and rather young man... dressed with singular richness, but bearing plain traces of recent sleepless cares and disquietudes, who stood passively by" (p. 6). And shortly thereafter, Amasa comments on Don Benito's "unfriendly indifference," that "conveyed a sort of sour and gloomy disdain, which he seemed at no pains to disguise" (p. 8). Throughout the story the American misinterprets the Spaniard's passivity and coldness. Rather than seeing the former as the outgrowth of his recently tormented soul and the latter as part of an assumed appearance, Amasa concludes that they
are inherently part of Don Benito's character.

Delano continually misinterprets Benito's psychological condition. For example (pp. 16-17), when the narrator asks him what he owns on the ship, he replies that he owns all save the blacks, who belong to the now deceased Alexandro Aranda. As he mentions this name, Benito's "air was heartbroken; his knees shook; his servant supported him."

"Thinking he divined the cause of such unusual emotion," Delano then, after discovering that Aranda was originally onboard the ship, asks whether he had died of the fever. Benito's affirmative answer brings on another sign of his physical infirmity, quivering. Before he can finish his sentence, however, Delano quickly informs him that his physical condition is merely an aftereffect caused by the death of his friend. But when Delano says: "Were your friend's remains now on board this ship, Don Benito, not thus strangely would the mention of his name affect you," Don Benito faints into Babo's arms. Again he speaks confidently, as he concludes now that "This poor fellow ... is the victim of that sad superstition which associates goblins with the deserted body of man, as ghosts with an abandoned house." Notice here--as well as throughout the tale--how Delano completely misinterprets the actions of Don Benito.

Much of what we need to know about Don Benito is brought out explicitly in the concluding pages. As already
stated, there is a contrast here between the degree of insight Benito shows and that shown by Amasa. Let us now take a closer look at the Spaniard.

Benito has been broken: his loss of power, symbolized by his "artificially stiffened" scabbard (p. 75), has made him unmanly, and the ordeal which he has just undergone has destroyed him physically and spiritually. Unable to face the future, he withdraws. As James Miller points out, for the first time one of Melville's masked innocents portrays a protagonist who withdraws rather than rebels. Like Bartleby, he refuses to adjust himself to the evil in the world. Prior to his confrontation with it, however, he was probably just as out of touch with it as was Delano. As part of a decaying age, he has not truly understood the Negro; rather, he has accepted slavery and the natural inferiority of the Negro as social fact. But when he finally faces evil, suggests Phillips, he is "surrounded, pushed down, and defeated by the dark natural forces. Like a Pip, Cereno learned from experience and was spiritually exhausted, if not suffocated, by it. What he learned of life was a lesson too large for him to live with." Or as Miller argues, "In his withdrawal and subsequent death, Don Benito deliberately severs his link in the common human chain: he refuses any longer to bear the responsibility of his humanhood." The ironic point here is that there is no suggestion of reconciliation or redemption for the man who understands the human predicament; only
the naive, innocent ones, like Delano, seem to survive. Perhaps, then, Stanley T. Williams has a point in saying that the words Don Benito (as well as Don Alejandro Aranda) suggest dimly a vision of life inevitably doomed.

The final stages of his withdrawal are completed with his retirement to a monastery, where three months later he "did, indeed, follow his leader" (p. 75). Critics differ over who the "leader" is. Putzel argues that it is Babo; at the end though Delano is able to emerge into the light, Benito cannot. He has become darkly aware of the forces of evil. Instead, he must remain with his servant. Cardwell's approach, on the other hand, is both literal and religious. First, the leader is Aranda, as Babo destroys both of these Spaniards. More than this, though, the leader is Christ, so that Benito, "'the Benedictine,' is the Christlike man following the Master." Actually, both approaches are valid and shed light on Benito's withdrawal.

Chase places Cereno's character within the context of Melville's work in general. He sees the writer creating an "historical-cultural myth . . . in which experience continuously presents itself to the young man as partaking of an innocent and unfallen nature. The hero is tested, that is, by encounters with masked experience. When he unmasksexperience, he succeeds in taking one step further in self-education, in the discovery of reality." "The discovery of reality is the precondition, and the acceptance of reality
is, perhaps, the whole condition of the atonement of the young man with the gods and the fathers from whose estate he has fallen." Within this mythic framework, then, the idea of the Fall is significant, and two sets of polar symbols are used to symbolize Up and Down. "The mythical abode of the gods and the fathers from which the young hero has fallen has the symbolic qualities of the father [the Up], and the earthbound world of the fallen hero has the symbolic qualities of the son [the Down]." In this mythic world Melville's Ishmaels wander, hoping to reconcile the father and son and thus become Promethean-Oedipean men. For Chase the idea of withdrawal has at least three meanings. It represents the spiritual crisis of the fallen son, the spiritual crisis of post-revolutionary America, and the general state of the world. As far as we are concerned, Benito is "withdrawn."

The problem with this view, however, is that its procrustean approach tends to distort the story. Critics who tend to rely too much on mythic-allegorical approaches interpret Benito as pure good, Babo as pure evil, and Delano as an obtuse observer. But as I am trying to show, Melville's world is not that easily divided.

One last character, Babo, remains to be considered. Like that for the preceding two characters, the criticism on Babo varies, though not as much. He has been seen, for
example, as a Conradian figure; "the personification of malicious criticism" against Melville; the devil; "a monster out of Gothic fiction at its worst, not at its best"; "the symbol for "the unyielding determination of men to be free"; the moral victor; "a colored confidence man"; and primitive man in a cyclic world where time and history are non-existent. To see how views like these arise, we should take a closer look at his character.

Melville is actually combining two characters from the original narrative, Mure and Babo, in order to create his Babo. In his Voyages Delano portrays Mure as the villain. He is the ringleader and apparent servant to Benito, and he orders the killing of Aranda, the owner of the slaves. In Melville, however, Babo does these things and is the "plotter from first to last" (p. 70). He tries to stab the Spanish captain. (In the original Don Benito tries to stab one of the Negroes.) Furthermore, he is excessively cruel. When Don Joaguin, Marques de Aramboaleza showed signs of breaking under pressure, Babo ordered the Ashantee Lecbe to pour heated tar over his hands (pp. 71-72).

Though critics accept Melville's worsening of Babo as a character, they differ over the reason why he made the change. Basically, we can divide the critics answering this question into two groups: those who see him representing pure, motiveless evil, and those who find some justification for his acts. Two of the pioneers in the former group are
Feltenstein and Williams. Feltenstein approaches the problem thematically and symbolically. She prefaces her remarks by pointing out that Melville "bridges the inner and outer worlds" with the use of symbols. Though he accepts the Emersonian belief that natural facts have a correspondence with spiritual facts, he goes beyond this point by never losing hold on the material world. In other words, he creates the possibility that matter and spirit might be one. Using this fact as a basis for her argument, she contends that the nature of evil, one of the main themes, is so strong that we cannot merely say that Babo is like evil, but only that he is evil. Melville thus makes no distinction between the symbol and the thing symbolized. Feltenstein also uses a comparison between the two versions of the story to argue her point. Besides emphasizing that Babo is worse in the Melville version, she also points out that whenever in the legal section guilt is laid on slaves or Negroes, Melville substitutes "the negro Babo" for the appropriate phrases. Finally, she concludes by finding a trace of nineteenth century satanism in him.

Williams, on the other hand, sees the problem as one of connotative semantics. He sees the similarity between Babo and baboon and calls the leader of the slaves "an animal, a mutinous baboon." Others have concerned themselves with the word Babo qua Babo. Cardwell, for example, believes that the first word which would come to the mind of a reader after
seeing Babo is baboon. And Magowan suggests that it might be a variation of the Tuscan word for daddy, Babboo. (Did Melville know Tuscan?).

Other critics presumably expanded on the groundwork laid down by Feltenstein and Williams. Arthur Vogelback shows what he considers to be a parallel between Babo and Iago in Othello. Besides agreeing with Scudder's view that Melville used Babo in lieu of Mure because of its evil suggestiveness, he also suggests that he might have chosen it because of the similarity in sound between Iago and Babo. Other parallels include the following: both men are intellectually aware; Iago is constantly "'honest,'" Babo "'faithful'"; immediately following their capture, both swear never to speak again; and Othello is destroyed by the evil in Iago, while Benito is wrecked by that in Babo. Miller, in emphasizing Babo's satanic proclivity, finds him "reveling like the common racketeer-in an ingenious and complicated plot calculated to hurt as well as to fleece. Babo obviously enjoys evil for itself alone." Finally, Kaplan, in arguing that Babo is pure evil, asks us to forget that objectively the ringleader is a "maritime Nat Turner." "The fact that for us, the heirs of Lincoln, his cunning ruthlessness is worthyly motivated is not an issue within the story ... ."

To further his position Kaplan cites two possible sources for the character of Babo. Could Melville have been influenced, he conjectures, by Mowree Bembo, the harpooner of the Julia.
in Delano's Narrative?

'Unlike most of his countrymen,' Rembo was short and 'darker than usual.' It was whispered that he was a cannibal, so fearless and bloodthirsty was he in his desire to kill whales. Extremely sensitive to slight, he would not tolerate jostling from Sydney Ben: 'Rembo's teeth were at his throat.' Thrown on the deck by Ben's friends, Rembo was 'absolutely demoniac; he lay glaring, and writhing on the deck without attempting to rise.' In revenge he plots to wreck the ship. Thwarted, Rembo 'never spoke one word . . . . His only motive could have been a desire to revenge the contumely heaped upon him the night previous, operating upon a heart irreclaimably savage, and at no time fraternally disposed toward the crew.'

Or was he thinking of Baubo, the leader of the witches in Goethe's Faust, which he might have been reading around 1855?

Other critics, however, find Babo to be something other than pure evil—a position I hold, though I disagree somewhat with two approaches in particular. John Bernstein, for example, finds Babo acting not motivelessly but for freedom. He bases his argument on the fact that he does not kill anyone, he prevents Francesco from poisoning Delano, and he keeps the Negroes from torturing the Spanish captain. Unfortunately, this position is based on a misreading. Though Babo does not kill anyone himself—although he later tries to kill Don Benito—he orders the killings, including that of Aranda. He stops Francesco because the death of Delano would bring the crew of the Bachelor's Delight
on him. (He wanted to capture their ship by surprise.)

And last, Babo could not have Cereno tortured because he needed him as a front. Schiffman, likewise, makes similar mistakes. Granted, his premises may be valid: that Williams and Feltenstein are wrong in equating Babo and evil, and that Melville did not intend the reader to infer the word baboon from Babo—as Williams suggests. (Because of the speculation involved in seeing name similarities, the conclusions reached can be misleading. The important thing to consider is not what the word implies without the story, but rather how it is used within it.) Because of his excessive reliance on the thematic relevance of slavery, though, Schiffman concludes that Babo is the moral victor. To argue as Schiffman does, I believe, results in a misreading. Melville's changes in the character of Babo—as mentioned above—just do not support this. His excessive cruelty makes him, if anything, an immoral victor.

If Babo, then, does not quite personify the motiveless malignity of an Iago or, perhaps, a Claggart, what is he? As Fogle suggests, correctly I think, he is the symbol of the slaves and the "principle of unknown terror." Therefore, while from one point of view Babo is Satan, an absolute principle of destruction, a pure hatred of all order, he is likewise a sufferer from order, its prober and test, the sign of its weakness. In this aspect he is the vengeance of nature, evoked by the inequities of all orders. When
they transgress too far against nature, the vengeance beats them down."

Now that a general view of Babo has been given, two scenes remain to be considered. As a character, he seems the embodiment of the "secret of dominance" which Melville had not quite been able to achieve in his previous writing. The shaving scene, created by Melville, shows this artistic mastery. Tom Haber, however, has misinterpreted the scene. After the shave, Delano walks to the mainmast to see if there is any breeze. Hearing a noise near the cuddy, he turns around and sees Babo cut, presumably by Benito. Inwardly Delano concludes that the Spaniard is now avenging the scratch on his face made by the Negro. Babo then tells Amasa that Don Benito did it. Examining the scene, Haber asks whether the wound was self-inflicted in order to convince Delano that Cereno is in complete control of the ship or whether he actually cut the slave. Haber accepts the latter interpretation and argues as follows: he recalls in the original Narrative the scene where the Spaniards are cruel to the Negroes after their capture; in this part Benito tries to stab one of the slaves with a dirk. Melville takes this show of lack of restraint and plants it in the center of his tale. "When we grasp the full meaning of Melville's story, our admiration for the cunning black and his Frankenstein reaches its height at this point; for the negro, the barbarian, demonstrates at a moment of
supreme provocation something that his civilized protagonist could not muster: restraint. Here the tale and the telling are in rare accord, for no less admirable is the restraint with which Melville reports the incident to us."

Haber's contention, however, disregards certain key points about the characters of Benito and Babo, the theme, and the overall aesthetic content.

Ward Pafford and Floyd Watkins show where Haber makes his mistakes. He says, they point out, that there is noise sounding like a fight and that Babo runs to Delano after "he was cut" by Benito. But there is no proof for these statements. The idea of a fight is farfetched for several reasons. First, in the original Delano is a coward, and in Melville he is too terrified to fight. Second, Benito felt that only God's intervention could have helped him: at court he says that God and his angels helped him leap from the ship; if he had cut Babo, then, he surely would have mentioned this as an example of God's aid again. Third, if the Spaniard had been in a fighting mood, he would have fought Babo when he attacked Delano's boat. Fourth, after the cutting Don Benito lunches rather calmly. If a man in his condition had just undergone a physical struggle, he obviously could not have been calm, nor even appear to have been. Thematically, Haber's position is also weak. The idea of a self-inflicted wound is more in keeping with the book's structure and method of presentation. Throughout the story Don Benito is shown
as the one unable to act. Suddenly, though, he leaps into Delamo's boat. Up to that point nothing suggests that he is capable of acting positively. The irony and suspense are thus heightened. If Babo's wound were not self-inflicted, they would be lessened. What this scene is trying to do, then, is to show Babo's control over the entire situation. To see it any other way, as does Haber, is to misinterpret it.

One other incident involving Babo remains to be considered. At the end Babo's head, "that hive of subtlety," is fixed atop a pole and placed in the Plaza, its unabashed stare--reminding one of the "Lima intriguante's one sinister eye peering across the Plaza from the Indian loop-hole of her disk saya-y-manta" (p. 2)--pointed in the direction of St. Bartholomew's Church, where the bones of Aranda now lay, and the monastery on Mount Agonia, where Benito had retired to. His gaze symbolizes the fact that "Cereno cannot escape the memory of earth's evil nor the recognition of nature's vulturism." He is trapped, and his tragic acceptance of this fact ultimately defeats him.
Chapter III

Melville's Use of Symbols

Dealing with the symbolic structure of *Benito Cereno* offers certain unavoidable problems. Cardwell gives one of the best answers to this. Many of the symbols have changing values. Also the groups of them are so intertwined with the text that a re-evaluation of one may necessarily require a re-examination of the rest. "The unusual difficulties offered by the symbols are, then, a product of Melville's habit of mind and of the use to which he puts the symbols as organizing instruments, influencing both emotional and logical structure." Melville was an uncompromising searcher for absolutes, but his quest ended in failure. This desire for something ideal and Melville's eventual, realistic admission of its unattainability "expressed itself in symbols that satisfy Freud's definition: they suggest things that cannot be phrased; they lead us into dim, branched approaches to imperfectly seen truths." And when a reader has taken from a symbol "the secrets of the unlike that it relates, a shift in the narrative or the introduction of a paired symbol" may involve a reinterpretation of the whole symbolic structure. Melville's symbols, then, are multivalent, contextual organisms rather than univocal signs allowing a one-to-one allegorical relationship to be established. This is
why some critics have failed in their attempt to explain *Benito Cereno*; they have oversimplified the shifting, symbolic structure. To use Elizio Vivas' terms, they have not distinguished between "quasi-" or "pseudo-symbols" and "constitutive symbols." The former stand "for something else that can be grasped independently of the sign vehicle." The latter establish a "creative synthesis of empirical matter which manifests itself in dramatic and moral terms and which functions categorically." The dramatic quality of the symbols is seen if one considers how they heighten the suspense and add to the irony; and their moral quality is found in the themes, three of which I wish to single out: religion, the decline of Spain, and law and order.

Because of the nature of the symbols, any attempt to isolate one group of them—say, those pertaining to Spain—and discuss them in isolation from other thematic groups will fail. *Benito Cereno*'s symbolic structure is a tightly wrought matrix. Keeping this in mind, I would like to discuss individual symbols, with the hope that by inductive analysis, Melville's overriding thematic concerns will become apparent. And finally, I wish to discuss the story's legal section.

The two main controlling symbols are the ships themselves, the *San Dominick* and the *Bachelor's Delight*, named in the Delano Narrative the *Tryal* and the *Perseverance* respectively. The changing of the names, as Leyda argues,
"shows a concern in striking exactly the perfect and subtly harmonious note for every detail: the renaming of the *Tryal* as the *San Dominick* provides the exact passive counterpart to the active, physical American ship—but captain Delano's *Perseverance* was a name perhaps too massive and crude for Melville's purpose, so this, too, was renamed, after the buccaneer's ship that he had been reading about as an early visitor to the Galapagos, the *Bachelor's Delight*—the open, simple contrast to the complexly spiritual *San Dominick*." These revisions show Melville's thematic and aesthetic concern with religion. First seeing the ship as a "white-washed monastery after a thunder-storm" (p. 3), Delano perceives upon it "Black Friars pacing the cloisters" (p. 3). Shortly thereafter, Delano describes Cereno as an "abbot" (p. 7) and Babo as "a begging Friar of St. Francis" (p. 13). The fact that the Negroes in particular are seen as Black Friars is significant. Feltenstein offers three reasons why. The Dominicans, founded by Saint Dominick, are known as the Black Friars, and the name, appropriate for a group of Negroes, implies the blackness with which the story is concerned. Also the Dominicans are associated with the Inquisition, so that the name of the ship is meaningfully connected with the experience that Don Benito undergoes. And finally, these monastic references foreshadow the ending of the story, the Spanish captain's retreat into a monastery, and thus help to unify the plot.
Stein in his highly imaginative article, which, despite its occasional sound observations, misses the grade, extends Feltenstein's analysis. In general, he interprets Benito Cereno as the Catholic Church, with its hierarchical structure dissolving and decaying; Amasa Delano as American Protestantism; and Alexandro Aranda as the real Christ. In particular, however, he considers further the historical significance of Saint Dominick. He was instrumental in the elimination of the Albigenses, an heretical sect based on the Manichean heresy—a belief that God and Satan are equal in power. This, along with their extreme "Christocentrism"—a feeling that salvation can be achieved merely by following the teachings of Christ without the aid of some formal religious superstructure—forced the church to take action against them. Stein sees a parallel between this revolt by the Albigenses against the established authority and that precipitated by the Negroes against Aranda.

Stein does not stop here in his interpretation of the ship's title. Rather, he mentions that etymologically Dominick means "belonging to the Lord." Thus, the ship is the dominical vessel of the Lord. From this he concludes that Aranda is Christ, since he is the lord, the owner, of the ship.

The ship, however, is more than just a white-washed monastery and a symbol for the conflict precipitated by the Albigenses. Delano tells us that "Her keel seemed laid,
her ribs put together, and she launched, from Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones" (p. 3). Briefly, this Old Testament allusion refers to Ezekiel who, in a vision, saw people revitalized from dry bones lying in a valley; this incident serves as a prophecy for the resurrection of mankind. Because of this death imagery, the roll of the ship's hull is "hearse-like" (p. 15), the bell rings with a "dreary graveyard toll" (p. 17), and skeletal imagery pervades Delano's descriptions. Furthermore, these images explain why Atufal standing on deck is seen as a guard of an Egyptian tomb (p. 49) and why one of the corridors is described as a "subterranean vault" (p. 54). Now if we keep in mind that the corpse of Aranda is kept below the deck for three days before it is brought up again, we see that we have a mock resurrection. If Aranda is the real Christ, then the traditional view of the founder of Christianity has been misleading. For nineteen hundred years, mankind has been duped by Christianity.

Closely connected with the image of the ship as a symbol of living death is that of the wanderer, so prevalent in Melville's writings. "Like a man lost in woods" (p. 12), the ship wanders, occasionally doubling back on its own course, in an attempt to journey to Senegal. This meandering is important thematically, for as Putzel says, one of Melville's concerns is that "of freedom and law which accompany man in his evolution from primitive barbarity to civilized
and organized barbarity. Other critics have emphasized the theme of law and order. Fogle, for example, sees the main order as that of Spain, where Church and State are one, which the San Dominick symbolizes. Benito's cabin, its chaotic state suggesting its inhabitant's mental chaos, is the old Spanish order, having now fallen into confusion, while the revolt itself shows that this system of order has decayed—thus the inclusion of Benito's empty scabbard, symbolizing his loss of power. Canady, on the other hand, offers a different approach to Fogle's historical consideration. He argues that the vagueness and inconsistency found in the story can be more or less eliminated by seeing the theme of authority as the structuring principle. As it is the task of the courts to restore authority, the importance of law is that it "is an expression of the authority of the state." A captain, the personification of law on a ship, derives his authority from naval or maritime law. When he is removed from his position (regardless of how his removal is accomplished), another person assumes his place, thus continuing "this traditional chain of command." In Benito Cereno, however, the Spaniard's removal from commander of the ship is done illegally. This loss of command, symbolized by his empty scabbard, thus makes law inoperative. Used instead by the slaves is brute force. When the mutineers are finally defeated, the Spanish courts are in a position to restore law and order to the San Dominick. Canady concludes
by warning that "Chaos and disorder are the inevitable results of authority functioning without power and of power exercised without authority." What we thus have, in other words, is a ship lacking a sense of direction because law and order are missing. Throughout the images and language emphasize this. Delano himself notices it: "What the San Dominick wanted was, what the emigrant ship has, stern superior officers. But on these decks not so much as a fourth mate was to be seen" (p. 10), and later the American describes Don Benito as "one of those paper captains" (p. 15). Now if we keep in mind the fact that the ship never makes it to Senegal, perhaps we can see the value Melville is placing on need of law and order in a barbaric society. Restraint is needed in order to assure social advancement.

Let us now take a closer look at parts of the ship. First is the sternpiece: "... the principal relic of faded grandeur was the ample oval of the shield-like sternpiece, intricately carved with the arms of Castile and Leon . . ." (p. 4). These lines implicitly refer to Ferdinand I of Spain, who, during the Middle Ages, united the warring provinces of Castile and Leon under Christianity. He was also known as El Magno, "the king of Kings," whose defeat of the Saracens and whose deep religiosity made him in the eyes of others a soldier of Christ. Notice, though, that this emblem is faded, suggesting the waning power of Spain.
in general and Don Benito in particular. Its description continues: "it is medallioned about by groups of mythological or symbolical devices; 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" (p. 4). Stein becomes confused with these lines also. From what was said about Ferdinand above, he argues that Ferdinand is a Christ figure. Contrasted with him is the satyr, the antichrist, whose proximity to the stern-piece reverses the emblem's significance: the power of the Savior is on its decline. Stein thus concludes that "Melville asserts that only the deep and dynamic faith of a Ferdinand I can master the forces of Satan which have always challenged the world of Christendom." Now even if we grant validity to his interpretation of the Spanish King through implied metaphor, we are still faced with a procrustean approach to this passage. The satyr is not necessarily an antichrist, but can merely symbolize evil. Stein overlooks two important images: both the satyr and the figure are masked. If we keep in mind that practically every character and event is veiled with the theme of appearance versus reality—that almost everything in the story is masked—we can see the two images as Babo and Benito. Babo is dark like the satyr. Furthermore, the snake-like quality suggested with the "writhing" is used elsewhere in conjunction with him. When Delano comments on the fact that he seems to be like a privy-
counsellor to Don Benito, "the servant looked up with a
good-natured grin, but the master started as from a venomous
bite" (p. 23). And later when he attacks the rowboat which
the Spaniard is on, he is described as "snakishly writhing
up from the boat's bottom" (p. 57). In other words, though
these words add a satanic tinge to Babo, they do not make
the satyr an antichrist.

Other critics also tend to follow the more direct
way of interpreting this symbol. Kaplan merely assumes that
the two masked figures are Babo and Don Benito. Charles
Hoffman agrees likewise and sees their masking as a symbol
of Delano's inability to see through their masks. And
Phillips, in suggesting that the satyr symbolizes "natural
force" and the prostrate man "natural fallen man," admits
that their masking is the important thing.

Closely connected with the above are the words Seguid
vuestro jefe (follow your leader) on the bow of the ship
and the canvassed skeleton of Aranda just above them. Stein
is correct in his literal interpretation of this part of
the ship: Babo uses it as a means of showing to the other
Spaniards their fate if they don't obey him: they too will
follow their leader. But then this critic's approach runs
into complications. Using the skeleton as the figurehead
is not the culmination of a mock crucifixion, as he suggests.
Christ died while on the cross, but Aranda is already dead
by the time he is used as a figurehead. If anything, this
incident is a mock resurrection following Aranda's death. If you recall that after Aranda is killed, he is taken below deck—figuratively into the tomb—and not brought up until three days later (p. 65), Stein's error is seen. Stein also misinterprets when he says that the "insertion of this phrase ['the image of Christopher Colon, the discoverer of the New World'] is an unquestionable rubric—a warning to the reader that he must interpret it in the context of the symbolic crucifixion. If one is to follow the leader, he will follow Christopher, etymologically, 'the Christ-bearer.' Thus to discover 'the New World' will be to discover the New Jerusalem—the new world of the spirit."

But the problem here, however, is that this image cannot be interpreted in the light of a symbolic crucifixion, simply because there isn't one.

Other critics have also commented on these symbols. Hoffman interprets the figurehead on a purely aesthetic level by saying that it adds "an air of verisimilitude and authenticity." Rohrberger gives it more of a thematic approach: "This [the world of Benito Cereno] is a world where a white skeleton for a figurehead is an emblem of a society overrun by the dark desires and destructive lusts of men."

As to the identity of the skeleton, Cardwell suggests that the jefe might refer to Aranda, whose position as owner of the ship presupposes some obedience from those below him. In this sense Benito Cereno literally follows Aranda:
after his death, he is removed from the monastery on Mount Agonia to the burial area of Don Alejandro. Dutzel, on the other hand, prefers to see the leader as Babo, whom Don Benito must eventually follow in death. In reality the Negro is the Spaniard's master, his leader.

Despite the attempts to exhaust the symbolic possibilities of the chalked phrase and the figurehead, one interpretation, to my knowledge, has not yet been offered. The fact that the words and the figure-head of Christopher Columbus originally appeared together on the bow should suggest a joint interpretation. In this sense Columbus is the leader, and Babo's removals of his figure-head, "the discoverer of the New World" (p. 66), is actually a repudiation of this new-world way of life on the part of the Negroes. Likewise, using Aranda's skeleton, the symbol of death, as the new-figure-head symbolizes a rejection by the Negroes of what this man represented to them, slavery. Now if we keep in mind that the Negroes wished to go to Senegal, we can view their rejection of the New World actually part of an attempt to return to a primitive way of life—which, for these slaves, is probably the only kind that they have ever lived.

Another important addition made to the ship by Melville is the flawed bell, which does not symbolize, as Stein contends, the call of Christ. Melville tells us that it sounds like "a dreary graveyard toll" (p. 17) and like "the tolling for execution in some jail-yard" (pp. 53-54).
Both phrases are appropriate, as death imagery pervades the tale. In this sense the bell is not so much a symbol as it is an active detail. In another way, though, it is a symbol. If the bell is taken as being a symbol of freedom—perhaps even our cracked Liberty Bell—then its flaw suggests that the freedom on the ship is likewise marred: the Negroes' freedom before the revolt is limited, and that of the Spaniards after the insurrection is restricted.

Many of Melville's symbols are aesthetically and thematically significant not only to his religio-historical concern but to the trends of his times. While leaning against the carved balustrade, Delano "found his eye falling upon the ribbon grass, trailing along the ship's water-line, straight as a border of green box; and parterres of sea-weed, broad ovals and crescents, floating nigh and far, with what seemed long formal alleys between, crossing the terraces of swells, and sweeping round as if leading to the grottoes below. And overhanging all was the balustrade by his arm, which, partly stained with pitch and partly embossed with moss, seemed the charred ruin of some summer-house in a grand garden long running to waste" (p. 31). Melville is here not only referring to Charles V's own garden (to be discussed later) but to the nineteenth century's use of the image of the decaying house in the decaying garden, which was closely allied with the Adamic myth. In this context the passage suggests a prelapsarian loss of virginal beauty.
Before leaving the San Dominick, we should briefly mention the cuddy, since it is the setting of perhaps Melville's most histrionic textual change, and Benito Cereno's name, since its implications affect the religious theme.

Because no paraphrase can do justice to the description of the cuddy, Melville's description of it should be quoted:

The floor of the cuddy was matted. Overhead, four or five old muskets were stuck into horizontal holes along the beams. 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 settlees 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. A flag locker was in one corner, open, exposing various colored bunting, some rolled up, others half unrolled, still others tumbled. Opposite was a cumbersome washstand, of black mahogany, all of one block, with a pedestal, like a font, and over it a railed shelf, containing combs, brushes, and other implements of the toilet. A torn hammock of stained glass swung near, the sheets tossed, and the pillow wrinkled up like a brow, as if whoever slept here slept but illly, with alternate visitations of sad thoughts and sad dreams. (pp. 39-40)

In combining the elements of the Church and the Inquisition, Melville is curiously amalgamating death and evil.

A closer look at what Melville is doing here is worthwhile. John Bernstein sees the story structured upon
the Spanish Inquisition. Because of its value let me give
a brief outline of his article. Keeping in mind that the
Dominicans were influential in the Inquisition and that the
slaves are called Black Friars, "it does not seem too rash
to suggest that Benito Cereno and his Spanish crew--members
of an old, wealthy, educated but now decadent civilization--
are the victims of an inquisitional uprising staged by the
slave's . . . ." Certain things emphasize this. First,
Lima, the setting for the trial, was the home of the Inquisi-
tion in South America. Second, during the shaving scene,
(remember its references to the Inquisition) Babo puts the
flag of Spain around the neck of Don Benito. This flag
serves as a sanbenito, the garment worn by heretics around
their necks, as both had designs against a yellow back-
ground. Third, showing the Spaniards the skeleton of Don
Alexandro is like the auto-de-fés, in which two Dominican
Friars would lead the prisoner, wearing his sanbenito, to
the scaffold. If he failed to repent, he was burned. In
other words, he was asked to follow his leader. Fourth,
the name "Aranda" is significant because "Pedro Aranda,
Bishop of Calahora, was one of the most influential bishops
who was attacked by Torquemada [Thomas Torquemada (1420-1498),
the inquisitor-general of Spain]. As a result of the latter's
onslaught against him, Aranda was stripped of all his goods
and sent to prison, where he eventually died. Interestingly
enough, Torquemada and Bishop Aranda died in the same year,
as do Babo and the shipowner, Alexandro Aranda." With these general points, Bernstein is able to explain some of the smaller details. The name of Francesco, a mulatto servant, suggests a San Franciscan Friar. The bottle of Canary wine that Benito has recalls the fact that "one of the largest auto-de-fés ever held in the Canary Islands in 1569; [in bringing out the bottle] Babo may be reminding his master that the Spaniards aboard the San Dominick are also faced with an auto-de-fé if they do not 'keep faith with the blacks.'" (Isn't Bernstein here crediting Babo with too much knowledge? It seems unlikely that he would literally be doing what Bernstein suggests.) And finally the references to Charles V are important because under him the Inquisition was quite strong.

Actually, Bernstein's last point is more relevant than he admits. In an extremely cogent article H. Bruce Franklin discovers a new source for Benito Cereno, William Stirling's The Cloister Life of the Emperor Charles the Fifth, which Melville follows so closely—even at times to the wording—that Benito becomes the supernatural and the symbolic ghost of Charles V. A summary at the article will reveal this.

After abdicating his throne, Charles retired to a monastery in the mountains of Spain; Don Benito's ship is described as a monastery in the Pyrenees. His monastic chambers are like the Spaniard's cuddy. His gallery overlooking a garden reminds one of the ship's gallery where
Delano fancies that he sees parterres of sea-weed and terraces; likewise the forest beyond his garden (with its house) appear descriptively in the American's narrative. His physical description is similar to that of Benito. His wooden coffin is symbolized by the San Dominick. And the four monks who guarded his body after his death reappear as the four oakum-pickers with their funeral chant. Franklin goes on to say that historical allusions to James I, the Battle at Preston Pans, George III, and the revolt of the slaves at Santo Domingo suggest that the "central concern is the cause of the overthrow of worldly power, seen in the disintegration of the Spanish empire, its emperor, and its symbolic descendant--Benito Cereno."

Franklin also pays close attention to the religious references. The Negroes are "an allegorical incarnation of the Church," Cereno and Babo are compared to Christ and Judas, and certain Biblical allusions crop up (for example, the use of a padlock and key with Atufal and of a bottle of Canary).

Finally he sums up rather well the purpose of the historical-religious allusions. He concludes that "the cumulative effect of all corresponding historical details and Biblical contexts is twofold. Obviously, they widen the implications of Cereno's destruction. What is not so obvious is the way in which they narrow the definition of that destruction and its cause." "Worldly power, as
represented by Benito Cereno, is blighted by 'the negro'
that 'has cast such a shadow' upon him. Worldly power, as
represented by Charles V, is 'blighted' by the 'dark shadow'
of the Church. Benito Cereno equates the 'negro' and the
church metaphors and by references to The Cloister Life of
the Emperor Charles the Fifth and to the Bible. Not only
does the shadow of the 'negro' represent the shadow of the
Church, but it is the heeding of Church teaching, the confi­
dence of Christianity, which destroys Cereno. He had confi­
dence: he followed his leader and trusted the slaves." "The
question about Cereno is not, as it was with Bartleby,
whether he 'is' Christ. He obviously is not Christ, but
a Spanish sea captain. But as the ghost of Charles V,
Cereno re-enacts the Emperor's abdication of the world and
servitude to the Church. When he follows the leader of
the Church, he, too, is betrayed by the men in whom he has
confidence." This, then, is Franklin's position, a view
which I feel is quite sound.

Actually, we should now consider the name of the
Spanish captain before we look at the Bachelor's Delight
simply because it refers quite explicitly to what has so far
been discussed. In the original narrative, as Feltenstein
shows, "Bonito" and "Benito" were used. Melville settled
on the latter because it means "Benedictine Friar," a phrase
which emphasizes the monastic imagery. Thomas Connolly
extends her article. Actually, the two different names
used are "Bonito Sereno" and "Benito Cereno," the latter meaning "Blessed Serenity." "Benedict [keeping in mind Feltenstein's analysis], by extension of the original Latin word (benedictus, past participle of benedicere), immediately gives us blessed." "Sereno", on the other hand, is an adjective meaning "serene" with its English cognates "serene" and "serenity." "Blessed serenity" thus implies that Melville's Benito is a better character than is Delano's.

While the San Dominick with its heavily wrought religious-historical images establishes a somber tone, the Bachelor's Delight is less influential in the overall thematic structure of the story. As with Benito's ship, Feltenstein offers a possible answer why Melville changed the name of the ship from Perseverance. Actually, it gets its name from two vessels in Moby-Dick, the Bachelor and the Delight. Whereas the former, a happy ship, had heard of Moby Dick the whale but did not believe in it, the latter had been damaged by it and felt that no forge yet made could kill it. Furthermore, both the Bachelor and Delano rarely saw evil, and the Delight and Cereno, unable to resist evil, are destroyed by it. Here, she feels, Melville is trying to show how human life and evil are interrelated. Putzel, likewise, shows the source of the name, but adds something by pointing out its sexual connotation. "Bachelorhood seems to have connoted the innocence of a life free from those sexual fears and revulsions emblemed in 'Tartarus of Maids' and in 'The Bell Tower'
However, Stein's suggestion lacks factual basis; he justifies the change in names as reflecting "the unrelatedness and irresponsibility of Delano's moral command, symbolically an authority without ethical sanction," which allows Melville to mock Delano's spiritual awareness. Perhaps I am missing Stein's point, but I just do not see how he validly concludes this interpretation of the ship's name from the text. In fact, he does not. Instead, he looks at "The Paradise of Bachelors" and judges _Benito Cereno_ by "the cutting disparagement of the bachelor" found therein. Stein's attempt to ritualize the tale fails at times like this.

These, then, are the most important symbols in _Benito Cereno_. Obviously I have not mentioned all of them. For example, the knot thrown at Delano, symbolizing the knot in his head, is described humorously--"For a moment, knot in hand, and knot in head, Captain Delano stood mute" (p. 33) --and thus helps to heighten the satire. Also, the chains that Atufal wears heighten the contrast between appearance and reality. Though the list could go on, the question that one should ask is why they are used? I have already singled out three important themes, Christianity, Spain and law and order. But is there anything which binds these three and others together? Is there some overriding, thematic structural device used by Melville? The answer lies, I believe, in the color symbolism.
The traditional view has been to see a polarized split in the color symbolism: Babo is black, evil, and Benito is white, good. While some critics slightly vary this view, others disagree. Matthiessen accepts the dichotomy, but feels that "the embodiment of good in the Spanish captain and of evil in the mutinied African crew, though pictorially and theatrically effective, was unfortunate in raising unanswered questions," because the Negroes were treated cruelly. "Melville's failure to reckon with this fact within the limits of his narrative makes its tragedy, for all its prolonged suspense, comparatively superficial."

This position would be valid, as Fogle correctly points out, if Benito Cereno were suggesting an ideal order, but it isn't. Schiffman, on the other hand, disagrees with the traditional view. He argues that in Benito Cereno, as in Moby Dick, Melville reversed the approach to black-white symbolism. Kaplan, however, disagrees with him. Nothing within the story suggests that Melville is here doing what he did symbolically in Moby Dick. "In Benito Cereno the traditional equation is merely transposed so that black (delusively virtuous or harmless to early Delano) may equal blacker (incarnate iniquity to later Delano), while white (delusively evil and suspiciously malign to early Delano) may equal whiter (tragically victimized virtue to later Delano). Beyond this, . . . wherever black and white are used for ambiguous or foreboding effects, the aim is simply
conventional deception that builds up wrong leads in order to contrive mechanical suspense and a trick finale."

My own view draws on these and other analyses. True, the power of blackness in *Benito Cereno*—and Melville in general—is relevant, but to limit an interpretation of the story to conventional, polarized view of black-white symbolism is to oversimplify Melville's philosophy. We cannot merely conclude that the whites are good and the blacks are bad. As pointed out in Chapter 1, both do good and evil. The whites try to do their job, but collectively they mount Babo's head on a stick and place it in the Plaza so all can see. Likewise, the Negroes have an inherent right to their freedom, but in torturing and killing the Spaniards on board the *San Dominick*, they too are excessively cruel. What Melville is trying to show, in other words, is that the universe is not divided into a Manichaean division of all good and all bad. Besides for its aesthetic value in "foreshadowing deeper shadows to come" (p. 1), the use of the color gray at the beginning of the story emphasizes thematically that people and events in the world are a mixture of good and bad, and any attempt to simplify this moral view, as Delano tries to do, will fail. This is why the omniscient narrator, not the sometimes dubious point of view of the American, speaks of the color gray at the outset. Two critics in particular are aware of this position. "Perhaps," suggests Carlisle, "the white are the real moral black men
... both Delano's and Cereno's misunderstanding of the slaves suggests that decadence, cruelty, and oppression existed on the ship before the slave mutiny ... "All men--both black and white--are capable of evil (murder, here) and this aspect of man and life is what eludes Captain Delano so successfully." Fogle also, in emphasizing that white is associated not only with good but decay and death as well, understands this crucial point. This is why the contrast between appearance and reality is so vital to an understanding of the story's overall intent.

This intermixture of good and bad, then, lies behind the various themes and serves as a structuring and formulating principle.

I would like to conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of the legal section, for it can be seen as a symbol. Critical views on it are actually quite divergent. Arvin seems to be reflecting G. W. Curtis' complaining about the "dreary documents" when he criticizes Melville for not rewriting the "drearily prosaic prose." Geoffrey Stone finds it the story's weak point, for here "the vivid writing that has gone before is disadvantageously pointed up by a great lawyer's sentence of semi-colons and 'and that's', coiling along like a wounded snake." Hoffman admits the necessity of its inclusion in order to explain the story, for "Melville did not choose or else did not know how to make use of Delano's point of view as an observer to reveal enough of
the mystery so that he might dispense with the cumbersome method of the document." However, he feels that it hurts the unity. "If he had maintained a consistent point of view, the explanation could have been made very easily within the framework of the narrative through an interview then and there between Captain Delano and Benito Cereno." Howard suggests that because of the psychological strain Melville was under in the mid 1850's, the story might have been printed incomplete; this would explain the apparent lack of unity.

Instead of finding fault, others have tried to justify it on basically aesthetic grounds. For Tyrus Hillway the structure is similar to that of Poe's "The Gold Bug," in which there are two parts to the story, the first of which presents the mystery and the second the solution. Warner Berthoff on the other hand, argues that if we see the story as an allegory or a fable, or if we are concerned with dramatic organization, we cannot justify its inclusion. But if we see the whole story as an "extended narrative riddle," then its appearance can be justified: we are not satisfied with a riddle until someone unravels it. The ambiguities of this riddle are brought out by the quick alternation of moods, which the fragmenting of the story into short paragraphs emphasizes. "The very spareness and brokenness of this kind of exposition are central to the story's massed effect--the sense of tension increasing and diminishing,
the irregular measuring out of time, the nervous succession of antithetical feelings and intuitions. But once the riddle is broken open and fairly explained, once our concern can go out at last to the passional outcome of the whole affair, a different tactic is in order." So in the last two paragraphs we have "Melville spinning out the same kind of spare, rapid, matter-of-fact statement into longer paragraphs and a more sustained and concentrated emphasis ...." After an oscillating narrative and a dry legal section, these two final paragraphs are "a particularly impressive instance of Melville's ordinary boldness in fitting his performance to the whole developing occasion." What we thus have in the legal section, then, is an anti-climactic descent from the narrative which prepares us for another, more important, climax. Rohrberger, however, finds nothing anticlimactic with the legal section. For her it serves three purposes. First, it separates the reader from the point of view that has deceived him. (Here I disagree; if the reader has followed the text closely, he should have suspected after the first few pages that something was amiss.) Second, it helps him realize the ordeal that Benito has undergone. And third, it prepares the reader for the real ending: "Had the horrors, both stated and implied in the narrative, been dramatized rather than reported, the reader would have been limp, emotionally drained, before he reached the climax." Finally, Feltenstein merely acknowledges its "architectural
The problems that many of these critics face are the result of misreadings. Two critics who look at the section closely, although they disagree in their conclusions, are Fogle and Guttmann. For the former "the literal, legal truth of fact is a metaphor for truth of spirit. The search for one is implicitly the search for the other. Cereno himself ... is an appropriate symbol for the quest for truth." The latter takes exception somewhat to this view: "Melville wanted the prose official and dreary because the official and attested view of the matter, the view put forth by Don Benito and ingeniously accepted by Captain Delano is the very thing which Melville is subverting. With its legalistic pretensions of objectivity, the deposition misses the truth as widely as did Delano in his completest innocence." Though both of these views are incomplete in their analysis, the important thing to note is that they are trying to offer a thematic justification for the legal section.

Putzel, however, reads the section as well as anyone else. The changes made by Melville in this section are significant. For example, because the San Dominick assumes a greater role thematically than it did in the original Narrative, the number of people aboard it was increased. Also the time of the incident was changed from the nineteenth century (a time of increasing concern over the
slavery issue) to the eighteenth century (a period identified with the American and French Revolutions). By presenting the section in a revised version, "It threw into contrast the value of legal evidence as against psychological factors which such evidence cannot take into account, and suggested that legal justice is often at odds with absolute justice." This conflict merely gets back to the general, symbolic intent and the overriding, thematic structure: good and evil are mixed, and any question related to them, even if only tangentially, must take this intricacy into consideration, whether the problem be one of religion, politics, law, justice, or what have you. By contrasting the world of reality, the narrative, with the world of fact, the legal section—if I can make the distinction—Melville has shown us this. Though perhaps structurally loose, *Benito Cereno* does not lack thematic unification.
Notes for the Introduction

1 Harold H. Scudder "Melville's 'Benito Cereno' and Captain Delano's Voyages," PMLA, XLIII (1928), 502-532.

2 Raymond M. Weaver, Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic (New York, 1921), p. 348.


11 Nathalia Wright, Melville's Use of the Bible (Durham, 1949).

Notes for Chapter One

1 I first became aware of this theory during a seminar in Melville and Whitman that I took with Professor Carl Strauch of Lehigh University during the Fall term of 1968-69. There is some debate over the true nature of this relationship. Both Raymond M. Weaver, Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic (New York, 1921) and Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville (New York, 1929) suggest that Hawthorne was cold toward Melville. But as Thorp points out, both of these biographies, "in their effort to dramatize the snobliness of Melville and the failure of his contemporaries to take the measure of his greatness have exaggerated the native aloofness of Hawthorne" (p. xxxv, fn. 38). Thorp argues instead, correctly I think, that this relationship matured Melville's powers to their fullest. After this important influence, Melville went on his own." When he saw Hawthorne in England in 1856, he had lost the power to be moved by new adventures, except those of the mind. After 1852 the drama of his life is played on that stage" (p. xxxix). For further reading on the subject Thorp suggests Newton Arvin's Hawthorne (New York, 1929), pp. 166-173.

2 The Letters of Herman Melville, eds. R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven, 1960), p. 109. Using Howard as a source, Davis and Gilman say: "At best Melville's claim to two years' experience as a harpooner is an exaggeration. There is no evidence that he ever hurled a harpoon in the eighteen months he spent on the Acushnet or the six or seven weeks on the Lucy Ann. On his third and last whaling voyage aboard the Charles and Henry he may possibly have been a boat-steerer and harpooner, but the trip lasted only six months" (Howard, 63-4).

3 Moby Dick had been published in London in October of the same year.


5 Ibid., p. 435.

6 Ibid., p. 469.
7 Tyrus Hillway, Herman Melville (New York, 1963), p. 49.
8 Leon Howard, Herman Melville (Berkeley, 1951), p. 218.
11 Ibid., pp. 500-501.
12 Ibid., p. 501.
13 Ibid., 504.
14 Ibid., p. 508.
15 In a letter to Dix and Edwards (January 19, 1856) Melville had suggested that the book be titled Benito Cereno and Other Sketches. But in another letter (February 16, 1856) to his publishers he changed his title to The Piazza Tales and suggested that the following order of the tales be used:

The Piazza
Bartleby
Benito Cereno
Lightning-Rod Man
Encantadas
Bell Tower

It might be a worthwhile venture to investigate why Melville chose this order. Was he trying to impose a deliberate structure on the collection?

16 Hugh W. Hetherington, Melville's Reviewers: British and American, 1846-1891. (Chapel Hill, 1961), pp. 248-255. The two reviews are those from the Knickerbocker and The New York Tribune respectively.

17 Howard, pp. 221-222.

Howard uses this as the title of chapter 10 in his book. The following note appears in Hawthorne's journal: "Melville has not been well, of late; he has been affected with neuralgic complaints in his head and limbs, and no doubt has suffered from too constant literary occupation, pursued without much success, latterly; and his writings, for a long while past, have indicated a morbid state of mind. . . . . I do not wonder that he found it necessary to take an airing through the world, after so many years of toilsome pen-labor and domestic life, following upon so wild and adventurous a youth as his was" (Leyda, II, pp. 527-528). Melville's journal in late 1856 and the first half of 1857 is marked by a note of plagued skepticism throughout.

Two of the better books on this subject are Herbert Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts (New York, 1943) and Kenneth M. Stampp, The Peculiar Institution, Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South (New York, 1956). For a full account of the incident see Perry Walton, "The Mysterious Case of the Long, Low, Black Schooner," NEQ, VI (June, 1933), 353-361.


Ibid., pp. 15-16.

Ibid., p. 331.


Kaplan, p. 27 (fn. 9) also makes this point.


35 Fogle, p. 144.

36 Robert M. Farnsworth, "Slavery and Innocence in 'Benito Cereno,'" ESQ, No. 44, 95.

37 Margaret Jackson, "Melville's Use of a Real Slave Mutiny in 'Benito Cereno,'" CLAJ, IV (1960), 91-93.

Notes for Chapter II


7. Stanley T. Williams, "'Follow Your Leader': Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" *Virginia Quarterly Review* (1947), 73.


12. Amasa Delano, *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels, in the northern and southern hemispheres: comprising three voyages round the world, together with a voyage*
of survey and discovery in the Pacific Ocean and Oriental Islands (Boston, 1817), p. 324.

13Ibid., p. 331.

14Guy A. Cardwell, p. 139.

15Putzel, p. 193.


17Fogle, p. 122.


20Carlisle, pp. 349-362.

21Margaret Y. Jackson, "Melville's Use of a Real Slave Mutiny," CLAJ, IV (1960), 86.


23Ibid., p. 194.

24Herman Melville, Benito Cereno, ed. John P. Runden (Boston, 1966), p. 1. Future page references refer to this edition. This edition is quite useful as it gives the pagination of the 1856 edition (The Piazza Tales) of Benito Cereno and the textual variants made between this revised version and the version that first appeared in Putnam's Monthly (10-12/1855). Also, it reprints several articles on the novella and supplies their original pagination.

25Carlisle, p. 351. Actually, Carlisle speaks only of the first quotation. By implication, however, he surely included the second.

26Carlisle and Phillips in their respective articles imply an awareness of this crucial distinction. Rohrberger uses it as one of the overriding premises of her article.
I am using the word "epiphany" in its Joycean sense: that point in the story in which there is a sudden revelation, that moment when the veil is lifted—or for Delano, when the scales from his eyes drop. The following is Delano's epiphany: "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... Captain Delano, now with scales dropped from his eyes... (p. 57).

27 Delano, p. 326.

28 Sidney Kaplan, p. 25.

29 Rosalie Feltenstein, p. 253 and Kaplan, p. 25.

30 Fogle, p. 137.

31 Kaplan, p. 19.

32 Putzel, p. 201. Though Benito Cereno can be read in the light of the Adamic myth, Delano is not an Adam. Putzel reinforces his argument by pointing out that R. W. B. Lewis in The American Adam (Chicago, 1955) does not discuss this novella.

33 Harold H. Scudder, "Melville's 'Benito Cereno' and Captain Delano's Voyages," MLA, XLIII (1928), 531.


35 Newton Arvin, p. 240.

36 Fogle, p. 132.


38 D'Azevedo, p. 133.

39 Putzel, p. 194.

40 Magowan, p. 349.
41 Tyrus Hillway, Herman Melville (New York, 1963), p. 117.

42 Scudder, p. 502.

43 Delano, pp. 329-330.


45 The original Delano narrative also discusses Benito's apparent indifference:

After the ship was anchored, I invited the captain to go on board my ship and take tea or coffee with me. His answer was short and seemingly reserved; and his air very different from that with which he had received my assistance. As I was at a loss to account for this change in his demeanour, and knew he had seen nothing in my conduct to justify it, and as I felt certain that he treated me with intentional neglect; in return I became less sociable, and said little to him. After I had ordered my boat to be hauled up and manned, and as I was going to the side of the vessel, in order to get into her, Don Benito came to me, gave my hand a hearty squeeze, and, as I thought, seemed to feel the weight of the cool treatment with which I had retaliated. I had committed a mistake in attributing his apparent coldness to neglect; and as soon as the discovery was made, I was happy to rectify it, by a prompt renewal of friendly intercourse (pp. 324-325).


48 Miller, p. 158.


50 Stanley T. Williams, p. 72.
51 Putzel, p. 203.

52 Cardwell, p. 161.

53 Chase, pp. 34-37, 151.

54 Freeman, p. 148.

55 Scudder, p. 530.


57 Arvin, p. 240.

58 D'Azevedo, p. 133.

59 Joseph Schiffman, p. 323.

60 Miller, p. 158.

61 Putzel, p. 194.


63 Williams, p. 73.

64 Cardwell, p. 161.

65 Magowan, p. 348, fn. 3.

66 Scudder, p. 531.


68 Miller, p. 158.

59 Kaplan, pp. 20-21.


71 Schiffman, p. 323.
Phillips' position is somewhat similar: "Sabo is the mysterious subterranean potential lurking beneath all natural human surface, potential which, when suppressed, does spring back on its suppressor" (p. 190).

Leon Howard, p. 219.

Tom B. Haber, "A Note on Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" Nineteenth-Century Fiction, VI (1951), 146-147.


Notes for Chapter III

1 Guy Cardwell, p. 157.


Melville himself gives us a clue concerning how we should view his symbolism. In the famous "Agatha" letter to Hawthorne (8-13-1852) he says: "You have a skeleton of actual reality to build about with fulness and veins and beauty" (Davis and Gilman, p. 157).


4 Feltenstein, pp. 248-249.

5 Stein, pp. 223-224.


7 Putzel, p. 192.

8 Fogle, pp. 128-131.


10 Stein, p. 224.


12 Kaplan, p. 21.

Among the works worth consulting are Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* and Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (New York, 1964).


Ibid., p. 349.


Ibid., pp. 145-149. See Isaiah 12:22 and Revelations 3:7 for the symbol of the padlock and key and Daniel 5 for that of the bottle of Canary.

Ibid., pp. 149-150.

Feltenstein, p. 248.


Feltenstein, p. 249.

31 Stein, p. 222.
32 Matthiessen, p. 508.
33 Fogle, p. 126.
34 Schiffman, pp. 320-321.
35 Kaplan, pp. 22-23.
36 Carlisle, pp. 359, 358, and 360.
37 Fogle, p. 126.
39 Arvin, p. 239.
41 Hoffman, p. 428.
42 Leon Howard, pp. 220-223. Jay Leyda in his edition of the Complete Stories of Herman Melville suggests that Melville was probably concerned with his financial intake at the time. Putnam's paid $5.00 per printed page. Thus, the longer that Melville could make the story, the more money he could make (p. xvii).
43 Tyrus Hillway, p. 117.
45 Rohrberger, pp. 545-546.
46 Feltenstein, p. 246.
47 Fogle, p. 146.
48 Guttmann, p. 42.
49 D'Azevedo sees this section as vital when considered in connection with the theme of slavery (p. 131).
50 Putzel, p. 199.

51 Ibid., p. 199.
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Vita

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