A "Stranger" as a Mask: The Spanish Masquerade in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Clotel*, and "Benito Cereno"

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The 1850s is one of the highly significant and problematic periods for the study of the color line in American literature. In addition to several slave revolts and the gradually swelling anti-slavery movement, the Compromise of 1850 triggered the publication of various kinds of novels where authors showed, whether directly or indirectly, their reaction to the problem of slavery.[1] Central to these novels as well as to the actual social system of slavery is the issue of color line between black and white. Whether being black or white, or whether having black blood or not, is a crucial matter for characters, and the black-white dichotomy dominates the narrative world. However, how fixed is the color line in those works? To explore the problem, it may also be significant to consider the issue of nation, since not only the problem of nationhood itself is essential in the 1850s but also those novels, with their concern for the contemporary, domestic cause célèbre, largely have a nation-oriented vision. As Jane Tompkins suggests about *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "Stowe addresses her readers not simply as individuals but as citizens of the United States" (Tompkins 517). While the novels deal with the domestic problem in the United States, what is interesting to note is how foreignness functions there.

In this paper, I propose to examine how the motif of Spain is used in illustrating the racially complex issue in two novels and a novella written in the early 1850s: Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851), William Wells Brown's *Clotel* (1853), and Herman Melville's "Benito Cereno" (1855). Intriguingly, in these three works—the first two novels having a scene of slaves' escape and the other one dealing with a slave's attempt of rebellion—the motif of Spain, more precisely the performance of "a Spanish gentleman," appears when the stories come to the moment when the fixed system of slavery is nearly subverted. How does the Spanish masquerade work in the tense scenes in these works? What position does it have in the binary image of a color line deeply rooted in the issue of slavery in the novels? First, I will discuss the representation of Spanish masquerade in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and in *Clotel*. Julia Stern thoroughly

examines the Spanish disguise of George Harris in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, powerfully arguing that "George Harris's Spanish masquerade . . . must be read as an important alternative vision to the manichean allegory at work in his culture" (Stern 107). Stern's idea that Spanishness enables characters to transcend the color line can be applied to a certain extent to the scene of Clotel's masquerade in *Clotel*, though the comparison also reveals the difference between the two works in the treatment of the transcendent power of Spanish masquerade. Next, I will explore how the motif of Spain functions in another work written in the early 1850s, Herman Melville's "Benito Cereno," where the Spanish masquerade is used in a totally different way from the one in the works mentioned above. Taken together, I hope to show in this paper how the representation of Spanishness causes the binary image of the color line as well as of the national boundary to oscillate, and serves to complicate the issue of boundary.

1. Spanishness as the "outsider" in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Clotel*

In the works dealing with the problem of slavery, the escape plot of slaves is almost always linked with the theme of "disguise" and of crossing the boundaries of class, race, or gender. Interestingly, in two of the novels written in the early 1850s, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Clotel*, the fugitives disguise themselves as Spanish gentlemen, crossing the boundary of nationality. In the former, George Harris disguises himself as a Spanish when he escapes from his brutal master, and in the latter, Clotel, once becoming free in Canada, changes her disguise to that of "an Italian or Spanish gentleman" (*Clotel* 186) to go back to Virginia to save her daughter. What kind of role, then, does the performance of "a Spanish gentleman" play in the escape plot in these novels?

Apart from the plot of Uncle Tom, the escape plot of Eliza and George Harris is no less important in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Julia Stern, in her close analysis of Chapter 11, the scene at the tavern in Kentucky, thoroughly examines the disguise of George Harris as a Spanish gentleman, comparing the figure with the description of George shown in the advertisement written by Mr. Harris, George's owner. Pointing out that George's Spanish masquerade outwits Mr. Harris' expectation that George will disguise himself as a white man because he has a fairly white complexion, Stern aptly argues that Spanishness enables George Harris to "pass" since "[i]n this provincial milieu, which Stowe figures as being representative of rural antebellum America, the nonblack, nonwhite other

passes precisely because such otherness remains relatively unintelligible in the terms of a manichean hierarchical system" (Stern 110). Indeed, "a manichean hierarchical system" in the society is emphatically presented in this scene. In the tavern is "a miscellaneous company," and people there are categorized into two camps: "[g]reat, tall, raw-boned Kentuckians, attired in hunting-shirts, and trailing their loose joints over a vast extent of territory, with the easy lounge peculiar to the race," and "[d]ivers negroes" who are "scuttling about, hither and thither, without bringing to pass any very particular results, except expressing a generic willingness to turn over everything in creation generally for the benefit of Mas'r and his guests" (*Uncle* 89-90). Stowe's use of the words "race" and "generic" here is highly suggestive, since it reveals that she creates here a racially tense space, which effectively contributes to highlighting George Harris' position as an outsider in the "Kentucky tavern," an epitome of a Southern society.

While George Harris crosses three boundaries—race, class, and nationality—Clotel does four, the boundary of gender added to those three above, by becoming "an Italian or Spanish gentleman" (*Clotel* 186). Stern's argument that Spanish masquerade enables George to transcend a binary system can to a certain extent be applied to the case of Clotel. As the space of the Kentucky tavern functions as the representation of the "society" in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, so does the space of the stage-coach in *Clotel* serve a similar function, this time not "representing" Southern society but American society, and there the central dichotomy is not the one between blacks and whites but the one between the Northerner and the Southerner. Apart from the main plot, this part comically but suggestively presents discussions of three social and national issues: the presidential election, Temperance, and bull fights in New Orleans. The political issue of the presidential election, which is discussed by everyone "except Clotel and the young ladies" (*Clotel* 187), is followed by the story about Temperance, which discloses the gap between theory and practice regarding law. The Southerner tells about his experience in Vermont, where he sees people drink alcohol secretly under the mask of "teetotlars" (*Clotel* 187). Also, as Robert S. Levine mentions in his footnote to this part, "General Jackson" and "Santa Anna" in the bull fight respectively refer to Andrew Jackson, who "achieved a reputation as a pugnacious fighter for having battled the British, the Spanish, and the Indians," and Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, who "was regarded . . . as particularly brutal for having led the 1836 attack on the Alamo" (*Clotel* 192, footnote). The representation of the bull fight mentioned

by the New Englander is in fact a parodic metaphor of the fight between the United States and Mexico, where Brown makes an ironical remark on the brutal policy of expansionism on both sides. In addition, Brown's repeated use of the word "American"—"an American road," "genuine Americans," and "American gentlemen" (*Clotel* 186)—serves to emphasize the national dimension of the scene. Situated outside the black-white dichotomy and the Northern-Southern dichotomy, the performance of "a Spanish gentleman" enables Clotel to have a certain distance from the discussion closely connected with national issues.

Though comical, the ending episode of Chapter 22, "A Ride in a Stage-Coach," underlines Clotel's position as an "outsider of America." Clotel is invited by the old gentleman with two daughters to his house because "American ladies are rather partial to foreigners" (*Clotel* 194). Here Brown's use of the word "American" is again suggestive since the word builds up a boundary between "American" and "not-American." Favored by "American" ladies, Clotel's masquerade of her identity is strengthened, which not only illustrates the success of her disguise but also seems to reflect her ambiguous position as a slave in the United States, as a being who lives in the United States but hardly has the position of American citizen.

Though the issue of slavery is not openly discussed in the scene of the stage-coach, the full awareness of the problem can be found there. The Connecticut man says to a Southerner, "You people of the Slave States have no regard for the Sabbath, religion, morality or anything else intended to make mankind better" (*Clotel* 191). Just after this passage, the narrator suddenly shows Clotel's reaction to these words: "Here Clotel could have borne ample testimony, had she dared to have taken sides with the Connecticut man. Her residence in Vicksburgh had given her an opportunity of knowing something of the character of the inhabitants of the far South" (*Clotel* 192). The narrator's sudden reference to Clotel's experience alerts the reader of the tension created by her hiding her identity as well as of the strategic effect of her masquerade which enables her not to be involved in the issue of slavery.

Next, in addition to the fact that Spanish performance in both works enables two mulattos to transcend the fixed dichotomy in the scenes and to be outsiders of "America," what is worth noting is that both George Harris and Clotel make themselves look like a Spanish gentleman by "blackening" themselves. Both being black slaves with a considerably white face and with his/her fathers' blood of a "white gentleman," George and Clotel, instead of

passing for a white, choose to blacken themselves in their masquerade. George Harris, alias Henry Butler, "was very tall, with a dark, Spanish complexion, fine, expressive black eyes, and close-curling hair, also of a glossy blackness" (*Uncle* 92). His darkening himself is repeatedly underlined. George explains to Mr. Wilson how to disguise himself, saying, "A little walnut bark has made my yellow skin a genteel brown, and I've dyed my hair black; so you see I don't answer to the advertisement at all" (*Uncle* 94); in fact, a "slight change in the tint of the skin and the color of his hair had metamorphosed him into the Spanish-looking fellow he then appeared" (*Uncle* 94). The image of blackening is also found in Clotel's disguise: "In addition to the fine suit of black cloth, a splendid pair of dark false whiskers covered the sides of her face . . ." (*Clotel* 186). Accordingly, in both works, Spainishness is regarded as what can be acquired through blackening.

What, then, does blackness in the white mulatto's masquerade signify? According to Stern, George Harris' masquerade is "*counterwriting*" (Stern 116, italics original) to the branded letter "H," which is written on his body by his master, and she argues that George acts in the reverse way of what his ex-proprietor has written in the slave advertisement: "By *darkening* his skin rather than highlighting his own naturally *fair* complexion, George Harris rejects the obvious route of assimilation into white culture that his master had predicted in the advertisement warning that his slave would try 'to pass for a white man'" (Stern 109-10, italics original). Stern's contrasting of the two figures of George Harris, "the fantastic 'boy' passing for a white 'man' of Mr. Harris's fantasy, and 'Mr. Butler,' in Spanish masquerade" (Stern 114), is fairly convincing; at the same time, however, George Harris' preference of darkening himself and also of changing nationality seems to imply more. In his letter in Chapter 43, almost at the end of the novel, George Harris promotes the idea that blacks should emigrate to Liberia, outside of "America." Claiming rights of "the oppressed, enslaved African race," he declares that "I have no wish to pass for an American, or to identify myself with them" and that "The desire and yearning of my soul is for an African *nationality*" (*Uncle* 374, italics original). What is crucial in this part is that he sticks to blackness as something that would strengthen his African identity: ". . . if I wished anything, I would wish myself two shades darker, rather than one lighter" (*Uncle* 374). In this respect, his masquerade as a Spanish gentleman by darkening his countenance can be regarded as a sign of his desire for, or his manifestation of, an African identity.

While the blackness in George Harris's Spanish masquerade can be seen as

a positive manifestation of African identity, blackness in Clotel's masquerade is more complicated, having an ambiguous and rather negative sense. To consider the function of darkness in her masquerade, it may be meaningful to recall her first masquerade on her way to Pittsburgh. Performing as "a gentleman with his black servant," Clotel's first disguise with her fellow fugitive William is to a large extent an echo of that of George Harris, though it is more complicated in Clotel's case because her performance is also related to the issue of gender. Despite William's words, "You are much fairer than many of the white women of the South, and can easily pass for a free white lady" (*Clotel* 167), she chooses not to become a lady but to become a gentleman, "Mr. Johnson." What is more problematic, then, is that in the article of the Southern newspaper issued after the escape of Clotel and William is disclosed, Clotel's face is described as dark and "Spanish": "From the better opportunity afforded by daylight, I [a correspondent] found that he was a slight built, apparently handsome young man, with black hair and eyes, and of a darkness of complexion that betokened Spanish extraction" (*Clotel* 170). Even without "Spanish" masquerade, Clotel's disguise makes her look Spanish in the eyes of the correspondent, who feels suspicious about Clotel's identity from the beginning because "[t]here was something so mysterious and unusual," and who claims his witnessing "the slaves in their disguise" (*Clotel* 170). It is interesting that the correspondent's perception of "a darkness of complexion" clashes with what William mentions regarding her "fair" complexion. What is worth noting, moreover, is that darkness inherent in Spanishness is regarded as the marker of a black slave; namely, disguised Clotel's resemblance to a Spaniard links her to her position as a slave. In this respect, it is significant that it is when she goes back to the South, not to England as William suggests (*Clotel* 167) nor even to Canada, that she puts on the disguise which is "more the appearance of an Italian or Spanish gentleman" (*Clotel* 186). It is ironic that Clotel goes back to the South disguised as an "outsider," since—unlike George Harris, who successfully goes out of the South and of "America" disguised as an outsider—she finally fails to be an outsider.

George Harris succeeds in escaping; Clotel does not. The scene in which Clotel is arrested is largely similar to that in which George "passes." They both stay at an inn near the place to which they formerly belonged, where their escapes are made public by the advertisements. The results, however, are totally different, since the disguise of the "stranger" functions in the opposite way in the two works. In *Clotel*, the narrator provides a social context where the

fear of black rebellion makes people "watchful of strangers" (*Clotel* 202).[2] Indeed, the fact that the word "strangers" appears three times in a rather short chapter seems to emphasize that it is Clotel's disguise as a "stranger" that attracts the eyes of city officers and makes her suspected, ultimately leading to her arrest. On the other hand, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the disguise of the "stranger" enables George Harris to escape the eyes of Southern slaveholders. The "new comer" attracts attention of those who are present in the tavern, but his appearance is perceived only as "something uncommon" (*Uncle* 92). Furthermore, though George's disguise is not complete enough to deceive everyone, the only person who recognizes his true identity "from the time of the entrance of the stranger" (*Uncle* 93) is Mr. Wilson, George's former employer sympathetic to him. Accordingly, the idea that masquerade as a Spanish gentleman enables slave characters to escape the dichotomy in the system of slavery is not seen to be as positive in *Clotel* as in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which may reflect the difference in the two authors' attitudes toward the issue of slavery. While Stowe, displaying the death of Uncle Tom, still shows a "happy" reunion of George Harris and Eliza at the end, Brown ends his novel with the suicide of Clotel, who is never able to be free.

2. Spanishness as the "insider" in "Benito Cereno"

As I discussed in the first part, the performance of "a Spanish gentleman" has a highly essential role in the escape plot of the slaves in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and in *Clotel*. In those works, Spanishness is linked with darkness, or blackness, in that it is performed by light-skinned black characters and that it is obtained by "blackening" oneself; on the other hand, Spanishness is instead linked with whiteness in another contemporary text, Melville's "Benito Cereno," which can also be read as the story of the escape "plot" of a slave and at the center of which again the motif of masquerade appears. In this work, Melville in a sense rewrites the story of the original source, a book titled *Narrative of Voyage and Travels, in the Northern and Southern Hemisphere* by Captain Amasa Delano about the revolt on the Spanish slave ship the *Tryal*, whose Captain was a man named Benito Cereno, by altering several details including the date, the name of the ship, and the declaration.[3] While this aspect makes it possible for the reader to read this work in relation to the actual historical event, it may also be meaningful to consider the work as a textual construction. Turning into fiction the writing of a captain about his experience with a

Spanish ship, how does Melville represent Spanishness in "Benito Cereno"? How similarly or differently does Spanishness work, compared with that represented in the two books I discussed previously?

First, just as in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and in *Clotel*, Spanishness is again introduced with the image of the "stranger" and functions as something that makes the issue of the color line ambiguous. In the first few paragraphs, the words "strange" and "stranger" are repeatedly used (in the fifth paragraph, the words "the stranger" appear three times), which serves to illustrate the mysterious atmosphere about the Spanish ship. Intrigued by "the stranger," Captain Delano continues to watch the ship until, to his eyes, "the longer the stranger was watched the more singular appeared her manoeuvres" ("Benito" 162). What makes this novel different from the other two is that in "Benito Cereno" the reader is situated not at the side of the Spanish "stranger" but at the side of an American gentleman who curiously watches "the stranger." Through his eyes, the figure of "the stranger" is connected with the issue of the color line, or more exactly, the oscillation of the color line: "To Captain Delano's surprise, the stranger, viewed through the glass, showed no colors . . ." ("Benito" 161). In this frequently cited passage, the word "colors" literally refers to the flag of the ship; however, it is fairly plausible that Melville uses the word with an implication of the issue of the color line.

In this respect, the emphatic use of the color image of "gray" in the opening of the work is fairly suggestive. In the paragraph between the one in which Captain Delano gets a report of "a strange sail" coming to the bay and the one beginning with the sentence cited above about the lack of colors of the ship, the view from the ship of Captain Delano is illustrated with the full image of grayness. In the morning, "everything [was] gray" and the "sky seemed a gray surtout" ("Benito" 161). The narrator then mentions "[f]lights of troubled gray fowl" and "flights of troubled gray vapors" ("Benito" 161). In addition to grayness implying the ambiguity in the identity of the ship, it can also be seen as the symbolic representation of the primal state before differentiation. Captain Delano's earnest watch of the strange ship shows the process where one gradually recognizes the differentiation in color. From vagueness, the ship "appear[s] like a whitewashed monastery after a thunderstorm" and what Delano recognizes on board from the distance and in the fog are "what really seemed . . . throngs of dark cowls," "dark moving figures [who] were dimly descried, as of Black Friars pacing the cloisters" ("Benito" 163). In addition to the peculiar image of Catholicism, which critics have discussed in relation to

the issue of slavery[4], what is notable about these images is their dimness. In the description through the eyes of Delano, the words such as "appears like," "really seemed," and "were dimly descried" emphasize that the image of the ship is constructed by his vague perception, which is to be "modified" ("Benito" 163) into the picture showing "the true character of the vessel" as "a Spanish merchantman of the first class, carrying negro slaves, amongst other valuable freight, from one colonial port to another" ("Benito" 163). When the "strange" ship with "no colors" is identified by Captain Delano, it appears with the full contrast of colors, and the color line is gradually constructed in front of the eyes of Delano—and the reader—until it takes the form of a dichotomy between whites and "negros" in the social system of slavery.

The strong contrast of color is continuously underlined when Delano goes on board the *San Dominick*, and is "at once surrounded by a clamorous throng of whites and blacks, but the latter outnumbering the former more than could have been expected, negro transportation-ship as the stranger in port was" ("Benito" 165). In this space based on the white-black dichotomy appears Benito Cereno with Babo, as a Spanish gentleman with his black servant:

> [T]he Spanish captain, a gentlemanly, reserved-looking, and rather young man to a stranger's eye, dressed with singular richness, but bearing plain traces of recent sleepless cares and disquietudes, stood passively by, leaning against the main-mast, at one moment casting a dreary, spiritless look upon his excited people, at the next an unhappy glance toward his visitor. By his side stood a black of small stature, in whose rude face, as occasionally, like a shepherd's dog, he mutely turned it up into the Spaniard's, sorrow and affection were equally blended. ("Benito" 167)

The version of "a Spanish gentleman with his slave" in "Benito Cereno" is quite different from that of George Harris. "The Spanish gentleman" performed by Benito Cereno is melancholic and passive while the one performed by George Harris is more self-confident and active. In this sense, Benito Cereno's version is more similar to Clotel's first performance, which makes her look like a Spaniard with his slave, in that both "Spanish gentlemen" seem frail and invalid.[5]

As I mentioned at the opening of this section, however, one of the points that make "Benito Cereno" strikingly different from the other two works

regarding its treatment of Spanishness is that Spanishness is emphatically linked with whiteness. As is seen in the sentence cited above, the words "Spanish sailors" are frequently substituted by the word "whites," almost always juxtaposed with the word "blacks," and the whiteness of Spanish men is closely connected with the power structure on the "negro transportation-ship" ("Benito" 165). In addition to several incidents which happen between blacks and whites and which Delano finds subversive, Benito Cereno's whiteness is repeatedly contrasted with the blackness of Babo, who always stands by his "Master" as "a faithful slave" ("Benito" 194-5). The position of the Spanish gentleman as a "white" and a "master" is underlined in Babo's words when he declares to Delano that "a black man's slave was Babo, who now is the white's" ("Benito" 183). The oscillation of power relationship, then, is juxtaposed with the strong color contrast in the famous scene of shaving: "Altogether the scene was somewhat peculiar, at least to Captain Delano, nor, as he saw the two thus postured, could he resist the vagary, that in the black he saw a headsman, and in the white a man at the block" ("Benito" 214). The power relationship linked with the color line in this passage can be ironically contrasted with the reversed image of power relationship shown at the end of the novel, where Babo, after his plot is disclosed, is executed and, with his head cut, meets "the gaze of the whites" ("Benito" 258).

Different from Spanishness in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and in *Clotel*, Spanishness in "Benito Cereno," repeatedly linked with whiteness, is thus situated "within" the very dichotomy between black and white as well as within the power structure based on the color line. Then, how about the boundary regarding nation? The line of nationality is considerably underlined from the beginning as is seen in the paragraph just after the scene where Benito Cereno first appears in front of Dalano: "Struggling through the throng, the American advanced to the Spaniard, assuring him of his sympathies, and offering to render whatever assistance might be in his power. To which the Spaniard returned for the present but grave and ceremonious acknowledgments, his national formality dusked by the saturnine mood of ill-health" ("Benito" 167-68). In this sentence, Benito Cereno and Delano are respectively called "the Spaniard" and "the American," and, as the words are repetitively used in the whole narrative, the line of nationality is ostensibly fixed. But how fixed is the line between "Spanish" and "American"?

While situating Delano—and readers—at the position of the "outsider" on the Spanish ship, the narrative implies a link between the issue on the *San*

Dominick—the dichotomy between blacks and whites, between a master and slaves—and the situation of "America." Critics have discussed "Benito Cereno" as Melville's ambiguous reaction to the situation of slavery in the United States, frequently connecting Benito Cereno with the image of the Southern gentleman[6]; for example, Levine, reading the novel in the sociopolitical context of the 1850s, powerfully argues that the novel reflects "contemporaneous fears of subversive insurrectionism" both in the North and the South (Levine 168), and that Melville shares the fear and stands at the side of the "sea-captain," the class of slave-owners (Levine 198). In this sense, Spanishness can be seen as a mask covering "America" and, just as the declaration is "translated from one of the official Spanish documents" into English ("Benito" 238), "Spain" can be translated as "America."

Moreover, while the representation of a Spanish slave trade ship suggests the contemporary social issue of slavery, what is characteristic is that Melville juxtaposes the beginning of the New World slavery with the beginning of "American history." As I mentioned before, when Melville wrote "Benito Cereno" using materials from *Narrative of Voyage and Travels, in the Northern and Southern Hemisphere* by Captain Delano, he made significant changes, one of which was the name of the ship from the *Tryal* to the *San Dominick*, the place where slave trade was first authorized by Holy Roman Emperor in the New World (Sundquist 136). On the stern of the ship is put the figure of "Christopher Colon, the discoverer of the New World" ("Benito" 245), the Spaniard of whom Americans "are all the direct descendants" and with whom "our [their] genealogy begins" (Todorov 5). The head of Christopher Colon, then, is substituted by the skeleton of Aranda, the captain of the *San Dominick*, killed in Babo's plot. Benito Cereno's declaration illustrates how Babo repeatedly shows the skeleton of Aranda to him and his fellow Spaniards and asks "whose skeleton that [i]s" and "whether, from its whiteness, he should not think it a white's" ("Benito" 245). Symbolically, the head of Aranda is in Babo's words generalized into the image of "whiteness" and "a white," and, to Babo's questions, "each Spaniard covered his face" ("Benito" 245). The substitution of Aranda's skeleton for the head of Christopher Colon, thus, suggests the substitution of "a white" as a slave master for "a white" as a romantic and mythic image of discoverer. Suggestively, the head of Aranda functions as the key to the enigma covering the whole event; the moment Delano recognizes everything, the cover comes off and what is revealed under the cover is "death for the figurehead, in a human skeleton" ("Benito" 234), the figure of "a white"

who is executed for his commitment to slavery, for his robbing blacks of "their liberty" ("Benito" 243); in other words, the whole event, which culminates in the disclosure of the head of Aranda, is an ironic reproduction of the "dis-covery" of the New World.

Being haunted by the past himself, Benito Cereno in his masquerade of a Spanish gentleman brings "American history" burdened with slavery and with the white-black color line to Delano and to the American ship. Continuously innocent Delano says at the end "the past is passed" and "yon bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky; these have turned over new leaves," to which Benito Cereno replies, "Because they have no memory. . . . because they are not human" ("Benito" 257). Asked "what has cast such a shadow upon you [him]," then, Benito Cereno answers, "The negro" ("Benito" 257). The image of the "shadow" here symbolically resonates with the "shadow" Captain Delano perceives in the very beginning: "Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come" ("Benito" 161).

What is worth noting, furthermore, is that in "Benito Cereno" Spanishness is not connected with Spain in Europe as in *Clotel* but with "Spanish America." The declaration reveals that the Spanish ship sails from "the port of Valparaiso" in Chile for "that of Callao" in Peru (also, in Benito Cereno's explanation, the ship is said to come from Buenos Aires for Lima). The "Spaniard's apparel" which attracts the eyes of Captain Delano is "a South American gentleman's dress to this hour" ("Benito" 177, 176), and Benito Cereno "avow[s] himself a native and resident of Chili" ("Benito" 177). There is a possibility that Benito Cereno's reference to his South American identity is a part of the performance; however, it can be true because his friend Aranda is from Mendoza, which is written in the declaration. Stanley T. Williams, thoroughly exploring the Spanish influence on American literature, points out that "[m]ore and more in the 1840's . . . Spanish influences on American culture were gaining both in maturity and variety" and one of the most central sources of information about Spanish culture that he mentions is various copies of travel journals about the "Spanish-American world," among which he says the popularity of Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years before the Mast* is outstanding (Williams 1: 89).[7] Considering this contemporary situation, it may be natural that Melville gives his Spanish character the nationality of Chile, in South America; at the same time, however, considering his intentional alternation of the source material as well as his concern about American history, it is quite meaningful that Benito Cereno's nationality and his slave transportation ship are linked with South

America. While Melville's use of the word "South American" may connect Benito Cereno with the image of the Southern American, the nationality of Chile—"Spanish America"—at the same time functions as something ambiguous between the images of "Spanish" and "American," and makes it possible to see Benito Cereno as a "Spaniard within America."

María DeGuzmán, in her argument that "the construction of Anglo-American identity as 'American' has been dependent on figures of Spain" (DeGuzmán xii), reads Benito Cereno's Spanishness as something nonwhite, or in her term something "off-white" (DeGuzmán xxviii): "In contrast to the Yankee Delano, Cereno, the Spaniard, is not only 'blackened' temperamentally ('saturnine,' 'hypochondriac,' 'moody,' 'despotic'), but, moreover, physically marked as non-Anglo or nonwhite in accordance with the transmutation of the Black Legend into nineteenth-century racial discourse" (DeGuzmán 61). In fact, Spanishness, though repeatedly connected with the image of whiteness in the narrative, provides a possibility of turning to the side of blackness. Delano, "the white stranger" ("Benito" 190), continues to perceive something ominous in "the strange ship" and something unexplainable in "the Spaniard's manner" ("Benito" 192), and, after meditating on "the strange questions" by Benito Cereno about his own ship, laughs at his own apprehension:

> At last he began to laugh at his former forebodings; and laugh at the strange ship for, in its aspect, someway siding with them, as it were; and laugh, too, at the odd-looking blacks, particularly those old scissors-grinders, the Ashantees; and those bed-ridden old knitting women, the oakum-pickers; and almost at the dark Spaniard himself, the central hobgoblin of all. ("Benito" 193)

In the evil image that Delano's anxiety creates, blackness is swelled by cataloguing black characters on board, and culminates in the image of the captain himself, a darkened—or blackened—Spaniard. Later, Delano again becomes suspicious of Benito's sudden withdrawing, and imagines his potential linkage with blacks: "But if the whites had dark secrets concerning Don Benito, could then Don Benito be any way in complicity with the blacks? But they were too stupid. Besides, who ever heard of a white so far a renegade as to apostatize from his very species almost, by leaguing in against it with negroes?" ("Benito" 201). Here, though Delano concludes that the linkage is not probable, and though the Spanish itself is regarded as a white "species," it is revealed that in

his meditation the Spaniard is possibly linked with blackness.

The ambiguity in the color line is strengthened when Spanishness finally crosses the boundary and comes into the ship of America—"the ship-of-state" (Levine 192). The black-white dichotomy on the Spanish ship is replaced by that between the American ship and the Spanish ship in the scene of the shooting battle between the black and the white. There is a problematic turn regarding the issue of the color line here. On the one hand, through the intimate link of "white men" between Delano and Benito against black Babo, Spanishness is considered as "white." On the other hand, the black-white dichotomy on the Spanish ship becomes confusing as both whites and blacks are mixed up in the confusion, and, finally, the Spanish ship, filled with rebellious black slaves, is linked with the image of blackness, being called "the fugitive ship" ("Benito" 234).

Not only the image of Spain but also the motif of masquerade itself appears differently in "Benito Cereno" from the two novels I discussed before. First, in "Benito Cereno" the role of "the Spanish gentleman" is performed by a Spanish gentleman, who might be entitled to act for his friend, the ship's true owner, when the latter accidentally dies; namely, there is no crossing boundary here if there is no subversion of power in advance. Making Benito Cereno Babo's "fugitive slave" (Levine 210) and reproducing the power structure between whites and blacks in a twisted way, Melville effectively shows that social roles are, both for slaves and for slave owners, performances.

Next, the agent of the whole plot of disguise in "Benito Cereno" is not Benito Cereno himself, as Delano suspects, but Babo, Benito's seemingly loyal servant. The black slave in his escape plot here does not disguise himself as a Spanish gentleman but makes his ex-master do so. In terms of agency, Babo seems to stand at the position between George Harris and Clotel. As George Harris outwits his white master's expectation, Babo intelligently outwits the idea of a white American, Captain Delano, who, suspecting a plot proceeding on board, never imagines a slight possibility of the existence of black agency there. On the other hand, Babo is not given a voice to tell about his own plot as George Harris does to Mr. Wilson. As Clotel's disguise is disclosed, Babo's disguise and his plot are finally disclosed, and, after being caught, Babo "uttered no sound," and "met his voiceless end" ("Benito" 258).

How to read Babo, or whether reading Babo as evil or not, has been one of the biggest issues when critics argue about "Benito Cereno."[8] Carolyn L. Karcher aptly argues that Babo subverts the stereotype of the black: "Melville's

portrayal of Babo as an almost disembodied brain—'his slight frame, inadequate to that which it held'—reverses the conventional racist stereotype of the Negro as all brawn and no brain. More subversively, perhaps, it also reverses the conventional appraisal of the black and white races' respective forces; for Babo yields only to the 'superior *muscular* strength of his captor'" (Karcher 130, italics original). Karcher considers three types of interpretation of the story of the slave revolt, one by Delano, another by Cereno and the other by Melville, suggesting that Delano's "misconceptions" presents "the fawning servility" in Babo and Benito Cereno's "distortions" shows "Babo's cruelty" (Karcher 141). Karcher then convincingly discusses that though Melville's attitude toward Babo and his act remains ambiguous, he presents his "most powerful personification of the Negro" in his portrait of Babo "surrendering with dignity to superior force of arms" and "going to his death with the stoic resolution" (Karcher 142).

Indeed, though Melville does not show an affirmative attitude toward the slave rebellion in the work, he presents black agency as intelligent and powerful rather than just violent, and seems even to participate in Babo's plot of disguise, not on the story's level but on the texual level. Interestingly, Benito Cereno's masquerade is suspected from the fairly early stage of the novella by Captain Delano[9]; however, he continues to misread the former's performance.[10] Through Delano's limited eyes, readers may also be deceived by the performance, and, when they read "Benito Cereno" for the second time, they may be surprised to know how deftly Babo's plot is conducted. Melville provides readers with the narrative which he allows them to read differently the second time from the first time and to unknot the enigmatic details which reveal Babo's agency. It is after they read through the whole work that readers can unmask several symbolic metaphors embedded in the narrative such as the phrase "a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked" ("Benito" 164), which may seem only ominous on first-time reading. Melville, quite aptly displaying "speechless[ness]"—or lack of the right to speak—of Babo in his final picture, paradoxically makes readers recognize the presence of Babo at the center of the palimpsest text. In this sense, though Babo's plot fails on the story level, it can be said to succeed on the textual level, and Melville, deftly making an enigmatic text, takes a share in creating the dual image in Babo's plot. While ironically showing Benito Cereno's declaration, which describes the plot of "the negro Babo" ("Benito" 242), as the "true history of the *San Dominick*'s voyage" ("Benito" 238, italics original),

Melville, by "not" writing about Babo's plot, makes it present in the text.

Furthermore, the figure of "a dark satyr" on the Spanish ship in the passage above is highly problematic, since it offers possibilities of various interpretations, and thus functions as a cause of oscillation of the color line. First, it can be interpreted in two ways: if reading this as a straight metaphor of the enigma on the *San Dominick*, "a dark satyr" can be interpreted as Babo, who, in a masquerade, oppresses and dominates Benito Cereno; then, if reading the former order of the ship as "the contemporary plantation myth" (Karcher 136) and reading Benito Cereno and Spanish mates not as "innocent victims" (Karcher 135), "a dark satyr" can be interpreted as Benito Cereno, or the Spanish master, who dominates slaves under the social roles, that is, performance. The text, however, offers another possibility of its interpretation. The figure of "a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure" on the Spanish ship may remind readers of the figure of Captain Amasa Delano, whose "right foot . . . ground the prostrate negro" ("Benito" 232). The similarity in these two images implies the idea that Delano, and American readers, can be participants of the system of oppression as "a dark satyr." The Spanish ship thus functions as an oscillating space to such an extent that the whiteness of American whites is made ambiguous.

In conclusion, while the motif of Spanish masquerade is used in the moment of tension relevant to the issues of slavery and of nation in three works written in the early 1850s, the ways of using the image are strikingly different. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Clotel*, black slaves George Harris and Clotel masquerade as a Spanish gentleman in their escape plots; in "Benito Cereno," Benito Cereno, a white ex-master, gives a "performance" of a Spanish gentleman in his ex-slave's escape plot. Worn both by the white and by the black, the mask of "a Spanish gentleman" has an ambiguous position in the black-white dichotomy. In the former two, Spanishness is linked with the image of "darkening" though it is not integrated into the category of "blackness," and, in the latter, Spanishness is linked with whiteness though the possibility is implied at the same time that it is transformed into the image of blackness. The oscillation of the color line, moreover, resonates with that of the national boundary. In the works I dealt with in the first part, the performance of "a Spanish gentleman" offers fugitives a position of the "outsider" to America, which enables them to transcend the Manichean dichotomy within the domestic societies shown in the scenes. In "Benito Cereno," however,

Spanishness serves to illustrate the "inside" of America, the issue of slavery, and not only is the motif of Spain symbolically linked with America—"the New World"—through the image of Christopher Colon, but the nationality of the Spanish gentleman himself connects Spain with "South America." Representing both blackness and whiteness, and both the "outsider" and the "insider" of America, Spanishness thus functions as a highly significant and problematic motif in the American literature written in the 1850s, uniquely and effectively working as a protean mask of a "stranger."

Notes

[1] Especially the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was very influential, to be followed both by pro-slavery and anti-slavery novels. According to Joseph Schiffman, fourteen pro-slavery novels were published after *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Schiffman 33).

[2] William Edward Farrison and Levine point out the anachronism here between Nat Turner's insurrection in 1831 and the Richmond scene in 1839 (Farrison 226, *Clotel* 202 footnote).

[3] Melville's alteration of the year from 1805 to 1799 and of the name of the ship from the *Tryal* to the *San Dominick* has been regarded as the embodiment of Melville's intention to connect his work with the threat "by insurrectionary slaves such as those of San Domingo, whose bloody revolt, among other things, led to the expulsion of the Spanish presence from the islands before 1800" (Levine 203). Also see Sundquist 140-45. Sidney Kaplan, pointing out that Melville gets rid of the atrocity of Spanishmen's revenge, argues that Melville's intention is "to highlight the inherent one-sidedness of the original court records" (Kaplan 134-5). Moreover, the relationship between "Benito Cereno" and historical events is found in the cases of the *Amistad* and the *Creole* (Kaplan 39).

[4] Eric J. Sundquist points out the role of the Catholic church in the genesis of slavery, and compares Benito Cereno to Charles V, who first admitted the New World slave trade (Sundquist 136-37). Levine suggests that "the church itself came to be imaged as a Slave Power, which, unmasked, was the church of the Inquisition," and connects Catholic Spain with "the Southern Slave Power" in the United States (Levine 202). Also, Stanley T. William suggests that "the Spanish influence . . . through a special concept of the Spaniard formed in his mind both by his reading and by his association with Spanish-American countries" is reflected in the image of the Catholic church in "Benito Cereno" (Williams 1: 225).

[5] That a female slave character disguises herself as a sick gentleman who is taken care of by "his" slave is a frequent image in the contemporary slave narrative, and the masquerade of Benito Cereno can be regarded as subversive also in this sense.

[6] Levine, suggesting that the South is often linked with Spain in the image of slavery and Catholicism, reads Benito Cereno as the "sickly leader of a declining slave power, the Northern stereotype of the Southern cavalier" (Levine 202). Also, according to Karcher, "Don Benito corresponds in almost every respect to the literary stereotype of the southern gentleman dubbed by William R. Taylor 'the Southern Hamlet'" (Karcher 136).

[7] Levine discusses Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* in his analysis of Melville's sea novels, and, pointing out that Dana describes the ship as the "corporate-republican institution" (Levine 178), argues that "[l]ike nervous 'sea captains' throughout America, these captains—even those, like Dana and Sumner, who became abolitionists—feared the prospect of 'mutiny and revolt' and placed their faith in 'perfect sea order'" (Levine 181-82).

[8] Though there are a few critics such as Kaplan who read Babo as evil, most critics have focused on Babo's intelligence. See Schiffman 33-4 and Levine 217-18.

[9] Also, it is interesting that, to Delano's eyes, the picture of master and man is "heightened by the contrast in dress," namely the costume, and, though he finds "something so incongruous in the Spaniard's apparel" ("Benito" 176, 177).

[10] For example, in the middle of the story Delano wrongly interprets Benito's strange behavior and lack of conduct as the outcome of the "masquerade" of a gentleman, of crossing the class boundary: "Under the circumstances, would a gentleman, nay, any honest boor, act the part now acted by his host? The man was an imposter. Some low-born adventurer, masquerading as an oceanic grandee; yet so ignorant of the first requisites of mere gentlemanhood as to be betrayed into the present remarkable indecorum" ("Benito" 186).

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