

# The Enigma of Benito Cereno

Treatment

From the novel, "Benito Cereno" by Herman Melville

Adaptation

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## Foreword:

Herman Melville, whose "Moby Dick" and "Billy Budd" have been brought to screens all over the world, has long been recognized as one of America's great authors, as well as one of its most enigmatic. His novels often unfinished, laden with quasi-biblical references, powerful and mysterious symbols and purposeful ambiguities defy attempts at finite interpretation and elude the grasp of cold-blooded analysis.

His Benito Cereno, which was also adapted for the Broadway stage by Robert Lowell, is certainly both a masterpiece and a screenwriters' nightmare.

The work is purportedly based on a real incident at sea first spotted by MELVILLE in an obscure Boston publication, dated 1817, simply entitled "Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres". Its author, the same Amasa Delano as one of the main characters in the book, an ancestor of the American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, had related in chapter 18 the details of his encounter and ultimate capture of the Spanish Merchantman "Tryal", somewhere within the proximity of Santa Maria Island, south of the Galapagos, off the South American Coast in 1799.

Slavery in any form was, and is today where we find it, an evil, desensitizing all of us, dehumanizing all of us. These events of over two hundred years ago serve as an extraordinary parable for our times and indeed, go far beyond the narrower and more obvious confines of the slavery issue, soaring or descending to the very core of the human spirit and into the heart of darkness.

Benito Cereno is not a cinematic polemic about mere political and social issues. It is not Docudrama. It is an anti-heroic 'walls within walls' mystery and action thriller about sexual terror and excess, slavery, fear, aggression and human degradation set against the background of the Big Ships and the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

# TREATMENT

## OPENING TITLES OVER MELANGE OF CROSS-DISSOLVED STILLS OF SLAVE TRADE HORRORS, PROLOGUE & MUSIC

### PROLOGUE FROM AN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

"Now their sufferings become dreadful — horrible; indeed, human language is incapable of describing, or imagination of sketching even the faint outline of a dimly floating fancy of what their condition is — homesick, seasick, half starved, naked, crying for air, for water, the strong killing the weak or dying in order to make room, the hold becomes a perfect charnel house of death and misery — a misery and anguish only conceivable by those who have endured it."

### MUSIC Paul Robeson Amazing Grace

"The slaves were all enclosed under grated hatchways between decks. The space was so low that they sat between each other's legs and [were] stowed so close together that there was no possibility of their lying down or at all changing their position by night or day. As they belonged to and were shipped on account of different individuals, they were all branded like sheep with the owner's marks of different forms.

The heat of these horrid places was so great and the odor so offensive that it was quite impossible to enter them, even had there been room.

The space between decks was divided into two compartments 3 feet 3 inches high; the size of one was 16 feet by 18 and of the other 40 by 21; into the first were crammed the women and girls, into the second the men and boys: 226 fellow creatures were thus thrust into one space 288 feet square and 336 into another space 800 feet square, giving to the whole an average Of 23 inches and to each of the women not more than 13 inches. We also found manacles and fetters of different kinds

The height sometimes between decks was only eighteen inches, so that the unfortunate beings could not turn round or even on their sides, the elevation being less than the breadth of their shoulders; and here they are usually chained to the decks by the neck and legs."

### EXT NIGHT BROTHEL IN VALPARAISO, SOUTH AMERICA 1799

An elegant carriage draws up to the highly ornate wrought iron gates of a fine white, columned, Spanish Colonial house set into its own grounds, and proudly high-lighted by the full moon. Laughter and voices raised in high spirits are coming from the house

and seem to fill the carefully sculptured gardens and pathways leading up to the house, gardens made all the more remarkable for their erotic statuary.

#### MUSIC Minuet for Guitar by Fernando Sor

Under the porticos of the houses' leafy veranda, a young man dressed in the elegant silks of 18th Century fashion cohorts with a sensuous young woman wearing a low cut evening-gown. She offers out her hand for the man to grasp and leads him seductively into the house.

#### INT BROTHEL BEDROOM

A candle light's glow is half lighting the face of a beautiful mulatto woman, AIDA, who peers, pensively, out of an upstairs window into the gardens below.

#### INT BROTHEL

Inside the main salon, fitted out gaudily in rococo style furnishings and elaborate architectural detail, gentlemen and ladies engage in lively, ribald discourse and intimate familiarity, while one couple dance to the guitarist's melody.

#### EXT ESTATE OF DON ALEXANDRO ARANDA

#### SLOW TRAVELING SHOT FROM EXTERIOR LONG ON MAIN HOUSE UP AND SLOWLY THROUGH A BEDROOM WINDOW

Don Aranda and his older friend, Don Benito Cereno, having shared a bed, are discussing two separate bones of contention which trouble their long standing relationship. Aranda's more diverse sexual appetite has included a bisexual affair with the mulatto, Aida, who is both his mistress and his slave. Don Benito begs him to end the affair and set the woman free. The second argument arises over Aranda's insistence on carrying slaves, along with his other cargo, using Cereno's ship bound for Lima, while Cereno argues passionately against slavery on philosophical and moral grounds as well as stating his disapproval of having his ship used as a slaver. To placate his friend, Aranda gives way on Cereno's wish to have him end the affair with Aida and grant her freedom, while maintaining his firm intention to carry the slaves on board the ship.

EXTERIOR OF BROTHEL AS A CARRIAGE DRAWS UP WITH DON BENITO INSIDE  
Carrying Aranda's emancipation document, Cereno exits the carriage and hesitantly enters the Brothel.

#### INTERIOR BROTHEL AIDA'S BEDROOM

The mulatto woman turns away from the window and retreats to a shrine of the Virgin Mary where she drops gracefully to her knees and bows her head in silent prayer. She prays for one of two things, either Aranda releases her to their marriage or grants her emancipation and freedom.

#### INTERIOR BROTHEL DOWNSTAIRS

Cereno, on his rather awkward deputizing mission, makes his way through the crowded main salon, past those at the dinner table, mixed couples in embrace, the guitarist and exchanges a glance with an elegant brothel girl as he climbs the grand staircase and she descends.

Reaching Aida's room and summoning up his courage, the tall, gaunt figure of DON BENITO CERENO puts a tentative hand to the door tapping it gently, waits, then, slowly twists the doorknob, gradually sliding the door open, entering the room nervously.

#### INTERIOR BROTHEL AIDA'S BEDROOM

Hearing the gentle, almost half hearted tap on her bedroom door, she turns and gracefully rises, her face caught fully in the glow of the candlelight. She stands there without responding to the knock at her door and stares incredulously as the door slides open. The woman, AIDA, seems genuinely surprised to receive this particular visitor, waiting as she was for Aranda. She is unaware that she is about to receive an answer to her prayer, a reprieve, emancipation, [manumission], and free passage to a new life.

#### BLACK SCREEN AND SOUND OVER

Starting from a whisper, noise and voices gradually rise, together with, the sound of horses' hooves and wooden cab wheels bouncing over cobble stones, UNTIL; we discern the incantation of an Auctioneer's voice rising to an unbearable pitch,

"What will you bid, what am I bid for this fine specimen? Bid me bid me once, bid me twice, bid me for the last time"

A wooden gavel crashes down hard against an auctioneer's block loudly reverberating as if it were sounded in an echo chamber.

#### BLACK SCREEN TO PICTURE

From black, horses and carriage emerge into the white-hot sunlight from underneath a vaulted underpass.

Inside the carriage, the two Spanish Grantees are engaged in an animated discussion

about their forthcoming business venture. Inevitably, the talk turns to bills of lading and once more to the choice of cargo.

The younger of the two men, DON ALEXANDRO ARANDA, in a detached, intellectual manner, tries yet again to overcome the reservations of his ship's master to carrying slaves, by pointing out, "In these competitive times, today's high bidder is tomorrow's winner."

CAPTAIN BENITO CERENO'S opposition is compromised by an obviously old and close friendship founded in early childhood, cemented by their aristocratic breeding and shaped by powerful, sexual and emotional ties. It is further compromised by his present state of indebtedness. Their social status is illustrated by the finery of their cloth, the final touch ARANDAS' large felt hat, overflowing with flamboyant ostrich feathers.

The carriage travels down a hillside cobbled road overlooking a sweeping bay. Passing through to the wharf area of a South American port, the carriage stops on the busy Quayside next to a large three-mast ship, its crew busily engaged in loading and last minute preparations before getting underway.

Not far from the ship, hundreds of frightened African slaves, men, women and children, are penned into a hastily conceived stockade where they are awaiting a barbaric branding with hot irons. Two amongst them stand out as defiant, watchful and almost detached.

Several passengers are climbing the gangway making their way on board the ship.

LEGEND OF VALPARAISO YEAR OF OUR LORD MAY 19TH, 1799

DON ARANDA is distracted by the figure of a beautiful mulatto woman [Aida] lugging her own bags up the ship's gangway. She drops a bag, turns to pick it up, spotting Aranda and returns his leering stare with an irritated glance. CAPTAIN CERENO regains his friend's attention with a last minute appeal to his humanity, gesturing towards the slaves, heads bowed, stumbling, herded like cattle along the dock. ARANDA draws the argument to a conclusion by saying, "And I have every confidence in your seamanship, as for the rest, I put my trust in God to deliver us fine weather."

The windless softly colored sky looks tame and seductive. Both men laugh.

The sky gradually changes colors, goes to cloud, darkens, as wind rises fast and loud, rain pelts down.

## MUSIC UP MOZART'S REQUIEM BENEDICTUS

### TWO SHIPS IN STORM AT SEA

Caught in the epicenter of a fearsome tropical storm the crew of the American Sealer BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT is fighting for survival. Their experience and instinct welds the sailors into a tight unit around their Captain, AMASA DELANO, whose authority and knowledge of the sea are crystallized in the determined look of his helmsman, battling to slide the keel through the crest of the waves keeping the ship balanced on the edge of the beyond.

### SHOTS ON BOARD A SECOND SHIP IN THE STORM:

Thunder shreds the electric night. Barbaric visions SEEM to whirl within the shaken minds of the sailors and their captain.

Screaming children clutching their mothers  
Scrunched Human grapes  
African slaves muscles twitching with fatigue and fear  
A fierce mask, carved by the whoosh of steel, cutting a swath into human flesh  
A black giant scything off an officer's sleeve arm  
Rape of a mulatto woman  
A golden key torn from a chain  
Iron chains whipping through sprays of wave

The Prow of the BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT sliding under the shadow of a gigantic three masted ship, two bodies swaying in murderous embrace in the nets under her beak, draws an incredulous look from the helmsman pointing to the scene. The collision appears inevitable. Delano takes over, thrusting his ship out of danger, his firm hand on the wheel, switching from HALLUCINATION TO REALITY

The storm skies slowly change.

LEGEND SANTA MARIA ISLAND OFF SOUTH AMERICAN COAST, AUG 1st 1799"  
Undisturbed, the sun rises.

It is daybreak in the overwhelming heat of a sun veiled by low hanging clouds, its piercing power projecting a hue of grays in all directions, its energy sucking still waters, obscuring the horizon with steams of twisted vapors.

CAPTAIN DELANO has dropped anchor at the uninhabited Island of Santa Maria, the smallest of the Galapagos group. The 2ND Mate HANSON is in charge of a work party

on the beach filling up casks with fresh water. They pile up fruit, while gathering wild tortoise, goat and boar. One would imagine they might enjoy being on firm ground after a harrowing escape. Why the sullen look on their downcast faces?

Delano's crew splits in two camps. Most of them experienced hands loyal to the Captain and his second in command, PETTIBONE; the rest, picked up on the wharfs, respond to HANSON, the Second Mate, who they fear more than respect.

Hanson stands on the top of a boulder, impassively looking at his men while occasionally glancing sideways out to sea.

Simultaneously, a young black lad, John-John, atop the crow's nest of the BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT spies a ship entering the bay confirming for all and sundry with a shout of "Ship Ahoy".

The profile of the barely visible tri-masted ship wakes the men out of their lethargy. She glides erratically in and out of the mists like a floating whitewashed monastery on calm water, the clicking and slamming of her torn sails in the windless skies and her fluffy wake pointing towards the reefs, signaling distress.

Delano has the longboat swiftly equipped dispatching Pettibone and eight oarsmen armed with musket. Pettibone draws closer to the troubled vessel just as she alters course, narrowly averting disaster on the hidden reefs. He manages to sight an anchor being dropped. The action of the anchor hitting the water sways the ship about so that the keel actually circles round the chain. The ship stops, her back to the BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT, facing out to sea.

Pettibone has the men row round to the stern, stopping by the castle deck with its nets dangling off the balustrade rails. Just as he is about to climb her ropes, an officer appears. From where he stands, Pettibone can only see his white angular face framed by a large felt hat, long matted hair and a pointed beard. Then, just as the man seems to fall backward, a black man appears. His bright clear eyes immediately distract Pettibone. The black is dressed in what looks to be an officer's jacket, a golden key on a chain round his neck and has no hat. He takes hold of the Spanish officer, supporting him at the elbow and waist.

Pettibone reaches the two men. The Spaniard introduces himself with Castilian flair, as Captain DON BENITO CERENO Master of the SAN DOMINICK and Pettibone replies with his own rank, Captain's name and ship. The Negro smiles down to him in a friendly but somewhat condescending and ingratiating way.



Just as Pettibone starts to speak, the belly of the ship surprisingly comes to life, exuding faint plaintive moans, which are covered over by calls coming from her decks. A powerful shout in a harsh and foreign tongue puts a sharp end to the noise.

Pettibone shuffles uneasily from one foot to the other and then starts to speak again. He asks the Spanish Captain if he and his ship can be of assistance, since the Dominick looked to have been in some difficulty entering the harbour.

The Spaniard coyly rejects his offer of assistance, saying that they could manage on their own, but leaving Pettibone with the impression that he was merely parading his pride and really looked to need some help.

A wave of moans and groans rise again, and are met by the same order barked out more loudly than before. Pettibone hesitates and once again offers assistance, pointing to the slit and torn mainsails.

BABO, the black man, whispers into the ear of his pale and haggard looking captain, who then reluctantly stammers down to Pettibone that his ship does need fresh water and food, asking Pettibone to convey greetings to his Captain, offering appreciation of whatever assistance the BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT can give.

Pettibone agrees and orders oars lifted, then turns and respectfully asks the Spaniard what port the Dominick was out of, what cargo she carried and where she was bound. Cereno, Babo close to him, stutters out his response, and Pettibone gives his men the order to push off.

Babo, the black slave, smiles and waves Pettibone off.

As the longboat pulls away, PETTIBONE'S eye fixes on the large oval stern piece of the DOMINICK, intricately carved with the Spanish arms of Castile and Leon, surrounded by groups of mythological creatures, their centre-piece being a dark and evil looking satyr in mask, stamping on the body of a writhing figure.

PETTIBONE looks off to the two raised quarter galleys, with their balustrades covered in sea moss and the cabin's dead lights, sealed and calked, then looks up to the mast where he notes the absence of any national colors and finally squints at the ship's prow, its beak wrapped and covered bizarrely in canvas. Under the beak and prow is a legend painted very roughly in a clumsy hand.

As Captain Cereno and Babo turn round, a well of noise rises up from the other decks.

They spring to life with masses of black men, women, children and Spanish sailors, all shouting and gesticulating wildly.

Babo makes for the scene, while Cereno leans against the masthead, staring out at nothing in particular, the only sign of life in him coming from his feverish eyes.

Babo shouting down on the lower deck suddenly comes face to chest, with a monster of a black man, seven feet tall, silhouetted by huge feline muscles, more outlined than covered by leopard skins, adorned by bracelets and necklace. This giant, named ATUFAL is holding a king-size blade which he sharpens with a stone.

The two men exchange heated words, Babo holding his own despite the brute force of Atufal's presence. We understand from Atufal's stinging remarks that he had been a powerful King in Africa while Babo was nothing more than a 'black man's slave'. Nevertheless, it is obvious that it is Babo who NOW has the greater strength of mind and resources to deal with their situation. Having taken control of the ship, they could agree on one thing at least: getting back to Africa. While Atufal is either for cutting and running or for immediate action and killing, emphasizing his simple ideas with violent gestures, Babo skillfully uses quiet body language to assuage and calm the giant, talking in soft measured tones offering a more rational approach, ultimately mesmerizing rather than convincing the big man.

Evidently, after Aida had unlocked the Stows and they had teamed up to kill the best part of the Spanish crew, the cleverer Babo took command. He alone had the presence of mind to realize that without a few competent seamen and a first class navigator they had no chance of reaching their avowed destination. Atufal, fighting to preserve bits and pieces of his pride and previous authority, gradually relents, giving way to his small companion.

Their intense discussion captures the rapt attention of the folk lining the Dominick's decks. Decks packed tight with filthy half starved children, sick and dying former slaves, babes in arms, pregnant women, warriors with recently fashioned spears, Spanish sailors in torn uniforms, rotting animal carcasses, bones, rusty chains, ripped canvas, smashed longboats and garbage.

Babo quietly undermines Atufal's resistance and has him ready to give the order to clean up the decks and gain the appearance of marginal ship decorum, hiding their one remaining longboat in the aft hold.

Captain Cereno remains transfixed, immobilized, staring vacantly out to sea, a single

word forms on his lips "Aranda" and then he resumes his mindless vigil in silence.

Before Babo can finish giving his orders to Atufal, a commotion rises from the lower deck nearest the Prow. Five Ashanti women are assaulting the mulatto woman, tearing at the cloth of her fine dress and pummeling her about the head.

Two black men rush down to the scene to separate the combatants. Atufal making amused guttural noises joins them pulling the black women off their victim. Babo, clearly irritated by this foolish diversion from his business, lifts Aida to her feet supporting her while she straightens her dress. She is dressed incongruously in a fashionable gown, barefooted, with carefully groomed nails, a lithe, sensuous figure with black braided frizzy hair pulled out full from her head.

Babo angrily reminds the Ashanti women that if it were not for AIDA, they would still all be languishing in stows fettered and manacled. For, such was the true situation until that wild night when a confluence of events and the mulattos's action led to the slaves turning the tables on their masters', taking the DOMINICK for themselves and seizing their freedom.

Babo added, that it was a miracle they survived storms and calms, treacherous currents and the deception of the Spanish Captain, just to reach this refuge of a harbor. However, they were in disastrous condition, sails torn and no cloth for repair, broken masts, no stores of food or water and no closer to their ultimate goal of freedom and home.

The new ingredient in this survival cocktail was the American Sealer anchored in the harbor of this isolated island. Her presence here was to them a BLESSING and a new THREAT. On the one hand they desperately needed to be re-supplied and repairs made to the ship, on the other, they risked being discovered as mutineers, recaptured and returned into servitude.

The Spanish Captain greets the rise of cheers coming from the fore section of his ship with a look of solemn resignation. He had lost his ship, owed his life to the whims of a black slave and was faced with a daily threat to the life of his best friend, ARANDA. Who he believed was being held captive below decks along with the remains of his senior officers. He simply could not see any clear way out of his predicament. Nailed to his own cross of guilt and responsibility he seemed more like a religious penitent than a ship's Master.

The anarchic patchwork crowd follows BABO towards the Prow of the ship, listening in

respectful silence as he sums up the situation, giving them a highly rational and resourceful speech on how they are to untangle their dangerous position.

With the Africans all gathered in the section of deck nearest the Prow, he reminds them of what binds them all together, offering them a secret and sinister banner to hang on, pointing to the beak covered in canvas clenching his fist out at the legend, roughly painted in his own hand and declaring, "Sequid Vuestro Jefe".

The illiterate, frightened mass can only respond with a stunned murmur to this magical incantation. Babo, sensing his new power over them, then shouts out a question. "Do you know what these three words mean?" Again, there is silence. He pronounces the words for them very slowly and clearly, "Sequid Vuestro Jefe! That is Spanish. In English it means, follow your leader! To each segment of the black crowd he incants in dialect, lighting a fire in his eyes and in theirs.

Across the harbor lay the BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT and her Captain, Amasa Delano, seated in his Spartan cabin going over ship accounts reflecting on the loss of his cargo. His ship was homeward bound from a very long voyage, having been cheated in Canton of their sealskin cargo and having lost most of their general cargo during a fierce tropical storm. There were scant profits for her owners and crew. The appearance of the crippled Spanish Ship offers DELANO, at the very least, a diversion for his disgruntled crew, an opportunity to sell his services and materials and possibly, if she is completely un-seaworthy...a shot at salvage, not to be confused with piracy.

Pettibone's report had surely whetted the appetite of Delano, but at the same time, and dangerously, it excited the interest of Hanson the 2nd Mate and some of the rabble amongst the crew who were disgruntled by the lost cargo and their own wages.

Back on the DOMINICK, there is a wild flurry of activity, the Ashanti warriors tamely wash the decks, clear up the rubbish, paying particular attention to the bloodstains and other signs of battle, others are set to repairing tools and hiding the smashed timbers of the longboats which Atufal had ordered destroyed, while the one remaining boat is hidden away in the hold. Another bunch take a quick course from the Spanish helmsman, while some of the young black lads climb the masts along with the few remaining Spanish sailors.

Babo's awareness that he's in a race against the clock, shows in the beads of perspiration on his forehead and the wrinkles wrapped around his studied grin. He dashes from Poop to Prow, cajoling, encouraging, bullying his forces, trying to whip the slaves and Spaniards into something resembling a ship's company, knowing that while they could

never approximate a real crew they just might pass for a makeshift one roughly assembled after a series of natural disasters at sea.

He rehearses the sullen and ambivalent Cereno in a complicated story of catastrophes which might account for the curious state of the Dominick and offers an explanation for the fact that all the slaves were unfettered and above deck, the lack of Spanish crew and soldiers, and make some sense out of their ridiculous navigational position.

Having improvised everything, with Atufal under control, Cereno in hand, Babo reserves to himself the hardest part of all, playing the dedicated servant to his fine Master, Cereno. It would take all of his guile and skill to hide his own fierce pride and emotionality, but the challenge greatly excited him, seeing as he did, the great 'irony' in his situation and knowing the high stakes.

After a long last look at his dumb show, of which AIDA is a minor key distraction card, he has the BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT signaled to request them to send a longboat.

In the meantime, Delano has joined his work party on the beach of Santa Maria island, and having approved the request, watches as the silhouettes of two men and what seems to be a....women, embark from the Dominick.

As the longboat approaches the shoreline, a few of the sailors wade out to pull in her ropes, and Delano clearly sighting the woman, gallantly joins them. Just as the boat nears the sand marks and Delano is offering a hand to the lady, a large wave breaks. Aida and Delano each end up falling into the water, emerge and drag themselves onto the shore. Cereno and Babo join them and for a moment, there is an awkward silence. Delano's men are staring at the wild beauty of this mulatto woman, Aida, who exchanges a subtle flirtatious and tempting glance with Delano, while Babo and Cereno stand there uncertain.

Delano, first to recover, starts the time clock ticking again with a sharp order to Hanson, who relays the command to the men, returning to work.

The two Captains now come face to face for the first time, under the scrutiny of Babo's wry smile. Greetings are exchanged ceremoniously and according to naval tradition, while all three men are taking cautious stock of one another. If Delano is impressed by the name of CERENO, one well known in maritime and merchant circles, he's disappointed to observe in the man a curious mixture of arrogance and hypochondria, as the Spanish Grandee's behavior and posture alternate. A signal from BABO drives AIDA to thrust forward into the conversation, taking stock of the food piled up along

the beach. A "spontaneous" remark earns her, as well as Cereno, an invitation to dine on board the *BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT*. Don Benito's limp reaction and bizarre fainting spell is explained away by Babo as a symptom of "Masters' fever", and he reassures the Spaniard that he would not, "leave him alone or short of Babo's constant care and watch."

The captain's cuddy on the *BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT*, is a rather cramped and Spartan space, it's simple, utilitarian furnishings reveal the modest, straightforward nature of its inhabitant. Delano is a man who, at the age of some 40 odd years, has worked his way through the ranks to earn his command.

The dinner shared by Delano, Aida and Cereno, who's attended by Babo, appears to be a stream of thoughts, words and actions springing out of the cardinal points of normal conversation, but is really a cacophony of surrealistic, one way communication, words bouncing like tennis balls against the locked doors of a steel-safe. Cereno falteringly tells a tangled tale of bad luck and misadventure, while Delano naively slips the nets by focusing on Aida...

Aida loses sight of the purpose to which she's being put, thinks of her own problems and responds to the flirtatious smiles and gallant attentions of the American Captain, which allow her to escape into a private fantasy world.

Cereno like a schizophrenic, is split in two antagonistic and opposite directions: Warning the American Captain and saving his own life if possible, thereby leaving Don Aranda and the others to sure slaughter, or: to submit to Babo's will and the situation, leaving matters in the hands of providence.

Babo, acting the part of humble and docile servant to perfection, balances his fragile control over minds and matters, by applying psychological pressure, in a juggling act that uses every ounce of his wits and will power, his mind firmly fixed on his objective...The soil of Africa! The only time he relaxes from his task is when a young black cabin boy, John-John, wearing a gold cross round his neck, enters the cramped quarters and the two blacks exchange a long glance, studying one another carefully.

#### THE NEXT MORNING ON THE 2ND OF AUGUST

Groomed like a schoolboy going on his first date, Delano makes for his rendezvous aboard the *DOMINICK*, climbing her latticed ropes and on to her deck, where he's astonished by the scene staged and created exclusively for him. Babo's turned the decks into an enormous theatre assembling Spanish sailors, black men, women and children, all with their roles staked out.

The Ashanti warriors are quietly polishing hatchets, others are working the tar barrels, some are begging and crying out for food and water, women are grabbing at Delano's uniform and pouring out incoherent tales of woe, and the enormous figure of Atufal stands like a centre-piece, tied to the mainmast, iron chains wrapped three times around his body, legs and wrists manacled and padlocked.

A black woman with large, white teeth says in broken Spanish and English "Atufal is tied like a mule" and laughs expansively.

Babo, rescues the American from the clutches of the pawing female, and escorts him down to Cereno's cabin, where Delano's bewilderment turns to rampant curiosity at the sight of the rather bizarre "Captains' Cuddy".

The place called the cuddy was a light deck-cabin formed by the poop, a sort of attic to the large cabin below. Part of it had formerly been the quarters of the officers; but since their death all the partitioning had been torn down and the whole interior converted into one spacious and airy marine hall; absent of fine furniture and a picturesque disarray of odd appurtenances.

The floor of the cuddy was matted. Overhead, four or five rusted 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, meager crucifix attached to the bulkhead. Under the table lay a dented cutlass or two, with hatchet harpoon, among some melancholy old rigging, like a poor friar's girdles. There were also two long, sharp ribbed settees of Malacca cane, black with age, and as uncomfortable to look at as Inquisitors' racks, together with a large, misshapen armchair, which was furnished with a crude barber's crotch at the back worked by a screw and looked like some grotesque engine of torment.

A flag locker in one corner was open, exposing various colored bunting, some rolled up, others half rolled up, and still others tumbled. Opposite was a cumbrous washstand of black mahogany, all of one block, with a pedestal, brushes, and other implements of the toilet. A torn hammock of stained grass swung near: the sheets tossed, and the pillow wrinkled up like a brow, as if whoever slept here slept little, with alternative visitations of sad thoughts, bad dreams and nightmares.

The further extremity of the cuddy, overhanging the ship's stern, was pierced with three openings, windows or portholes, according as men or cannon might peer, socially or un-socially out of them. At present neither men nor cannon were seen, though huge ringbolts and other rusty iron fixtures of the woodwork hinted of twenty-four

pounders.

Glancing towards the hammock, but taking in this very peculiar space, as he entered, Captain Delano tamely exclaimed: "You sleep here, Don Benito?"

"Yes Senor, since we got into milder weather."

"This seems a sort of dormitory, sitting-room, sail-loft, chapel, armory and private closet all together, Don Benito", added Delano, looking around the quarters once again.

Later, Delano and Cereno, Babo trailing close behind, go topsides and reach the poop, where Delano is making a list of repairs and discussing them with a distracted Cereno, who constantly nods his agreement, even when some heavy costs are calculated by the businesslike Delano. As they look up to the riggings and damaged sails, there is a commotion coming from one of the lower decks, which grabs their attention.

The American captain is struck by an instance of insubordination that no proper ship's captain or any other decent naval officer would ever tolerate on his ship. A group of lads, both black and white sitting close to one of the hatches on the deck had been scrapping and sharing out the scant remains of rice grains from a crude wooden platter. Suddenly, one of the black boys, enraged at a remark made by one of his white companions, seized a knife from the belt of the turbaned steward, Francisco, standing nearby and rushes at the white lad, inflicting a gash on the head of the other young lad from which blood flows. The two tumble to the ground against the roar from onlookers as the fight continues.

Much to Delano's surprise, Don Benito makes no effort to stop the fight. Turning to Cereno, he enquires as to why the Spanish Captain allows the fight to continue; to which Cereno impassively replies, that it is only a bit of harmless sport.

Finally Francisco and two of the Ashanti warriors pull the combatants apart, having spent their force and complacent to intervention.

Delano can't resist commenting critically on the incident, pointing out that on his ship such behavior would have been immediately and severely punished. Nevertheless, Cereno can only shrug his shoulders, giving a half lunatic look to the American.

Having sensed trouble in Delano's reaction to the incident, Babo signals Aida to join them on the Poop. She arrives in time to divert the American's attention. She does such a good job of it that he loses track of the previous incident, so that when he at last receives a disjointed response from his Spanish host to his own comment about discipline...Benito Cereno's: "Doubtless, doubtless, Senor!", muttered from behind tightened lips, falls off key in the middle of Delano's infatuations.



Meanwhile on the BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT, down in the crew's quarters HANSON is in the middle of a clandestine meeting with some of the men, turning on the possible "salvage" of the San Dominick. Their spirits heat up, all talking at the same time, each one with his own opinion and reason to take action, when they are interrupted by the young, black cabin boy, JOHN-JOHN, who startles them by entering silently. Hanson is just about to lose his temper with the lad, who delivers his message in a nervous, hurried voice, saying that Captain Delano has signaled for a boat to be launched with food and fresh water. He backs out of the cabin in a timid rush.

The discussion resumes, awkwardly, louder than before, some of the sailors speculating on the bizarre, ghost-like appearance of the DOMINICK, others chime in with shouts of "treasure", "salvage", wisecracks about their captain, the "lady", all convinced that there is "something rotten" about this converted Spanish Man O War, flying no colors, no guns in her ports, manned by "unfettered black slaves", half castes and Spanish and to the last man they shout that something should be done about it, even if DELANO lacks the stomach for the job.

In their excitement, they've forgotten the command passed down to them, all loudly agreeing when, JOHN-JOHN cautiously opens the door for the second time to insist that the Captain "wants the boat launched right away!"

This interruption, coming at the height of their euphoric call to arms only reaps a harvest of nasty, cheap-shot remarks and racist slurs. HANSON swears at the young lad before getting the crew on the move and back to their duty.

On the Poop of the DOMINICK, Cereno spies the longboat from the BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT being loaded and dropped into the water, before turning to Delano and Babo to report this fact. Babo responds by whispering into the ear of his "Master", who then offers a limp excuse to Delano before retiring to his private quarters with Babo supporting him like an obedient, caring, nursemaid.

DELANO'S free, or so he believes, to wander about the decks of the Dominick making his reparation list. He goes about his business with a confident and casual air, smiling at the children, taking in the riggings, spars and ropes, talking with a Spanish sailor, straddled by two warriors.

At first it seems as though the mob that follows him about his business, does so out of curiosity and simple minded good nature, but gradually the atmosphere changes as he moves down a flight of deck stairs, past sailors, hatchet polishing Ashanti's, oakum pickers,...into nooks and crannies of this vessel that he is not intended to see!

In turning uncomfortably away from one group of blacks, he comes smack into the path of an old Spanish sailor who is making up an intricate and very interesting knot. Delano relaxes, and engages the old salt in some small talk, then enquires about the knot, one he has never before seen. Their talk is cut short by the old man suddenly tossing the knot at Delano telling him to, "Undo it, cut it quick!"

The perplexed Delano, holds the knotted rope in his right hand, when suddenly, from behind him a hand snatches the rope away. The American experiences a flash of fearful paranoia, turning violently around to see a young lad skipping off innocently with the rope trailing along the deck. Delano's taught face relaxes in to a smile.

A barely imperceptible drum beat starts, undetected by Delano as he moves on again, having forgotten the old man and his "endless knot", distracted by the throngs who accompany him as on his inspection tour of the ship.

Also unknown to him, near the forward cargo hold in a stowage, the remains of the Senior Spanish officers are languishing, half starved and in chains.

As Delano gets nearer to the hold, the crowd wills him into other directions, but eventually his line is made straight for the forbidden area.

There are quick, intense moves made in the crowd around Delano, the sound of the drums seem to rise, menace can be seen by all but Delano, until it feels that a sudden, terrible violence is going to be done to the naive American Captain!

A hatchway opens with a bang!

A shout goes up from the crew's nest! Longboat to starboard!

Babo emerges from the hatchway!

Delano turns around as the crowd is pulling him along, their mood completely altered, anticipating the arrival of the food and water from the American's ship, Delano unaware that his life had almost ended in one spark of a moment.

The mood on board the Dominick lurches hard to pan demonic excitement as the supplies are lifted up. Eager hands thrust out, women and children wail inside parched, thirsting lips, white sailors jostle with blacks, collecting like barnacles on the backs of Delano's men who are unloading the barrels of water and fish on the main deck.

Aida sees Delano rescue a small child, separated from its terrified mother, just before the crowd can trample it to death in their mad dash for the food. He takes sight of her at

the same time, exchanging a long look filled with expectation.

Finally, Cereno escorted by his "black shadow", surfaces from his quarters pushing through the unruly masses, passing Delano, and rising to the Poop. With a show of great authority, he orders silence and for all to take one step back and hold their places. His powerful intercession comes as a shock to the entire ship's company, and throws the vacillating Delano off balance once again.

In full command, CERENO descends to the mainmast where his fellow captain waits, an astonished look on his face. But the crazy scene hasn't finished as Atufal makes a play at being surly, refusing to move out of Cereno's path in a threatening manner. Babo has carefully rehearsed the giant in his role as the insubordinate, obstinate slave, in order to re establish some confidence in Cereno as a ship's master.

Refusing thrice to move, Cereno has Atufal placed in chains and manacles and taken to the hold, where he will await the Captain's pleasure and sure punishment, in a charade of a "fake" flogging, later played out for the benefit of Delano.

CERENO instigates an exaggerated ceremonious bow out of all proportion to normal maritime etiquette that induces an awkwardly mimicked response from Delano. Babo steps forward with a small keg and cups, handing the cups to the two captains and pouring from them. The Captains' lift their cups and drink to the cheers of the crowd.

As the supplies are meted out below by his men, DELANO, the polite Yankee makes a great issue of the rations being shared equally among black and white alike, women and children first, naturally!

The atmosphere's so relaxed and friendly that Babo allows himself to lighten up, while sharing food and banalities with John-John, the black cabin boy, teasing the youngster about his golden cross and asking where he's stolen it.

Delano, unattended for a moment, searches the cramped decks, spotting Aida, and secretly arranges a rendezvous with the beautiful mulatto, for later that evening. He puts an end to her cautious refusals with the mock, exaggerated authority of an officer who must be obeyed.

## MIDNIGHT

We hear a ship's bell toll the hour over the sound of creaking ship's timbers.

A small dinghy drops into the shadowy waters and slides across the mirrored surface of the sheltered harbor, Captain Delano skillfully rowing, toward the DOMINICK,

standing out eerily in the night light like a huge black castle and to his tryst with AIDA, silhouetted in white climbing down the vessels nets.

Spying eyes follow the girl as she jumps gingerly into a dinghy and watch as the boat shoves off making for Santa Maria Island.

This is followed by the subdued sound of a body plunging into the still waters, swimming athletically in the wake of the dinghy, followed by a barely visible figure taking the same route, plowing through the bare ripples, carving a line for the same stretch of sandy beach that Delano and Aida have just reached.

Delano pulls the boat onto the beach, takes Aida's hand and leads her into the thick foliage beneath the cover of some tall palm trees, then onto a small clearing where they stop, and start the ritualistic universal love dance that transcends all notions of time, the one constant in a changing world, not bound to geography, revolving like the Earth about its Sun with perfect rhythm colored by an infinity of rainbows.

Mixing light chatter and assertion, disguising a question, neat answers masking small yet charming deceptions, curiosity, exaggerations, innuendo, discreet evasions and ultimately a safe shelter in fantasy, as Delano describes a 'Gala Ball' in his hometown of Duxbury, Mass, to which he invites his luscious mulatto, who, no doubt, will turn the eyes of all the distinguished gentlemen and even put a light in the envious ones of the fine ladies.

Aida, like a pollinated blossom, allows herself to believe in the American's romance, open to flattery, oblivious to all but the searching desire in Delano's eyes, thankful for his studied blindness to her mulatto caste and his pretense at ignoring the reality of her past dissolute life. Then memories of broken promises flood back to strip away the fantasy, the wounds to her pride made by so many broken promises and treacherous denials.

In a last fragile self protective ruse, she asks Delano what she'll be wearing to this fine ball. "I will have jewels and silks, no doubt?" But, the sincerity of his response crushes her negative resolve and she gives softly as he pries her waist backward, forcing her to the earthy carpet. His hands pull away the fragrant veils of her body revealing brown breasts, his lips reach for hers, but, in a last second protest she tries to resist, twists him over to one side, laughs, and manages to get up and run into the thick undergrowth of branches and leaves.

Atufal has stolen up from the beach. He circles around the tree trunks, stalking the

woman and, then moves swiftly to intercept her on the path of her love game.

Babo's searching the undergrowth for Atufal, fast making ground to catch up the giant, so that he can stop him from interfering and ruining his plans.

Delano's followed a wrong path and is doubling back to where the trail diverged.

Running happily, the expression on Aida's face turns to terror as she bumps into Atufal's unreal figure, his cruel eyes glowering in the moonlight. This brutal shock reduces her to a frightened runaway, fleeing barefooted, quivering and tripping back to Delano.

They meet at the point where the paths intersected, Delano is un-entangling himself from the thorns of an Acacia bush. He thinks she's pretending to be frightened and teases her, but she implores him to take her back to the ship. Certain that she is deliberately postponing their love-making he refuses to budge until her hysterics can no longer be ignored. She pulls him back through the clearing, past the tall trees and down to the dinghy.

Babo catches up with Atufal, just as the giant is about to pounce on the two lovers, stopping the giant with a sudden tug on huge arm. He nervously explains to Atufal that the girl won't betray them, that there's only one more day to get through before they're re-supplied, and reminds him of their destination. "Africa!", he intoned in a low but forceful whisper.

#### SUNRISE NEXT MORNING SHIP'S BELL TOLLING

On the *BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT*, the crew is busy loading more supplies of fresh fish, meats and sundries. Piles of sails, ropes and spars and heavy timbers are being assembled on the deck, while some of the provisions are lifted into the longboat. Pettibone is barking orders, relayed by Hanson, while Delano oversees the operation from the Poop, where he checks off every item of material against a list that's held by John-John, who stands timidly to one side of the captain.

On the *DOMINICK*, Babo and Cereno are locked in conversation on the Poop. The Spaniard's restless and sullen, insisting that he is allowed to see his friend ARANDA. First, Babo reacts by issuing a stern warning, saying that if Cereno doesn't cooperate, his dear friend, master of slaves and partner, will die, and he gives Cereno a graphic description of the manner of death. This jolts Cereno. Seeing the effect, Babo reverses the strategy, placating the broken captain with a pack of lies. Telling him how well Aranda looks, that he's been fed, even conveying an imaginary message from the "long

dead" slave owner, adding that it was Arandas' wish, for Don Benito not to do anything foolish, and that he placed his trust in his friends' strength.

Well in advance of his scheduled appointment with Benito Cereno, Delano's come along on the longboat bringing some of the provisions, intending to have a final check before putting a price on his services and materials.

Cereno and Babo see him arrive and go quickly to cuddy.

While his men are unloading, Delano noses about the DOMINICK, eventually opens the main hatchway, takes its rough wooden stairs down to a passageway which has a row of cabin doors on one side and a few steamer trunks, stuffed full and half opened on the other side.

Delano, about to indulge in some old fashioned prying, hears a noise coming from the other end of the darkened passage, looks up to see the outline of a Spanish sailor and a gleaming stone of some sort, but before he can pursue this shadowy apparition it disappears round a corner.

As he passes one of the cabin doors his attention is caught by a melodious voice, Aida's, and he turns the doorknob to her cabin without knocking and enters. She has been trying on some odd multi colored oriental cloths, some of which drop to the floor leaving her barely covered as she stands there open mouthed.

Delano grabs her by the shoulders, kisses her roughly, then more gently, and suggests that he should take her on board the Batchelor's Delight, explaining that his business deal is just about concluded and further, that there are no strings attached to his proposition, it is for her to choose, the destination and the man.

She accepts and is just about to reveal the plot of the blacks, when Babo, having as ever, been informed of Delano's unscheduled walk about, bursts into the cabin. She, thinking quickly, savagely hits out at Delano, cutting his lip with her sharp nails.

Babo laughs and tells Delano that Don Benito urgently awaits the presence of the American in his cuddy.

Babo and Delano reach the cuddy, where Babo invites the American to make himself comfortable suggesting that the two captains' might discuss their business while 'Babo shaves Master'.

Napkin in hand, Babo pretends to await his master's pleasure, gets an absent minded nod from Cereno seated in the Malacca armchair, then throws back his master's collar

and loosens his cravat.

Delano follows the delicate movements that Babo employs, thinking that this little black man is somehow different to other servants that he has come across, watching in fascination the marvelous, noiseless, gliding movements, graceful and manipulative use of comb and brush which seemed like rhythmic castanets, and lulled by Babo's cheerfulness and harmony of glance and gesture. It all looked so benign and familiar and amusing as well. Babo moves over to a flag locker where he removes a brightly colored bunting, which he ceremoniously tucks under the chin of his master for an apron. Delano silently thinking, 'these Africans sure love bright colors and fine shows'.

Babo then, lathered up and applied his soaps to Cereno's face, covering the Spaniards cultivated beard and leaving bare only his upper lip and low down under the throat.

So mesmerized was Delano that he sat silent as did Cereno!

Babo set down his basin and searched amongst the razors for the sharpest, and having found it, gave it an additional edge by expertly strapping it on the firm, smooth, oily skin of his open palm.....then made a grand gesture as if to start, midway, stood suspended for an instant, one hand elevating the razor, the other professionally dabbing the bubbled suds on the Spaniard's lank neck.

Not unaffected by the close sight of the gleaming steel, Don Benito nervously shuddered, heightening our view of his ghostlike, sickly pallid appearance, especially in contrast to the sooty blackness of the Negro's body and at the same time Delano has one of those momentary fantasies (or is it so?) seeing Babo as the executioner and Don Benito as the luckless victim about to be decapitated. But Delano snaps out of it when he sees, or realizes that the brightly colored bunting laid out over Cereno's body and up to his chin, has a profusion of armorial bars and the ground colors of black and blue and yellow, a closed castle in a blood red field, diagonal with a lion rampant on white.

He remarks with an almost embarrassed amusement, "Why, Don Benito, this is the flag of Spain you use here. Its well it is only I and not the King of Spain that sees this!" And then, with a smile, he turns to Babo and adds, "It's all one I suppose, so the colors be gay!" This brings a wry grin to the black man's face.

Benito Cereno could only shudder and in so doing drew a seditiously servile criticism from Babo, who intones that it was very difficult for him to do such a precise and dangerous job on his master, who was acting like a restless client and pointing out a very careful measured tones that he had never yet drawn blood, but, that it was bound

to happen one of these days. Then suddenly, Babo changes the mood again and apologizes for preventing the two captains' from proceeding with their business conversation.

During the swings and roundabouts of their talk, Delano carelessly asks questions that border on the dangerous, sometimes in innocence, occasionally out of a root dissatisfaction with the original story told him by Cereno about the storm, calms and fever that had hit the ship, for pieces of the puzzle don't seem to fit! Each time he hits a raw nerve, the atmosphere becomes tenser, as Cereno falteringly and clumsily recounts his earlier tale and Babo grows increasingly menacing with his blade, though not so Delano would notice. Until, Delano in response to one particular detail of the ships' misdirection round the Cape finally proclaims in half-jest that the story really strains credulity!

At this, there is a sudden unsteadiness in the black servant's hand, which slips and draws blood from Cereno's lathered face, the spots of which stained the creamy lather under the throat. Immediately, Babo withdrew the blade and remaining in his professional attitude, back to Delano, and face to Don Benito, he held up the trickling razor, saying with a sort of half humorous sorrow, "See, Master! You shook so- here's Babo's first blood!"

The bizarre scene is broken up by Aida prancing into the cuddy, swinging her dress freely around her hips. Don Benito gets up from his prisoner's seat and offers them to adjoin to the other end of the huge cuddy where a table has been laid for lunch.

The table has been laid at the back of the crypt-like makeshift bedroom, lunch is served, and while it is, Cereno is attended to by Babo ever-present at his side and wiping his master's brow.

The atmosphere is like a wake as they are about to sit down, the window flutters open, Delano crosses to it and peers out.

With the passive assent of Cereno, Delano begs leave to take over the navigation of the DOMINICK, withdraws and climbs topsides, where he is suddenly confronted by the unexpected figure of Atufal, standing there in the middle of the hatchway, like a sculptured porter of black marble guarding the porches of Egyptian tombs.

Babo comes rushing up behind, defusing any potential problem and escorts Delano to the poop, where, snatching a trumpet from the bulwarks, the American steps to the forward edge of the poop, issuing his orders in pigeon Spanish, with Babo echoing some of them in gibberish and better Spanish. The few Spanish sailors and many of the



Negroes, respond with seeming pleasure, obediently set about heading the ship towards the BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT. As the big ship makes way in the current, we can see Delano's longboat also cutting through the waters back to the Sealer.

Delano shouts out an order to lower the stun sail, and while he's doing this he sees the same Spanish sailor as before, indicating something about the other side of the deck. He looks to port and sees Babo repeating the order, like a faithful captain of slaves, brimming with confidence and authority, and the American is clearly impressed with the black servant, seeing him in a different light. The tattered sails and warped yards are brought into trim, the men pull to their task with fervor and commitment and soon the Negroes break out into an African chant as they work.

Finally, the two ships are brought close enough together, with Delano's longboat still attached to the Dominick so that Delano's can transfer materials and tools aboard the stricken Spanish vessel. Aida, Cereno, Babo and Delano all stand on the deck of the Dominick, where the American captain proposes to drink a toast with Cereno to clinch their deal and invites the Spaniard on board the BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT, also declaring that Aida should transfer on to his ship to continue her voyage in 'greater comfort'.

Cereno seems to revive a bit, from another of his enigmatic stupors and nods acceptance as Babo whispers into his ear, reminding him to play it carefully, instructing the Spaniard to accept but to tell Delano he'll join him within the hour, and bring Aida along at the same time with her wardrobe and trunks.

Delano bids farewell and disembarks from the Dominick, dropping into his longboat, and instructing his men to row back over to the BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT which is some twenty meters away, and tethered by a length of cable to the Dominick.

While Delano is getting ready to return to his vessel, Babo's men are getting ready to cut the line of cable holding the two ships, and at the same time we can hear Cereno shouting to Delano; "I can go no further. Adieu my dear Amasa Delano! May God protect you, and better than me, my friend!"

Delano looks perplexed, but orders his men lift their oars.

On the Dominick, a Spanish sailor comes running up to the deck just below the poop where Cereno is standing with Babo and Aida. He catches Don Benito's attention, "Captain!", then darts to the starboard side rails, shouting wildly, "It's as you've feared Captain! He's not within the bowels of this death ship!" At this, he leaps over the side of

the ship hitting the water hard.

The cable is cut quickly by Atufal taking charge!

Cereno's face is frozen in shock and dread for a moment, then while all are diverted by the sailor's plunge, the cable being cut and Babo shouting orders down to his makeshift crew; He darts for the rails, and gets one leg over the balustrade rail when Babo grabs him from behind and the two men tussle. In the course of their struggle, neither man notices that the section of rail, rotten in places, cannot sustain their weight. The timbers give way sending both combatants plummeting into the sea below.

Cereno lands, incredibly at the feet of an astonished Delano. The Spaniard lifts himself to his feet and shouts back to his ship in his native language, "Run for it! It is every man for himself!"

The fall throws Babo into the water, a few paces from the longboat.

Delano misunderstanding the cries of the Spanish captain, thinks that he's ordering an attack, that the Dominick is intent on piracy and murder, so he grabs Don Benito by the throat, while shouting over to the BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT, "Up the ports, run out the guns, this lot means to pirate us!"

Babo steals onboard the longboat and goes for the throat of Cereno. Delano flings aside the limp body of the Spaniard, in time to turn away a thrust from Babo's blade, counters, smashing the smaller man down to the deck, Babo takes out the second knife and attacks Cereno.

Delano knocks out Babo. A flash of revelation sweeps over the American. The enigmatic events of the last two days are finally understood and confirmed by the remarks of the slowly reviving Spaniard, lifting himself up from the bottom of the boat, giving Delano an impromptu account of the true events and circumstances on board the DOMINICK.

The Dominick is quickly putting distance between herself and the BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT, and beginning to swing round, her fag end lashing out, as Don Benito protests to Delano to let him go, explaining that he was a captive of the slaves: When the canvas shroud covering the beak of the Dominick, is whipped away to reveal the grotesque and horrible sight of a HUMAN SKELETON suspended between the beak and the nets below, its bones bleached white, adorned in gold and silver buckles, the top of its cranium crowned by a black felt hat and flamboyant ostrich feathers. Death in the form of this skeleton is acting as the Figurehead.

The two men stare, incredulously, before Cereno lets out a long piercing cry, "Aranda!" Cereno, sick at the horrid sight of his dear Aranda's corpse throws up into the boat.

By the time Delano's longboat reaches the BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT, all is prepared for action, and the American quickly takes command from the deck. All hands jump to their tasks with a fervor born of the thrill of the chase and fantasies of golden rewards, rationalized by the solid moral ground of Maritime Law.

Delano orders a round of six-pounders fired at the DOMINICK, in the hope of bringing down some spars, but facing her stern, the volleys merely cause peripheral damage.

The Spanish captain, wouldn't move an inch, nor engage in dialogue until Babo, his "black nemesis" was put below and well out of sight.

Then, much to the shock of Delano and his men, Cereno adamantly refuses to retake his own ship, making a huge scene on the deck, kneeling at the feet of his American friend, begging the American to leave the slaves and the DOMINICK to their own fate, and not to give chase.

Delano, with a disgusted grin and a rush of blood to his head, thrusts aside the limp figure of Cereno, endorses his men's full agreement and loyalty by incanting the words, "gold" and "silver", then to keep Benito Cereno calm, makes a promise to use as little force as necessary and to spare the lives of the mutineers.

The Dominick is sailing fast through the waters of the harbour and out to sea, but so inefficiently, that Delano thinks he can catch her using his whaleboats.

Boats launched, they speed through the water, the BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT following. Gradually the whaleboats gain on the Dominick, and it becomes obvious to the black rebel crew that their dream of returning to Africa is nearing its deadly end. Their brains assaulted by the hopelessness of the situation, the slaves react like frustrated children throwing hatchets and pikes at the men in the pursuing whaleboats, miraculously wounding some of Delano's sailors.

Atufals' gesticulating and swinging his blade in the air, then throws a pike, which takes off the fingers off a sailor's hand. Delano's men fire off a round from their muskets, one ball piercing the chest of Atufal, whose savage yelling turns into a groan as he staggers backward, hands to his chest as if to put the fiery vital fluid back where it belongs.

When Delano and his whaleboats finally reach the big ship and board her, they meet

with terrific resistance from the desperate blacks, defending to the man, giving ground only under the fiercest pressure, defiantly protecting the stern of their ship where the women and children were all huddled together like bats in a cave.

The air was full with emanations; the smell of blood, cordite, fumes, salty ocean breeze, all this pumped up by the adrenaline in the men's' wild souls. Unleashed by this dangerous chemical formula, the doors of hell were flung wide open....each man surrendering to his simplest and most primitive instincts, unbridled by the hypocrisy of civilization, all indulging in this orgy of blood- letting.

As the battle continues, incident for bloody incident, murder for bloody murder, WE flashback to the night of the rebellion on the Dominick, inter-cutting and fusing the two slaughters' into one, that highlights at the same time the brutality and similitude, with scenes of rape, golden keys, manacles, blades stained with blood, screams and all merging together so that you cannot tell one event from the other until:

WE are brought back into reality by Aida, who is seen trying to protect the children, hiding them under barrels. Delano, fighting off a wild attempt at his life, sees this and trying to make his way towards her, when another of the Ashanti leaps on his back, the two men locked in combat tumble over onto the deck and wrestle, the Ashanti with his hatchet, Delano with a short knife, having lost his sword. Delano avoids a swipe from the blade, misses a lunge of his own, and then forces the Ashanti backward against a large wooden coffer, where with a final swipe he murders the man. In the same breath, the warriors' woman, who was hiding by the coffer, lets out a long wail, and, Delano, thinking it another attacker, turns at once without looking fatally stabbing the woman piercing the chest area above her breasts.

Aida, seeing this innocent slaughter stands frozen.

Delano looks from the dead woman to Aida, but gets no visual response at all.

## SUNSET

The sun is fast disappearing, sliding behind the chain attached to the BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT's Prow, which links the two ships together. The black slaves are in chains and manacles, anchored to masts and bulwarks on the open deck of the Dominick.

Down in the captain's cuddy, Don Benito Cereno is collapsed in his cot, arms and legs limp, feverish, with a cold sweat breaking out on the forehead of his ashen face. Amasa Delano, standing at his side and genuinely concerned about the Spaniard's ill health, tries to raise the sick man's spirit, telling him that he's in complete safety now, the slaves are back under lock and key, the two vessels are under way for Lima, that however terrible the ordeal, it is now over; then asking what has caused such a deep shadow to

descend over the Spanish Captain.

Benito softly whispers an answer, "The Negro". There is a quick, timid rap at the door. John-John enters and reports to his captain that no one dares to fit manacles on Babo's wrists.

"You see", declares Don Benito, falling back into fit of morbid coughing.

Delano, shrugs his shoulders, begs leave of Cereno to leave and attend to the matter, and walks out of the cuddy, the cabin boy following closely behind.

Emerging from the hatchway Delano sees Aida, unfettered, standing by the starboard bulwarks amidst the black women and children. The American gestures an invitation, searching for some sort of approving response, but drops his arms, defeated by the women's proud indifference.

He and John-John, move towards Babo, standing by the mainmast, his defiant eyes daring the sailors to approach him, his gaze so fierce and filled with fire, that the men avert their glances.

Delano pushes through his men coming face to face with Babo, pauses for a moment and quietly gestures to John-John to bring over the manacles and irons. The young black boy follows his captain's instruction, approaching Babo with hesitance, starts to hand the manacles to Delano, halts, and before he can complete the task, Babo grabs the irons and the young lad.

Delano and the others react, but in the next second, Babo relaxes his grip on the lad and slides the manacles over his hand, applies pressure on the latch, locking himself into the instrument of torture.

John-John steps nervously backward, muttering to Babo that he deserves his punishment. Has he not killed and tortured of his own hands? Babo, merely smiles, his eyes fixed hard on the boys eyes like a magnet, drawing the lad closer to him once again, then in slow, measured tone he declares, "No man can trample on another man's roots, his freedom, his dignity. Only the devil could invent such madness and we must wash the earth clean of such vile instincts." Babo pulls the lad down to his own chest, adding, "as long as one of us is in these chains, no one is free."

The small gold chain round John-John's neck rattles, his chest still pressed against Babo's. He turns in Captain Delano's direction, with the seeds of doubt in his eyes.

Delano crosses back over to the BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT, stands on the Poop, with the same absent minded look we've been accustomed to seeing on Don Benito's face; the American captain passively waiting. He waits for a sign of approval and acceptance from Aida, whose silhouette overhangs the Prow of the DOMINICK and its hand painted motto: "Sequid vuestro jefe".

#### EXT DAY TWO WEEKS LATER HARBOUR OF LIMA

The "Dominick" and the "Batchelor's Delight" moored together at the port of Lima.

#### EXT STREET FRONT OF LIMA VICE-REGALS COURTHOUSE

Two carriages pass in front of the stately courthouse building, some pedestrians stroll past from either direction as we move slowly up to the LEGEND IN SPANISH "DISTRICT COURT OR AUDIENCIA [Court of Justice]". Soldiers guard the front door. LEGEND OVER THE MAIN DOOR "Obedezco Pero No Cumpló," [I obey but I do not carry out.]

#### INT COURTROOM SAME BUILDING

The court is packed with onlookers, clerks, bailiffs, counsels, ladies and gentlemen, notary and three high judges. Heat rises in the enclosed space. Delano and Pettibone enter taking a place at the rear of the room. Aida sits alone a few rows from Delano. The prisoner, Babo is escorted by armed guards and placed in the defendants' box, as the Chief Judge, His Honor Juan Martinez de Rozas, gives a simple nod to the Notary to commence proceedings.

Eventually after hearing a wide range of wild, incoherent and disparate testimony from the key witnesses, Babo gives an impassioned speech in defense of his actions. Rozas sums up the case, not without some sympathy, finding the Defendants guilty, "It is not our duty or obligation to adjudge the institution of slavery, nor to draw moral conclusions in regard to the circumstances leading to the mutiny. However, it is our solemn duty to hear the charges and make a judgment based solely on the Code of Maritime Law. It does seem appropriate, before passing sentence, to point out the irony of this sordid affair, whose sad consequences have been laid before us. (Pause)By the powers vested in me through this Maritime Court, I must sentence the man now before me, known as Babo to execution by hanging, having been proven to be the leader of the rebellion and all subsequent acts of mutiny, piracy and murder."

#### EXTERIOR HILLSIDE OVERLOOKING THE MONASTERY OF AGONIA

Inside the monastery chapel monks are chanting the Domineo". The chapel itself is small, simple and somber. The monks are all in simple, hooded robes. Delano enters

from a courtyard and seeks out one of the order enquiring after Cereno. Eventually he is led to Cereno's cell where the two men have their final encounter and reach mutual understanding, Cereno viewing their meeting as a dying confession of his homosexual relationship with Aranda and his guilt over the sexual lust that led to the final bloodbath on board Dominick. Delano, for his part, comes to grips with his own passive prejudice towards members of the black race, leaving the frail Spanish Grandee to die in peace.

#### EXT DAY LIMA TOWN SQUARE SUNRISE

The sun rises like a ball of hot wax over the square. A cart and donkey pull into the square and arrive at its mid point where a scaffold has been erected. It stops just to one side of the scaffold.

The square is gradually peopled in anticipation of a carnival atmosphere public execution, vendors selling foods, dogs, carriages containing fine ladies and gentlemen, town rabble on foot, prostitutes and pick-pockets, clergy, soldiers on horse and foot, as well as the Executioner and his assistant who climb the scaffold testing the hangman's trap door.

#### SHOT OF A GATE OPENING SLOWLY

SHOT FROM THE INTERIOR REVERSE AS BABO SHACKLED IS LED INTO THE SQUARE ESCORTED BY TWO SOLDIERS GRIPPING HIM ON EITHER SIDE

Some in the crowd catch sight of Babo now being led towards the scaffolding. A cheer goes up from some, while others protest and some applaud. There is a general excitement, like that of a rowdy and unbridled audience attending opening curtain at a theatrical spectacular.

Babo, as was the permitted fashion of the period, makes a final, un-repentant speech. He does so with dignity and a serenity born of resignation to his fate.

#### EXT DAY LIMA TOWN SQUARE SOME TIME LATER

The crowd has long dispersed. A cart and donkey pull out of the square, as it passes we can see the remains of Babo's body, partially hanging over the matting at the rear of the cart.

From another entrance to the square Delano comes into view. He moves closer to the center, and stops, looks over towards the scaffold, where to one side, Babo's head stares out in defiance, propped on a spike.

DELANO  
No. Slave I cannot call  
you!

MUSIC: MOZART'S REQUIEM MASS, AGNUS DEI

EVENING EXT BATCHELOR'S DELIGHT DELANO ON THE POOP PEERING OUT  
TO SEA AS THE SHIP MAKES HEADWAY ANOTHER SHOT OF HIM TURNING HIS  
GLANCE FROM THE SEA DOWN TOWARDS THE STERN

A sailor, standing by the rails of the stern piece is dumping garbage into the waters  
below, the rubbish floats, bobbing and weaving on the waves, being drawn inevitably  
back toward the shoreline by the tide and staining the sea red.

END TITLES

MUSIC CONTINUES OVER END TITLES [MOVEMENT 1[REQUIEM