

From Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Works*: "Trust men, and they will be true to you; treat them greatly, and they will show themselves great."

Melville's comment: "God help the poor fellow who squares his life according to this."

Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno" (1855)

Main source: *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels, in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres*, by Amasa Delano (Boston, 1817).

Melville changes:

the date from February 1805 to August 1799.

the name of the Spanish slaveship from the *Tryal* to the *San Dominick* and of the American ship from the *Perseverance* to the *Bachelor's Delight*.

the stature of the Spanish ship, enlarging the number of crew members and of slaves.

the fate of Aranda, the Spanish ship owner, from being thrown overboard to being stripped of his flesh and displayed as a skeleton in the bowsprit.

the identity of the black man posing as Cereno's personal slave from Muri to his father, Babo.

the leadership of the negro revolt (the source originally names Babo as the "ring leader," then subsequently refers to Muri as the "captain and commander"; Melville focuses on Babo alone as the leader.

Cereno's personality: in the source he is as heartless and savage as the slaves, in Melville he is cast in the role of the victim.

the description of the Spanish ship as decayed.

the shrouded figurehead with the words "*Seguid vuestro jafe*" chalked below it.

the oakum-pickers and the hatchet-polishers.

the appearance of Atufal in chains.

the attack of the two blacks upon the Spanish seaman.

the incident of the sailor and the Gordian knot.

the shaving of Cereno by Babo.

the luncheon on board the Spanish ship presided over by the mulatto steward.

Babo's leap into Delano's boat, his attempt to stab Cereno, and his capture by Delano.

the revelation of the skeleton as the figurehead under the shroud.

the final retrospective conversation between Delano and Cereno.

Cereno's confinement in the Hospital de Sacerdotes attended by the monk Infelez, his subsequent retirement to a monastery on Mount Agonia, and his death three months later.

But he retains:

the names of Amasa Delano and Benito Cereno (which in his own account Delano spells "Bonito" repeatedly and "Seren" the only time it occurs; he consistently uses "Benito Cereno" in his "officially translated" documents.

the Blacks' revolt on the Spanish slaveship.

the use of the black manservant to prevent Cereno from revealing the revolt to Delano.

the Blacks' plot to attack the American ship.

the device of appending legal depositions to support the truth of the events recounted.

Ammon and the Gordian knot:

In Egypt the oracle of Jupiter Ammon predicted to Alexander the Great that he would conquer the world. Later in Phrygia (in north-central Asia Minor), where the former King Gordius had predicted that whoever would untie his intricate knot would become master of Asia, Alexander cut the knot with his sword.