

SPINOZA'S WEB

by

Mark A. Thompson

Registered WGAw No.928974

Bar-Tam Productions
P.O. Box 726
Seal Beach, CA. 90740
Tel: 562/400-2968
E-mail: cantormark@adelphia.net

FADE IN:

INT. BETH JACOB SYNAGOGUE -- DAY

O.S. -- A BUZZ of nervous CHATTER. Candles suspended in 8-branched candelabra dimly light a beautifully carved and decorated, two-story sanctuary. Congregants sit in wood bench pews; women upstairs, men downstairs.

SUPER. AMSTERDAM-- 1640

A HUSH falls. All eyes turn to a contrite URIEL DA COSTA, as he ascends the *bima*, a raised platform that displays the Holy Ark containing the community's sacred Torah scrolls.

DA COSTA

I, Uriel da Costa, do hereby confess that I have violated the Sabbath. I have spread false beliefs that the soul cannot be resurrected. With God as my witness, I promise that I shall never again fall back into such turpitude and crime.

BELOW THE *BIMA* -- MOMENTS LATER

RABBI MORTERA, 30's, bearded with a severe, intelligent face, takes Da Costa by the arm, says something to him, and points to another location in the sanctuary.

INT. SYNAGOGUE/COLUMN -- MOMENTS LATER

An attendant ties Da Costa's hands around the column. Da Costa is naked down to his waist, barefooted and blindfolded.

The attendant LASHES Da Costa with a whip. The Cantor CHANTS plaintively in Hebrew.

Da Costa grimaces in pain with each lashing on his bare back.

IN THE PEWS

BARUCH SPINOZA, 8, and his father, MICHAEL SPINOZA, early-40's, flinch with each SNAP of the whip. Baruch's large dark, lustrous eyes swell with tears as he tugs on his father's sleeve.

BARUCH

How many times must they do this, Father?

Michael struggles to maintain a stoic composure.

MICHAEL

Not more than forty. It says so in Deuteronomy, Baruch.

EXT. BETH JACOB SYNAGOGUE/AT THE DOOR -- LATER

Da Costa, bloodied and beaten but fully clothed, lies supine across the threshold, his head supported by an Assistant.

Somber congregants exit the synagogue, carefully stepping over Da Costa's lower extremities.

FROM A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY

Tears stream freely down Baruch's cheeks. He buries his face in his father's chest. Michael sadly strokes his son's long black curly hair.

INT. URIEL DA COSTA'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Da Costa, despondent, writes at his desk in a journal. A pistol lies next to his papers. He places his pen in an inkwell, takes a deep breath, and writes.

DA COSTA (V.O.)
Once I felt the need to belong. Not
anymore. I refuse to become an ape
among apes in a world of beasts.

Da Costa places the pistol to his head.

BLACK OUT:

O.S. A SHOT

FADE IN:

EXT. THE NORTH SEA, NEAR AMSTERDAM -- DUSK

In the waning light, a sailboat glides through the gently rippling waves.

CAMPY (V.O.)
Ask anyone who's sailed these waters
over the last 50 years--

CAPTAIN (CAMPY) CAMPHUYSEN, early 60's, tall, lanky, his long, stringy, gray-blond beard and thinning hair still tinged with traces of red from his youth, hunches over the tiller and puffs on a long-stemmed clay pipe.

CAMPY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
-- they'll tell you Cap'n Camphuysen
is the best damn navigator they ever
saw. I'm not bragging; I can just
figure out the patterns of the stars
and the ways of the wind better than
most.

The boat continues on. At the tiller, Campy waves to sailors on a ship heading out to sea.

CAMPY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But if you're talking about navigating
through life, I never met anybody
who could do it better than Spinoza.

DISSOLVE TO:

SUPER. AMSTERDAM -- SIXTEEN YEARS LATER

EXT. AERIAL VIEW OF AMSTERDAM -- DAY

In the dank North Sea fog, canals radiate out from the center
of Amsterdam, making the city look like a giant SPIDER WEB.

EXT. THE JEWISH QUARTER -- DAY

Tree-lined thoroughfares surround tall, narrow brick houses,
timber yards, warehouses, and mercantile offices.

Along the canals, men unload cargo from boats and barges.
Adjacent streets bustle with people.

EXT. BETH JACOB SYNAGOGUE -- DAY

O.S. FAINT CHORUS of Hebrew CHANTS can be heard outside the
converted two-story house.

INT. BETH JACOB SYNAGOGUE -- DAY

Rabbi Mortera, now in his 50's, preaches from the *bima*. His
congregants, Portuguese Jews, donned in prayer shawls, look
like they stepped out of a Rembrandt painting.

MORTERA

Our sages taught us that every
Israelite has a portion in the world
to come, except--

BARUCH SPINOZA, now a handsome youth in his early 20's, clear
skin, fine features and black, curly shoulder-length hair,
listens from a bench near the *bima*. Next to Baruch is his
father, Michael Spinoza, now 65, a much older version of his
son, his grizzled, gray face worn and worried.

MORTERA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

-- he who says there is no
resurrection, or he who says the Law
has not been given by God--

Sitting directly behind Baruch and Michael, JUAN DE PRADO,
40, and a group of men TALK incessantly. Michael, distracted
by the noise, reprovcs the men with a glance and gestures
for them to be quiet. They ignore him.

MORTERA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

-- for such a person is an *apikoros*,
an *unbeliever*.

EXT. SYNAGOGUE ENTRANCE

Baruch and Michael stay with the remaining congregants as the talkative group leaves. Michael is scornful of their behavior.

MICHAEL

Where's the justice, Baruch? They come to talk and laugh. I come to study and pray. So what happens? They get wealthier. I get poorer.

BARUCH

Father, if only you wouldn't worry so.

MICHAEL

Our ship, the *T'vat*, left from the port of Faro today!

(looks up)

Lord, you know I am your meek and humble servant. In Your infinite mercy, I beg you. Please. *This* time let our cargo survive!

BARUCH

Don't look up *there* for justice.

Michael is distracted; in the corner of his eye he notices Rabbi Mortera has been listening to their conversation nearby.

Mortera approaches.

MORTERA

No? Then where do you find God's kingdom, Baruch?

BARUCH

Wherever justice and charity have the force of law and ordinance. Divine Presence dwells in the midst of the people, not in the heavens.

A moment of awkward silence. Mortera looks hopelessly toward Michael who shrugs his shoulders and smiles weakly.

MICHAEL

My son, the scholar.

MORTERA

A scholar is he?

Mortera wags a finger at Baruch.

MORTERA (CONT'D)

Heed the advice of our sage, Avtalyon:
'Scholars, watch your words, lest
you be punished by exile to a place
of bad water.'

Mortera abruptly turns away from Baruch, pulls Michael aside.

MORTERA (CONT'D)

Your son has an excellent mind. But
if he attended my Torah study class
regularly he might see more clearly.
Who knows? He could even become a
great rabbi one day!

MICHAEL

From your mouth to God's ear, Rabbi.

Mortera gives Michael an affectionate pat before moving on
to visit with the others.

Michael's entire body sags slightly.

BARUCH

You don't look well, Father. You
should go home and rest. How's
Esther?

MICHAEL

No better. You coming later?

BARUCH

No. I promised Jarig I'd meet him.
He's going to cut us in on a shipment
of raisins... and at a fair price.

MICHAEL

(thoughtful a moment)
You'd better put a hedge on the
contract. With the *mazel* we've been
having --

BARUCH

I don't want to be late.

MICHAEL

Am I stopping you? Hurry home after.

Baruch turns to leave.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Baruch! A word to the wise: Don't
miss Rabbi Mortera's class tonight.

INT. BETH JACOB SYNAGOGUE/ MORTERA'S CLASSROOM -- EVENING

A vitriolic, two-sided debate rages among a group of agitated men gathered around a table, their Bibles open in front of them. It's Baruch and Juan de Prado versus SAMUEL CACERAS, Baruch's brother-in-law, 30's, a short, heavy-set, stern-faced man, Rabbi Mortera and the others.

SAMUEL

What are you saying, de Prado? This is the divine law Moses brought down from the mountain that--

PRADO

-- we no longer need today, Samuel, because *most* of us can actually reason with our brains!

Insulted, Samuel leaps from his chair. De Prado follows suit.

MORTERA

Sit down gentlemen. For God's sake!

Ruffled, Samuel and de Prado sit.

MORTERA (CONT'D)

You must understand what our great teacher Maimonides is saying: if the text does not conform to reason, we must interpret it... metaphorically.

BARUCH

But whose metaphors, Rabbi? Yours? Mine? Samuel's? Maimonides may have written a guide for the perplexed, but he should be counted among them.

Several men GASP. Mortera is shocked.

Samuel points an accusing finger at Baruch and Prado.

SAMUEL

Apikoros! Non-believer!

EXT. *IN DE KONST-WINKEL* ("IN THE ART SHOP")-- DAY

On a corner of *Kalverstraat*, a noisy, narrow street on the *Singel*- the grand concentric canal that radiates from the center of Amsterdam- a shop window holds a display of LUTES.

Baruch peers in to view the interior of the store.

INT. IN DE KONST-WINKEL

Baruch tentatively steps inside. O.S., A LUTE being tuned by repetitive PLUCKING of the strings.

The counter is stacked high with precariously balanced books.

Peering over the top of the pile with more than a little interest, Baruch studies the angelic face, Delft-blue eyes and long blonde hair of CLARA VAN DEN ENDEN, 16, but looks 20. Absorbed in a book, she does not notice him.

BARUCH

Goedendag!

Taken by surprise, Clara nearly leaps off the chair. She and Baruch both laugh.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

Is this Professor Van den Enden's School?

CLARA

Yes, may I help you? I am Clara, his daughter.

BARUCH

Pleased to meet you, Clara. My name is Baruch Spinoza. I am supposed to meet a friend here... Jarig Jelles?

CLARA

Mr. Jelles is in the back. He and some other students are having a lesson with my father. You are welcome to browse around the store while you wait.

Clara resumes reading, but Baruch does not want to browse.

BARUCH

What are you reading?

Clara shows him the book.

CLARA

A book by Galileo Galilei.

It's Baruch's turn to be surprised. He leans over the counter for a closer look. Clara teasingly clasps the book to her chest. Seeing the title, Baruch is shocked and amused.

BARUCH

(reads awkwardly)

Dialogo Dei Massimi Sistemi.

CLARA
(fluently)
Eppur si muove.

Baruch is stumped.

CLARA (CONT'D)
'Yet, it does move.'

BARUCH
Ah! The earth, you mean. How did you get that, anyway? It's on the Index of Forbidden Books!

CLARA
Smuggled it. Galileo's my father's hero.

BARUCH
That so? Did your father teach you Italian, too?

CLARA
And French and Latin.

Baruch looks past Clara at a copper etching on the wall.

BARUCH
Is that a Rembrandt?

CLARA
No, one of his student's... my father's, also.

Clara turns to help a customer who enters.

IN THE STACKS

Baruch browses. The shop seems in a permanent state of disarray. Paintings haphazardly line the walls. Books virtually spill out of the crammed shelves.

Kneeling to examine books on a lower shelf, Baruch bumps into a bookstack behind him. Several books CRASH onto the floor.

BARUCH
Achh! Sorry!

Baruch picks up the fallen books. Clara comes to help him. She walks with a pronounced limp due to the partial paralysis of her left leg.

CLARA
That's alright. Let me help you.

Not the least bit self-conscious, she helps pick up the remaining books. Baruch also notices that she has a lovely figure.

O.S. The Lutenist strikes a beautiful CHORD as a *coda* to his efforts, then begins playing a hauntingly beautiful MELODY, *Mille Regretz*.

Clara hands Baruch one of the books she has picked up.

CLARA (CONT'D)
You might find this interesting.
Rene Descartes.

Excitedly, Baruch opens the book that is written in Latin. Miffed, he quickly closes it.

BARUCH
My Latin... is not fluent.

CLARA
Guess this wouldn't do you much good then.

As Clara replaces the book on a shelf, she suddenly lights up with childish enthusiasm.

CLARA (CONT'D)
I could teach you Latin!

BARUCH
Perhaps we should speak to your father about that.

Clara sees that the LUTE PLAYING distracts Baruch.

CLARA
Mille Regretz. 'It is with great regret that I leave you and lose sight of your loving face; I suffer such grief and pain that you will see my days are numbered.'
(SINGING)
Mille regretz de vous abandonner et d'eslonger vostre...

INT. SPINOZA HOUSE/BEDROOM -- EVENING

O.S. CLARA'S SONG continues.

Baruch's stepmother, ESTHER SPINOZA, has expired in her *ledikant*-- a red curtained wigwam-like canopy. RIVKA, her daughter, closes Esther's eyelids and mouth, and covers her face with a sheet. Michael sits at the foot of the bed, weeping.

O.S. CLARA'S SONG ends.

INT. SPINOZA HOUSE/BEDROOM -- NIGHT

At Esther's deathbed Michael and Rivka embrace and cry. Samuel Caceras (Rivka's husband) clasps a Psalter. Baruch looks down at his deceased stepmother, her facial contours vaguely apparent under a white sheet.

(MEMORY FLASH)

Years earlier, a dead HANA-DEVORAH, Baruch's beautiful olive-skinned, raven-haired mother, lies on the same *ledikant*.

(BACK TO SCENE)

Baruch is lost in his memories as Samuel recites.

SAMUEL (O.S.)
Baruch ata adonai eloheynu melekh ha-
olam dayan ha emet. Praised are You
the Judge of Truth.

O.S. The RIPPING of cloth breaks Baruch's reverie as Rivka and Michael each tear a piece of their clothing.

CUT TO:

EXT. OCEAN OFF PORT OF FARO, PORTUGAL -- DAY

The *T'VAT*, a cargo vessel bearing a Dutch flag, is under attack from a PIRATE SHIP.

O.S. An EXPLOSION. Cloth RIPS.

ON *T'VAT* -- MOMENTS LATER

The mainsail flutters in tattered ruins. Panicked sailors leap off the boat.

ON PIRATE SHIP -- MOMENTS LATER

Moorish corsairs celebrate. They FIRE another round.

ON *T'VAT* -- MOMENTS LATER

O.S. Another EXPLOSION. Flames erupt as the stern sinks into the ocean.

INT. AMSTERDAM, THE BOURSE/CLOCK TOWER COURT -- DAY

Near the entrance of the huge, colonnaded open air court, Baruch gazes with detached curiosity at frenzied floor traders furiously waving slips of paper.

O.S. the BELL CHIMES, signifying the close of trading. The CLAMOR subsides.

Baruch waves to get the attention of a tall, lanky, blond Dutchman emerging from the hubbub. This is JARIG JELLES, 30's, conspicuous in the crowd because of his height, plain attire and calm demeanor.

BARUCH

Jarig!

Jarig eventually notices Baruch and approaches him.

JARIG

Let's get out of this shit hole of iniquity.

Jarig puts his arm around Baruch as they wind their way through the bustle.

JARIG (CONT'D)

I heard about the *T'vat*. I'm sorry. Moorish pirates?

BARUCH

Destroyed the entire cargo: olive oil, figs, almonds, everything.

JARIG

Bastards! Must be tough-going for your father right now.

Jarig briefly studies Baruch's somber face.

JARIG (CONT'D)

Let's go to that new coffee shop on the *Kalverstraat*.

INT. *KALVERSTRAAT* COFFEE SHOP -- SHORTLY AFTER

In the nearly empty shop, Baruch and Jarig drink coffee by the window.

BARUCH

I hear Professor Van den Enden's convinced you to abandon the world of greed. Your father doesn't mind you're quitting the business?

JARIG

Hell, he doesn't need me. Bastard'll trade 'til the day he dies. Then I imagine he'll try to bargain with the devil. Probably will win too! He's the only man I know who didn't get caught with his pants down during the tulip craze of '37.

BARUCH

While *my* father was stuck holding the sack. He had to take delivery on some *Semper Augustus* bulbs just before the bubble burst.

JARIG

My God! Those were worth a fucking fortune!

BARUCH

Were. Until the maidservant cooked them in a beef stew for dinner. She thought they were onions.

Jarig LAUGHS HARD. Baruch turns serious.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

Such are the vagaries of pursuing wealth for its own sake. Jarig: tell me more about Professor Van den Enden. Where's he from?

JARIG

Antwerp. Had a Catholic upbringing. Parents wanted him to become a priest, so he joined the Jesuit order when he was fifteen. But then, two years later he was asked to leave.

Jarig sees Baruch's intrigue. He looks around to make sure no one else is listening.

JARIG (CONT'D)

Rumor has it he was caught in a ... compromising position with the wife of a high ranking military officer. But this much is certainly true: he's one hell of a teacher. Son of a bitch understands Descartes. Even makes learning Latin fun.

Baruch is amused and amazed.

The Waiter brings the bill. Baruch reaches for it but Jarig grabs it first.

JARIG (CONT'D)

You get it next time.

EXT. COFFEESHOP -- MOMENTS LATER

As they emerge, Jarig is struck by an idea.

JARIG

Come with me to class tonight, Baruch. We're reading a play by Terence.

BARUCH

Terence?

JARIG

The Roman playwright. Wrote comedies
a couple of hundred years before
Christ.

BARUCH

(teasing)

Jesus was a playwright, too?

JARIG

Come on, Baruch... What do you say?

BARUCH

I'm tempted, Jarig, but I have a
long-standing debt to collect.
Terence can wait; our creditors
cannot.

CUT TO:

EXT. *HERENGRACHT* BRIDGE -- NIGHT

A FULL MOON is in MID-ECLIPSE.

At one end of the bridge, ANTHONY ALVERES, 30's, dark and
brooding, smokes a short-stem clay pipe and stares into space.

AT OPPOSITE END OF THE BRIDGE

Baruch clutches Alveres' sister, LINDA-- early 20's, an
irresistible Iberian charmer.

Baruch and Linda watch the eclipse, brilliant crimson against
an inky-blue sky.

LINDA (O.S.)

Is it true that an eclipse is a bad
sign?

Linda playfully bites and kisses Baruch's neck. Baruch finds
it difficult to ignore her advances and focus on the eclipse.

BARUCH

Only if you are superstitious.

A few yards away, Anthony paces, occasionally stealing a
glance in the direction of the couple.

Baruch notices Anthony's tense behavior while Linda clings.

BARUCH (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Linda, why is your brother so nervous?

LINDA

Maybe he doesn't think you're going to forgive the debt.

(cloying)

I wish you would because it might persuade him to allow us a more private rendezvous.

Baruch pauses momentarily; he's on to her. He kisses her viciously on the lips.

Linda likes it, but feigns humiliation. She pushes him away.

BARUCH

Tell Anthony if I do not receive by next month, at least half of what he owes me, I will have him arrested.

Linda SLAPS Baruch hard on the face.

Anthony rushes to grab Linda's hand. He takes a long draw on his pipe, blows smoke in Baruch's face, spits at his feet and, with Linda in tow, leaves.

FULL MOON -- IN MID-ECLIPSE

Baruch, his face still smarting, sees an HOURGLASS PATTERN emerge on the surface of the eclipsed moon.

(FLASHBACK)

-- O.S. An EARSPLITTING SHRIEK. Hana Devorah's terror-filled face.

(BACK TO SCENE)

Baruch is shaken by the memory of his mother's scream.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIELD OF WINDMILLS -- NIGHT

The same eclipsed moon stands out in stark relief above the silhouetted windmills.

A gaggle of peasant women huddle together, cowering in fright. A group of men alternately ridicule the women and point to the celestial spectacle.

INT. SPINOZA LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Michael, parched and pale, lies propped up with pillows on the *ledikant*. Baruch gives his father a sip of water. Baruch starts to take the glass, but Michael, who seems disturbed about something, stops him.

MICHAEL

(hoarse, weak)
Did you collect the debt from the
Alvares brothers?

BARUCH

I'm... working on it.

MICHAEL

Good. And you're going to Rabbi
Mortera's class tonight?

BARUCH

Perhaps I should stay here with you.

MICHAEL

No! You go, son. Do you hear me?

Agitated, Michael pulls at his bedclothes. His mind seems
preoccupied.

BARUCH

Alright, Father. Now what are you
worried about?

MICHAEL

This dream I keep on having. I am
in the synagogue. I'm looking at a
man whose arms are wrapped around a
column. His hands are bound and
he's blindfolded. His back is bare.
And he's screaming because he's being
lashed with a whip. Horrible, painful
screams.

Michael's distress and pain are as real to him as his dream.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Then, I'm standing outside the
synagogue. And I'm holding onto a
little boy's hand.

Baruch is caught up in his father's dream.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

The man is lying on the steps of the
synagogue. And everyone who exits,
treads over him. The man turns his
face toward me.

(horrified)

Such anguish and humiliation! But,
the face... it is yours, Baruch!

Michael grips Baruch's arm.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

You must not continue to challenge
Rabbi Mortera. Promise me.

INT. *IN DE KONST-WINKEL* ("IN THE ART SHOP")-- DAY

Baruch is delighted to find Clara behind the stack of books. As before, her head is buried in a book. He speaks softly so he doesn't alarm her again.

BARUCH

I see you've nearly finished *Dialogo*!

CLARA

Oh, Baruch. It's you. Yes, nearly.

To hide her self-consciousness, she discusses the book.

CLARA (CONT'D)

I just love Galileo. He is so witty!

BARUCH

And he paid dearly for his cleverness.
(looks around)
Clara, where's your father?

CLARA

He's at the municipal theater. He's
making arrangements for a play he--

Baruch's sister, Rivka, enters.

BARUCH

Rivka! How did you know I was here?

RIVKA

Are you joking, Baruch?

Rivka sizes up Clara.

RIVKA (CONT'D)

He was never very good at keeping a
secret.

(to Baruch, worried)

You should come home. Father has
taken a turn for the worse.

EXT. AMSTEL RIVER -- DAY

Dark clouds gather on the horizon as Campy Camphuysen glides his *trekshuit*, a sailing barge, that carries a plain pine casket.

ALONG THE RIVER'S EDGE

While Rivka, Samuel and others trail far behind, Baruch keeps pace with his father's funereal barge.

Campy acknowledges Baruch with a respectful nod.

EXT. COASTAL DUTCH FARM -- DAY

On the other side of the river, crops wither in the fields.

A frenzied crowd gathers around a Holy Man, zealous, filthy, who straddles bales of hay. He waves a staff, Moses-like, toward a darkening sky.

Another man prods a red heifer toward the Holy Man. The crowd SHOUTS excitedly. The Holy Man YELLS above the din pointing first at an open Bible, then at the cow.

EXT. ENTRANCE, *HET BETH HAIM VAN OUDERKERK* (JEWISH CEMETERY) -- LATER

ABOVE A WOODEN GATE, A SIGN INSCRIBED IN HEBREW, SUBTITLED: Thus saith the Lord God: Behold I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, O my people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel.

In the distance, Campy's *trekshuit* is docked near a small foot bridge. Nearby a gnarled oak tree shades the largest and most elaborately carved tombstones.

EXT. COASTAL DUTCH FARM

The Holy man slices the throat of the heifer. The crowd CHEERS as blood spurts from the flailing animal.

EXT. *HET BETH HAIM VAN OUDERKERK*, MICHAEL'S GRAVESITE

A fine drizzle mists over the Mourners who gather at a freshly dug grave beside the plainly-inscribed stone markers of Hana Devora, Esther and other Spinoza family members.

Rabbi Mortera CHANTS in Hebrew.

MORTERA

-- *tachat kanfey haskhina et nishmat
Michael Ben Yitzchak D'espinoza
shehalach l'olamo.*

Baruch, distraught, scatters a shovel of freshly-dug earth on his father's coffin.

EXT. COASTAL DUTCH FARM

The drizzle creates a stir in the crowd. The Holy Man scoops up some ashes from the heifer's partially cremated carcass and places them in a jar. Grateful farmers kiss the Holy Man's garment.

INT. BETH JACOB SYNAGOGUE -- DAY

With Prado at his side, Baruch joins the congregation reciting the mourner's *Kaddish*. His unshaved face is lined with grief after a week's growth of beard.

BARUCH
*Yeet-ga-dal ve-yeet-ak-dash sh'meih
ra-ba.*

CONGREGATION
Amen.

BARUCH
*B'al-ma dee v'ra kheer-u-teih,
v'yamleekh mal-khu-teih...*

INT. BETH JACOB SYNAGOGUE -- ANOTHER DAY

Baruch's beard is a month longer and thicker.

BARUCH
*...b'ha yei-khon u-v'yo-mei-khon, u-
v-'ha-yei d'khol beit Yisrael...*

INT. DE VIERS HOLLANDERS (THE FOUR DUTCHMEN) -- DAY

A converted tavern on the *Nes* that serves as a quasi-civil courtroom.

Anthony Alveres paces while the BAILIFF completes paperwork at his desk. Linda and her brothers, GABRIEL and ISAAC SHOUT at each other.

LINDA
Idiot! What did you expect? Listen. Baruch promised he'd be here and he will be. We'll settle this once and for all. So shut up! All of you!

EXT. DE VIERS HOLLANDERS -- MOMENTS LATER

A flash of lightning. Thunder RUMBLES. Heavy rain BEATS DOWN as Baruch reads the sign on the door of the tavern: No Weapons Allowed While Court In Session.

INT. DE VIERS HOLLANDERS -- MOMENTS LATER

Baruch SLAMS the door against the gusting wind and blowing rain. He hangs his dripping coat on a rack near the door.

BAILIFF
Any weapons, sir?

BARUCH
None.

Baruch nods solemnly at Linda.

BARUCH (CONT'D)
I'm willing to post bail.
(to Anthony)
If you settle up now.

Anthony, handcuffed and seething, sneers as he kicks Baruch's shin. Linda GASPS. Baruch YELLS, doubling over in pain.

The Bailiff, unwilling to join the fray, simply observes.

Gabriel slams Baruch on the head with his fist, losing his ring in the process. Baruch's hat flies off. O.S., the CLINK of metal striking the floor.

Anthony STOMPS on Baruch's hat.

Linda tries to rescue Baruch, but Isaac nudges her out of the way.

As Gabriel opens the door, he unknowingly kicks his ring. The ring rolls out the door along with Baruch as Gabriel and Isaac shove him into the street.

EXT. DE VIERS HOLLANDERS -- MOMENTS LATER

Baruch falls in a heap, hat and coat flying after him. Lightning flashes. Thunder RUMBLES. Baruch shudders, shakes out his hat and coat and puts them on.

As he starts to limp away, something catches his eye.

ON THE GROUND.

Gabriel's ring glistens in the rain. Baruch examines the plain gold band.

INT. *IN DE KONST-WINKEL*/COUNTER -- SHORTLY AFTER

A wet and battered Baruch peeks expectantly over the stack of books.

His gaze is met by the mercurial blue eyes of FRANCISCUS VAN DEN ENDEN, 50's. Despite his shoulder-length gray hair, he retains much of his youthful physicality that women still find attractive.

VAN DEN ENDEN
Jesus Christ!

Alarmed at Baruch's strange appearance, Van den Enden shoves a stack of books onto Baruch, sending him sprawling to the floor.

O.S. CLARA SCREAMS.

Van den Enden rushes around the counter, poised to strike Baruch. Cowering, Baruch raises his hands in surrender.

BARUCH
Professor Van den Enden?

VAN DEN ENDEN
Who the hell are you?

BARUCH
Sir, please don't be alarmed. I...
I'm sorry. I know I must look like
the devil, but I'm--

Clara rushes to Baruch's side.

CLARA
Oh, my God! Baruch!

Van den Enden shields his daughter from Baruch.

VAN DEN ENDEN
How do you know *my* daughter?

Jarig Jelles suddenly appears from the back of the store.

JARIG
Christ! What happened to you?

BARUCH
I was involved in a ...
misunderstanding. I'll be fine.

While Van den Enden comforts his distraught daughter, Jarig drapes his arm around Baruch's shoulder, causing Baruch to wince in pain.

JARIG
Franz, *this* is Spinoza--

Van den Enden is clueless.

JARIG (CONT'D)
--the Jew... the scholar. Remember?

Still leery, Van den Enden doesn't make the connection.

Clara angrily detaches herself from her father's clutches and replaces the books on the counter. Jarig assists her.

CLARA
I think you owe Baruch an apology,
Father.

VAN DEN ENDEN
He looks more like a scoundrel than
a scholar!

She strokes Baruch's wounded puppy face.

CLARA

He is a scholar *and* a gentleman.
(pleadingly)
Can he stay for dinner?

VAN DEN ENDEN

No. He'd frighten your sisters.

CLARA

Pretty please.

His revulsion giving way to skepticism, Van den Enden receives a reassuring nod from Jarig.

VAN DEN ENDEN

Go tell your mother. But you'd better clean him up first.

CLARA

Thank you, Father.

She heads upstairs.

CLARA (CONT'D)

That beard makes you look so... old,
Baruch.

Baruch turns to Van den Enden, choking back tears.

BARUCH

My beard... my father passed away.
I'm not supposed to shave for 30
days.

JARIG

It's been over a month now, Baruch.

Baruch seems genuinely surprised to learn this.

Van den Enden regards Baruch warily, already regretting his decision to have Baruch stay.

VAN DEN ENDEN

Jarig, have you any idea what kind
of *misunderstanding* could have created
a lump on your friend's forehead...
in the shape of four large knuckles?

Jarig carefully examines Baruch's forehead wound.

JARIG

And... a ring?

Baruch smiles sheepishly and shows the ring to them.

BARUCH

A debt... they did not want to pay.

VAN DEN ENDEN

At least you got something for your trouble. Let's go wash up.

Van den Enden winks at Jarig and guides Baruch up the stairs to the family's living quarters.

VAN DEN ENDEN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

That's some bulge on your head.
Fine physical proof of Descartes'
principle: *cogito, ergo sum!*

Van den Enden LAUGHS heartily at his own joke. Baruch does not laugh.

VAN DEN ENDEN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Didn't you get it?

BARUCH (O.S.)

No.

VAN DEN ENDEN (O.S.)

Frankly, I'm not sure I did either.

INT. VAN DEN ENDEN'S LIVING QUARTERS UPSTAIRS -- LATER

Clara's two younger SISTERS play a duet on the clavichord beside the hearth.

Van den Enden's wife MARIA, 40's, matronly but pretty, prepares dinner.

At the washbasin Clara 'fingerpaints' lather on Baruch's moustache. It titillates him and she knows it.

Van den Enden hovers like a hawk, sensing his wife's growing discomfort with their daughter's developing crush on this strange, older man.

CLARA

May I teach him Latin, Father?

MARIA

(alarmed)

Franz?

VAN DEN ENDEN

Your mother and I will discuss it.

(pause)

What did you say your last name was?

Baruch's eyes widen in full alert as Clara displays a razor.

BARUCH

Spinoza. It was 'Despinoza', but we--

Clara shaves a section of Baruch's moustache.

CLARA

-- Despinoza: 'from a thorny, bristly place.' Like your moustache--

(swipes the rest)

-- was.

Clara sensually wipes the remaining lather from Baruch's naked upper lip.

CLARA (CONT'D)

And his first name means... 'Blessed.'

I found it in a *Hebrew* lexicon.

Baruch is startled as Clara moves toward his neck with a pair of scissors.

VAN DEN ENDEN

I still don't quite follow, Baruch.
Was your family exiled from Spain?

BARUCH

Portugal. You see, we changed it so
the Inquisition couldn't track us
down or sever--

(Clara SNIPS his beard)

-- our trade.

VAN DEN ENDEN

Which is?

BARUCH

Dried fruit.

Baruch is suddenly overwhelmed by the aroma of food.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

That smells awfully good, Mrs. Van
Den Enden.

MARIA

Thank you, but I imagine your mother
prepares you a proper meal.

BARUCH

My mother died when I was six. And
my stepmother, may she rest in peace,
was a terrible cook.

VAN DEN ENDEN

Has your business been profitable,
Baruch?

BARUCH

We've had our ups and downs. Mostly
downs, lately.

VAN DEN ENDEN

Debts?

BARUCH

I'm afraid so.

(GULPS as Clara places
the razor just below
his chin)

But I intend to pay them off... when
I can.

VAN DEN ENDEN

You're how old?

BARUCH

Twenty-three.

Maria stiffens, drops a utensil that CLANGS to the floor
causing Clara to slip with the razor, nicking Baruch's chin.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

Ah!

VAN DEN ENDEN

Ah! Then you're an orphan!

CLARA

Ooh! I'm sorry, Baruch. How clumsy
of me.

Blood trickles from Baruch's chin.

VAN DEN ENDEN (O.S.)

At least that much is in your favor.

Clara dabs Baruch's freshly-shaven face with a towel.

BARUCH

I fail to see the good in my present
predicament.

VAN DEN ENDEN

Then apparently you are unfamiliar
with the case of Titus Rembrandt.

BARUCH

The painter's son?

VAN DEN ENDEN

Who, according Dutch law, is entitled
to legal protection from bankruptcy
... as an orphan.

AT THE DINING TABLE -- LATER

Maria HUMS her daughters' tune while serving steaming plates of food containing sliced pork roast, slabs of cheese and butter, rolls, herring, and spinach along with a pot of beer.

Baruch smells the wonderful food, but something is terribly wrong. It finally dawns on him.

CLARA
What's wrong, Baruch?

BARUCH
I'm not sure but I must ask... is
this... pork?

Maria Van den Enden STOPS HUMMING.

VAN DEN ENDEN
Maria, Jews can't eat pork.

Embarrassed, Maria snatches Baruch's plate. She stomps to the sink.

MARIA
Then why is he taking his meals in a
gentile home?

BARUCH
I am truly sorry.

Maria plops a plate of spinach in front of Baruch.

MARIA
Let him eat his spinach, then!

BARUCH
I like spinach. I really do.

Clara's sisters WHISPER to eachother then burst with LAUGHTER.

SISTERS
Spinach! *Mijnheer Spinazie!* *Mijnheer*
Spinazie!

VAN DEN ENDEN
That's right, girls. And if you eat
your spinach perhaps someday *you'll*
be just as clever as *Mijnheer*
Spinazie.

Grinning, Baruch takes a big bite of spinach.

INT. BETH JACOB SYNAGOGUE/ MORTERA'S CLASSROOM -- DAY

Around a large table stacked with documents, Rabbi Mortera huddles with ELDERS of the *Ma'amad*, the Jewish community's board of directors.

ELDER #1

Baruch Spinoza still owes several hundred guilders to the widow Henriques. And there are other large debts, long past due.

ELDER #2

His father's old accounts.

ELDER #1

One cannot collect from the dead.

ELDER #2

Baruch's had a tough year. We all know this.

ELDER #1

Don't we pay our synagogue dues and taxes? Is he better than us?

ELDER #2

You want to tax his losses?

MORTERA

Baruch must at least fulfill his charity pledge as a show of good faith that he intends to honor the rest of his financial commitments.

ELDER #1

Good faith? You realize he's in bed with the Quakers. And everyone knows what they believe.

ELDER #2

All I know is every Friday night he's here in the pews saying *Kaddish* for his father.

ELDER #1

I'll lay you odds he's also praying for the second coming of Christ.

MORTERA

I must remind you it is forbidden to spread malicious gossip! On the other hand, it seems very clear Baruch is not attending to business.

ELDER #1

Oh, he's busy all right; boning-up on his *Latin* with the buxom daughter of an ex-Jesuit priest.

The men GASP in disbelief.

MORTERA

God forbid! Who told you this?

ELDER #1

His brother-in-law.

MORTERA

If this is true, then Baruch has
much to answer for.

EXT. RASPHUIS "AMSTERDAM HOUSE OF CORRECTION"-- DAY

Briefcase in hand, Baruch follows Van den Enden as they pass a long queue of people who gawk through the bars of a gated entry, straining to get a view of the shackled prisoners inside.

VAN DEN ENDEN

It's *kermis*-- carnival time. All
the foreign tourists are waiting to
be admitted for the exhibition.

INSIDE THE GATE

Two men caked in red dust and sweat cut into a large log with a huge rasp saw.

VAN DEN ENDEN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

For a *stuiver* you can see the inmates
at their labors.

A guard LASHES an inmate. Streaks of blood ooze from his back. A small crowd gapes.

VAN DEN ENDEN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

For two more you can watch the guards
whip them with a bull's *pistle*.

INT. HOUSE OF CORRECTION/DARK CELLAR -- DAY

Murky water SPURTS from a hole in a cement wall.

Tethered prisoners writhe in agony as they trudge around an iron wheel through waist-high muddy water.

VAN DEN ENDEN (O.S.)

And six coins will buy you admission
to a view of the drowning cell where
a few poor bastards have to pump
like crazy to keep themselves from
drowning.

ON A VIEWING PLATFORM

Tourists jostle to get a good view of the scene below.

A SIGN reads: 'To be wet is to be captive, idle and poor.
But to be dry is to be free, industrious and comfortable.'

VAN DEN ENDEN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
It's distinctively Dutch.

BARUCH (O.S.)
Despicable! When we get to the Town
Hall I shall object to this wanton
cruelty!

VAN DEN ENDEN (O.S.)
Then I suppose you will enjoy being
shackled to your father's debts and
drowning in them for the rest of
your life.

INT. VAN DEN ENDEN'S LIVING QUARTERS -- DAY

On the sofa, Clara and her mother knit socks while the younger
children play nearby.

MARIA
Clara, you're becoming too attached
to Baruch.

CLARA
He's just a friend.

MARIA
I notice how you look at him. I
have a mind to stop these... tutoring
sessions.

CLARA
But, Mother, I'm an excellent
instructor. Father says Baruch's
Latin is really improving.

MARIA
He's too old for you. And he's
Jewish.

INT. AMSTERDAM TOWN HALL -- DAY

Van den Enden and Baruch walk through a crowded lobby. Baruch
is still upset with the scene at *Rasphuis*.

BARUCH
I've decided I must say something.

VAN DEN ENDEN
Give me your briefcase.

Van den Enden grabs Baruch's briefcase and wallops him.

VAN DEN ENDEN (CONT'D)
Keep your mouth shut. Let me handle
everything.

AT A CLERK'S DESK -- SHORTLY AFTER

Van den Enden conducts himself with utmost propriety while
Baruch fidgets anxiously before the city CLERK, 50's, stodgy.

CLERK
I'll need proof of your age and death
certificates for both your parents.

VAN DEN ENDEN
(brightly)
Right here, Your Honor.

Van den Enden locates several papers in the briefcase and
hands them to the clerk.

While the clerk carefully studies the documents Baruch simmers
silently until he can no longer restrain himself.

BARUCH
Sir, I wish to register a complaint!

VAN DEN ENDEN
No, he doesn't!

BARUCH
Yes, I do.

Van den Enden emphatically shakes his head 'no.'

CLERK
Let the young man lodge his complaint.

BARUCH
Thank you, Your Honor. On our way
here--

Van den Enden surreptitiously kicks Baruch's shin.

BARUCH (CONT'D)
Ow!

VAN DEN ENDEN
He tripped on a loose cobblestone...

Baruch flashes Van den Enden a look of reproach.

VAN DEN ENDEN (CONT'D)
...and fell, Your Honor.

BARUCH
(glaring)
And it really smarts!

Van den Enden reciprocates with mock sympathy.

VAN DEN ENDEN

You should see his leg, Your Honor.
What a bloody mess. He should really
see a doctor before it starts oozing
pus.

The Clerk eyes Baruch and Van den Enden suspiciously.

VAN DEN ENDEN (CONT'D)

I'm afraid you'll have a nasty bruise
there... at the very least, Baruch.

BARUCH

At the very least.

The clerk has had enough. He removes a certificate from his
desk drawer.

CLERK

This is your court order, Spinoza.
Print your name, sign and date it.

As Baruch follows the clerk's instructions Van den Enden
rises, shakes the clerk's hand and gestures for Baruch to
follow suit.

CLERK (CONT'D)

Young man, in the future you would
be well-advised to watch your step.

EXT. TOWN HALL -- MOMENTS LATER

Strutting like a peacock, Van den Enden escorts a slouching
and limping Baruch out of the building.

VAN DEN ENDEN

Sorry about your shin, Baruch. You
left me little choice, you know.

BARUCH

At least it was the *other* leg. Nearly
made a mess of it, didn't I?

VAN DEN ENDEN

You'd make a rotten lawyer.

Baruch doesn't appreciate the joke. Van den Enden grabs
Baruch's cheeks, forcing his mouth into the shape of a smile.

VAN DEN ENDEN (CONT'D)

You must learn to be happy, for God's
sake! You've just kissed your
father's debts goodbye. Now you're
a privileged creditor on his estate.

(MORE)

VAN DEN ENDEN (CONT'D)

How can you be morose at a time like this?

BARUCH

I just can't believe it.
(dawns on him)
My *sister* won't believe it. Now where will I stay?

VAN DEN ENDEN

You will stay with us.

Baruch is stunned and delighted.

VAN DEN ENDEN (CONT'D)

But I'll have to charge you ten guilders a month.
(an epiphany)
Perhaps that will convince my wife!

Van den Enden takes Baruch by the arm.

VAN DEN ENDEN (CONT'D)

Come on. You owe me a beer.

INT. BETH JACOB SYNAGOGUE -- EARLY EVENING

Through the sanctuary windows, rays of the setting sun ILLUMINATE HEBREW LETTERS on the parchment of a Torah scroll stretched open before Rabbi Mortera at the reader's desk. Two Elders wait patiently in the pews below.

ELDER #1

I don't know how you are going to convince him, Rabbi.

Mortera locates a passage of text with a silver pointer.

MORTERA

I'll entangle him in the web of his own deceit.
(glowers at the Elders)
Then fill him with the fear of God.

INT. SPINOZA HOUSE/BEDROOM -- LATER

A partially-packed suitcase is propped up against the *ledikant*, where Baruch has fallen asleep, fully clothed.

MOMENTS LATER

Rivka enters, flings Baruch's feet off the bed, nearly launching him onto the floor.

RIVKA

What do you think you're doing?

BARUCH

(groggy)

I suppose I was sleeping.

RIVKA

You smell like beer.

Baruch BELCHES, shrugs.

Rivka points to the suitcase.

RIVKA (CONT'D)

What's this all about?

BARUCH

I'm leaving, Rivka.

Baruch rises, unsteadily.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

I've declared bankruptcy.

RIVKA

You've what?

BARUCH

I'm no longer responsible for father's debts.

RIVKA

The hell you're not!

Baruch hastily removes a few articles of clothing from a chest of drawers and places them in the suitcase.

BARUCH

Since I am an orphan and I am a minor according to Dutch law I am entitled to financial relief. I've got the court papers to prove it.

RIVKA

You bastard! You'll never get away with this.

Rivka begins to pound Baruch with her fists. He tries to deflect the blows.

RIVKA (CONT'D)

Samuel was right about you this whole time. You hypocrite! You sneak!

Baruch manages to grab Rivka's wrists. She starts to SOB.

RIVKA (CONT'D)

I'll be ruined.

BARUCH

No, you won't.

RIVKA

How could you be so cruel?

BARUCH

Rivka, I have decided to relinquish my claim to Father's estate.

RIVKA

Is it because I'm only your half sister that you treat me so--?

(stops sobbing)

What did you say?

Baruch releases Rivka. He drapes a heavy wool coat over his shoulder.

BARUCH

I'm only taking his coat... and this bed.

Baruch picks up the suitcase.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

The rest is yours.

Rivka suddenly transforms in a mixture of relief, delight and embarrassment.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

Any assets that were due me, including the remainder of my mother's estate... will pass to you.

Baruch heads toward the door. Rivka rushes to embrace him.

RIVKA

Baruch, what a wonderful brother you are!

BARUCH

I'll come for the bed later.

O.S. HARD RAPS at the door.

Baruch opens the door to two grim-faced elders.

ELDER #1

Rabbi Mortera's waiting for you at the synagogue.

INT. BETH JACOB SYNAGOGUE -- LATER

O.S. RHYTHMIC SCRAPES on a sandy surface.

Mortera reverently replaces the Torah scroll in the ark.

AT THE PEWS

Baruch is flanked by the two Elders. With his shoe, Baruch SCRAPES a design on the sand-covered floor that vaguely resembles a SPIDER.

Mortera returns to the lectern. He speaks sternly to Baruch.

MORTERA

This rebellion of yours is bitter fruit for all my efforts to educate you on your father's behalf. Are you not mindful of the good example I have set you?

BARUCH

You have taught me well.

Suddenly enraged, Mortera POUNDS his fist on the table. Baruch's head jolts up.

MORTERA

To say and to do whatever you please? To continually violate the trust of your own community and family?

(softens)

Baruch, I am the one who severed the foreskin from your flesh and thus brought you into a holy covenant with God and the Jewish people. Do you want to break my heart?

Baruch sadly shakes his head 'no.'

MORTERA (CONT'D)

Then remember the lesson from your *Bar Mitzvah*. Do you recall that passage from your Torah portion-- when Pharaoh and the Egyptians are about to receive the tenth plague?

BARUCH

Perfectly. The Israelites did Moses' bidding and '*borrowed*' from the Egyptians objects of silver and gold and fine clothing.

MORTERA

And that bothered you a great deal. Didn't it, my son?

BARUCH

In my opinion, the Israelites ransacked them.

Mortera descends the *bima*, stands between the Elders, forming a gauntlet, and confronts Baruch within inches of his face.

MORTERA

Do you now intend to despoil us?

BARUCH

I have done nothing illegal. Only asserted my rights as a Dutch citizen and as an orphan.

MORTERA

Repent Baruch! Heed the words of Avtalyon, the patron protector of orphans, or be banished to the waters of heresy!

BARUCH

So be it.

The elders GASP as Baruch brushes by them.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

(at the door)

At least when I take my leave, it will be more innocent than was the exodus of the early Hebrews from Egypt!

O.S. -- The door SLAMS.

CUT TO:

INT. BETH JACOB SYNAGOGUE -- NIGHT

In virtual darkness, against a backdrop of dripping black candles, an Elder addresses the congregation.

ELDER

The *Senhores* of the *Ma'amad*, having long known of the evil opinions and acts of Baruch de Spinoza, have endeavored by various means and promises to turn him from his evil ways.

In the shadows of the candlelight, several Elders nod in somber agreement. Samuel sits in stony silence.

ELDER (CONT'D)

But failing to make him mend his wicked ways, have excommunicated and expelled him from the people of Israel.

Upstairs in the women's section, a solitary Rivka weeps.

ELDER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
No one should communicate with him,
neither in writing, nor accord him
any favor.

CUT TO:

INT. SPINOZA HOUSE/ENTRY -- NIGHT

Baruch and Jarig carry the disassembled *ledikant* out the door.

ELDER (V.O.)
Nor stay with him under the same
roof, nor come within four cubits in
his vicinity; nor shall he read any
treatise composed or written by him.

INT. *IN DE KONST-WINKEL* -- MORNING

While Van den Enden works behind the counter, a group of students (all in their 20's) gather at the book stacks around SIMON DE VRIES who reads from a pocket-sized book.

SIMON
The author continues: 'What follows
is meant to open the eyes of dumb
and thoughtless youths to the
frightful consequences of frequenting
musicos and gaming houses.'

The group JEERS.

SIMON (CONT'D)
'Numerous disasters and misfortunes
that occur daily all have their origin
in commerce with whores.'

Raucous LAUGHTER from the group.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Oh my. Look at this engraving.
This couldn't be the work of a
Calvinist minister!

COMMOTION ensues as all reach for the book. PIETER grabs it away from Simon.

PIETER
Let me see that!
(ogling)
Let's go to a *musico* tonight!

CHORUS of CHEERS.

JARIG snatches the book away from Pieter and holds it out of reach.

JARIG

Pieter, I thought you were getting married!

VAN DEN ENDEN

Careful, gentlemen! That's my last copy. Next to the Holy Bible, Amsterdamsch Hoerdom is my best seller!

Baruch bounds down the stairs. O.S. LAUGHTER settles into restraint.

BARUCH

What's all the commotion?

SIMON

We're planning this evening's entertainment; a consolation party for our favorite heretic.

VAN DEN ENDEN (O.S.)

Better not overdo it. We have a rehearsal tomorrow night.

BARUCH

No need to console me, Simon. They did nothing I would not have done myself if I did not dread scandal.

VAN DEN ENDEN

Scandal? Hell! If this were Rome, the Inquisition would have roasted you on the stake, like Giordano Bruno.

SIMON

Would it be too scandalous for you to go out and have some fun for a change with your friends?

BARUCH

Mirth can never be excessive. Where are we going?

EXT. 'MARIE THE TOBACCO VENDOR' STOREFRONT -- NIGHT

A subtle glow of light illuminates the gauzy red curtains in the plain storefront window of #7 St. Antoine Breestrat, the *musico* of Marie the Tobacco Vendor.

O.S. A bell TINKLES, the PATTERN of footsteps.

INT. 'MARIE THE TOBACCO VENDOR'- ANTEROOM

A small reception room, gaudily decorated, with a red door opposite the entrance.

Behind the counter, the proprietor/procuress, MADAME MARIE, 40's, plump and rosy-cheeked, wearing a low-cut dress barely concealing her huge breasts, acknowledges Baruch and FIVE of his companions: Jarig, Simon and Pieter; and two others: LODEWIJK MEYER and JOHAN BOUWMEESTER.

Madame Marie quickly sizes-up the men with a practiced eye as they stare at the wall behind her, transfixed by the pornographic drawings of couples engaged in a variety of explicit sexual acts. Baruch studies his shoes in embarrassment.

Jarig carefully removes a long, clay pipe from his overcoat and massages the inside of his pipe bowl.

MADAME MARIE

Been a long time since I saw a fellow fingering his *pijp* like that. You'll get my *kwedio* all wet if you keep that up.

Madame Marie CACKLES, revealing a toothless grin. Jarig tries to suppress a smile.

JARIG

Madame, would you kindly direct us to the *musico*?

MADAME MARIE

That'll be four stuivers each to get in. Liquor's extra. You make your own arrangements with the girls.

INT. *MUSICO* -- MOMENTS LATER

A large, smoke-filled room lined with rows of bench tables packed with men and women drinking, smoking and playing cards. At one end of the room, three musicians play a screeching fiddle, an organ, and a droning hurdy-gurdy.

KATIE, 18, a thin and waif-like prostitute with an engaging smile, approaches Baruch.

KATIE

Come, Lovey, let's sit. My name's Katie. What's yours?

Hopelessly disoriented, Baruch allows Katie to take his hand and guide him to a table.

BARUCH

Buh... Benedict.

BARUCH'S TABLE -- SHORTLY AFTER

Baruch and his friends have each paired up with a woman. All are having a good time drinking, smoking, playing cards,

and CLAPPING to the lively music. They shout to make themselves heard above the din.

SIMON
Having fun yet, Baruch?

Baruch's friends lean forward, curious to hear his response.

BARUCH
Frankly, yes.

PIETER
We should give ourselves a name to remind us of our night with these lovely ladies!

JARIG
How about the 'Pleiades', the 'Seven Virgins?'

BARUCH
Last time I counted there were only six of us.

JARIG
We'll make Van den Enden an honorary member then.

Baruch raises his drink.

BARUCH
I'll drink to that!

SAME SCENE -- LATER

Only Jarig, Pieter, Simon and Baruch remain at the table with their companions. Jarig's companion pulls him up and they head to the back rooms.

SAME SCENE -- EVEN LATER

Only Simon and his companion, along with Baruch and Katie remain at the table. Simon stumbles to his feet and dances his companion toward the back rooms.

Katie and Baruch remain alone at the table. She cozies up to Baruch.

KATIE
Do you want to go into the back, Honey?

Baruch shrugs, indicating his ambivalence.

KATIE (CONT'D)
You're a timid one, aren't you?

Katie persists, tonguing Baruch's fingers one by one. She inspects Baruch's "found" ring, now engraved with the word Caute against a background of thorns and a rose.

KATIE (CONT'D)
(spelling)
'C-A-U-T-E.' What does *that* mean?

BARUCH
'Be Careful' in Latin.

POV. UNDER THE TABLE

Katie slides her free hand toward Baruch's crotch.

KATIE (O.S.)
Then I'm giving you fair warning,
Benedict.

INT. IN DE KONST-WINKEL -- NIGHT

A pouting Clara hangs leaflets publicizing the upcoming performance of Eunuchus, at the Amsterdam Municipal Theater.

DIRK KERCKRINCK, 18, blonde, handsome, confident and well dressed enters the store as Clara places a brochure on the counter.

DIRK
Goedenavond, Lovely one! Why such a sourpuss?

Clara gives Dirk the once over, likes the way he looks.

CLARA
If you've come to see the Professor,
I'm afraid he's out for the evening.
So is everyone else, for that matter.

Dirk notices the collection of lutes.

DIRK
I don't mind waiting. May I play
one of those lutes?

CLARA
Suit yourself. They're not tuned.

Dirk picks up a baroque lute and begins to tune it expertly.

DIRK
I'm Dirk Kerckrinck, by the way.
(PLAYS a wild flourish
of arpeggios)
You must be the Professor's daughter?

CLARA

(awed)
I've never seen anyone play like
that before.

O.S. As delicate, lovely LUTE MUSIC plays on--

SAME SCENE -- LATER

Clara brings a book and sits next to Dirk. Enchanted, she puts her book down and watches him play.

SAME SCENE -- LATER

Clara SINGS *Vous me l'aviez bien dit*, a French *air de cour* (Huygens) to Dirk's accompaniment.

EXT. THE *SINGEL* -- LATER

O.S. Clara'S SONG continues as Baruch and his still drunken friends trudge down the road.

Two passersby recognize Baruch. One whispers to the other who nods in agreement.

One passerby deliberately bumps into Baruch. Baruch stumbles, nearly falling.

O.S. Clara'S SONG ends.

PASSER-BY

Why don't you look where you're going,
Apikoros!

The passersby hurry on. Jarig and Simon yell CATCALLS after them.

JARIG

Rotten bastards!

SIMON

Go piss in your breeches!

EXT. AMSTERDAM MUNICIPAL THEATER -- NIGHT

Next to the main entrance, a poster reads: Eunuchus ("The Eunuch") by Terence. Directed by Franz van Den Enden

INT. AMSTERDAM MUNICIPAL THEATER -- NIGHT

A packed house views the activity onstage in rapt attention.

ONSTAGE

The set is a palace courtyard, lit for day. Baruch plays the part of CHAERA, a young nobleman, with Simon in the role of PARMENO, his servant. Latin is subtitled in English.

BARUCH/CHAERA

*O fortunatum istum eunuchum quiquidem
in hanc detur domum. How fortunate
is that eunuch, who lives in her
house!*

SIMON/PARMENO

Quid ita? Why so?

BARUCH/CHAERA

*Rogitas? You need ask? Aderit una
in unis aedibus, cibum non numquam
capiet cum ea, interdum propter
dormiet. He is together with her
there-- taking his meat with her,
sleeping by her.*

SIMON/PARMENO

*Pro illo te ducam. Et esse illum
dicam. I will lead you instead of
him. I will say you are he.*

BARUCH/CHAERA

Intellego. I understand.

SIMON/PARMENO

*Tu illis fruire commodis. Tangas,
ludas, propter dormias; quandoquidem
illarum neque te quisquam novit neque
scit qui sies. Then you may enjoy
all those things: you may touch her,
play with her, and sleep by her since
no one will know who you are.*

Parmeno gestures to Chaera's mid-section.

SIMON/PARMENO (CONT'D)

*Praeterea forma et aetas ipsast facile
ut pro eunucho probes. Your shape
and size is the same, that you may
easily pass for a eunuch.*

IN THE AUDIENCE.

General laughter by all, including Clara who rests her head on Dirk's shoulder.

EXT. AMSTERDAM MUNICIPAL THEATER/STEPS -- LATER

A heavy rain pelts down as Van den Enden's students receive congratulations from the theater-goers who quickly scurry away. Baruch, wearing his father's overcoat and carrying an umbrella, descends the steps.

A MAN cloaked IN BLACK, his face hidden by a wide-brimmed hat, blocks Baruch's path.

MAN IN BLACK

Apikoros!

Startled by the rough voice, Baruch looks up at the man who keeps his face hidden.

MAN IN BLACK (CONT'D)

Now *you* can be the eunuch!

A gleaming silver blade appears from the man's coat. He lunges at Baruch.

Baruch instinctively turns to avoid the blow. He tries to parry the knife with his umbrella.

The man manages to thrust the blade into Baruch's groin. Baruch doubles over in pain and collapses in a heap.

The Man in Black hurries off. O.S., SHOUTS of "HELP."

INT. VAN DEN ENDEN'S LIVING QUARTERS -- LATER

A thoughtful Baruch warms himself by the fire. Nearby, Clara mends his overcoat. She holds it up for inspection.

CLARA

Good as new! Guess your father was looking after you.

BARUCH

What?

CLARA

If it was not for your father's coat perhaps your attacker would have accomplished his objective. Of course, if he *had* succeeded in making you a eunuch, would you have any reason to frequent another *musico*?

BARUCH

Certainly. For the music.

Clara's mood turns serious.

CLARA

Who was it, Baruch?

BARUCH

I have no idea. It was so dark. It happened so quickly.

CLARA

You apparently didn't put up much of a defense!

Baruch is taken aback by Clara's apparent insensitivity.

BARUCH

What did you expect? The beast was on top of me before I even had a chance to react!

Astonished, Clara throws the coat at Baruch.

CLARA

The beast? It was your behavior that was bestial. I heard what happened at that *musico*. Did you even bother to ask her name?

BARUCH

I've been talking about my attacker, Clara! Obviously your mind has been elsewhere.

CLARA

I want to show you something.

Clara shyly unbuttons the top button of her dress. Baruch, now wide-eyed, is unsure of what's going on.

VAN DEN ENDEN STAIRCASE

As Van den Enden and his wife proceed upstairs they overhear the conversation between Baruch and Clara.

LIVING ROOM

Clara lifts a small pearl necklace from her bodice.

CLARA

Dirk gave these pearls to me. Do you think I should keep them?

Clara gets no indication from Baruch's impervious face.

CLARA (CONT'D)

Or should I give them back? I'll do whatever you say.

Baruch kneels before Clara. He caresses her hands, then kisses them.

BARUCH

These are very expensive. I regret I have nothing comparable to give you as a token of *my* affection.

Tears well up in both their eyes. He releases her hands.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

Keep them, Clara. I can't stay.

CLARA
(incredulous)
Why?

VAN DEN ENDEN (O.S.)
Because it is simply too dangerous
for him to remain here.

Baruch and Clara look up, surprised to see Van den Enden and Maria in the kitchen.

VAN DEN ENDEN (CONT'D)
Baruch has become the latest Judas
goat for those whose fears drive
their actions.

Van den Enden glances at his wife who nods in agreement.

VAN DEN ENDEN (CONT'D)
We wouldn't want him to become their
next sacrificial offering.

INT. KALVERSTRAAT COFFEESHOP -- DAY

The 'Pleiades' sit at a window table watching the falling rain. The mood is somber. Baruch nibbles absently on a roll while the others enjoy large meals.

SIMON
How will you support yourself, Baruch?

BARUCH
My needs are simple, Simon. I have
enough.

SIMON
You barely eat anything as it is.

BARUCH
Eating is simply a way to avoid
starving.

JARIG
And swimming is just a way to avoid
drowning. Did you ever manage to
collect anything from that Spanish
siren and her brothers?

Baruch meekly displays his ring.

JARIG (CONT'D)
Christ, Baruch, do you always have
to be so stoic? Let us provide you
with some things to make your life a
little easier. Like some cash.

BARUCH

No.

MEYER

You can have my mistress.

BARUCH

(amused)

Thank you, but no.

PIETER

Take my wife, please.

The men try to keep the moment light.

JARIG

Jesus, Pieter, you just got married last week.

BOUWMEESTER

At least you're better off than Galileo when he was excommunicated. Poor man was under house arrest for the rest of his life.

BARUCH

At least he had a house.

MEYER

A surgeon friend of mine has a room to let, near the University of Leiden. He owes me a favor. It's time he pays up.

Baruch is interested.

BOUWMEESTER

I've had an epiphany! You're already a philosopher. Now, be a lens maker. Like Galileo. A suitable profession for a man of your temperament.

Baruch is intrigued with the idea.

MEYER

And as you become adept, men of science will want to meet you, Baruch.

JARIG

Or, you could just fake it. Professor 'V' just told me about some German youth he heard about named Leipzig. No, that's where he's from. His name's Leibniz. That's it. Gottfried Leibniz.

(MORE)

JARIG (CONT'D)

Anyway, apparently this son of a bitch, who happens to be quite gifted, decides he wants to be initiated into a secret society of alchemists even though he knows absolutely nothing about alchemy.

INT. ALCHEMIST'S LAB -- NIGHT

A cramped, rustic room with a fireplace prominently in a corner. Above it, next to a pendulum clock, a stuffed crocodile hangs like a trophy, its toothy jaws opened wide. Shelves laden with pottery vessels of various shapes and sizes line the walls.

O.S. a rhythmic WHOOSH of air forced from a bellows. Fingers impatiently DRUM on a desk. Pen strokes SCRATCH paper.

A decrepit octogenarian squeezes a bellows below a crucible to fan the flames in a small hearth.

JARIG (V.O.)

So he reads some books on the subject, composes a letter containing the most obscure expressions only he can understand and sends it to the director of the society requesting admission.

GOTTFRIED LEIBNIZ, early 20's, hawkish eyes, a ruddy, expansive face, thin lips, fiercely impudent nose, and curly black hair tied in a ponytail, drops his quill into an ink well and looks at the clock.

LEIBNIZ

(in a distinctive
high-pitched voice)

Verdammt! I'm late for church.

Leibniz seals the envelope with wax.

LEIBNIZ (CONT'D)

Put that infernal bellows down and come here, you miserable withered mandrake!

Leibniz insolently thrusts the envelope toward the old man who hobbles over.

LEIBNIZ (CONT'D)

See to it that Baron von Boineburg receives this letter. When he reads it he will be convinced I am on the verge of discovering the elixir of immortal life.

(MORE)

LEIBNIZ (CONT'D)

(pauses, disdainfully)

Just make sure no one sees you, Graybeard, or they may doubt my claims. You are not exactly the fountain of youth. More like a dribble, you *Flachwichser*.

INT. COFFEESHOP -- CONTINUOUS

The men are fascinated by the story.

SIMON

What happened?

JARIG

They took him in all right. Made him secretary, in fact. Even gave him a pension on the basis of his supposed great knowledge.

The men are incredulous.

JARIG (CONT'D)

But this Leibniz fellow wouldn't know a philosopher's stone from a gallstone if he passed one through his ass.

O.S. LAUGHTER.

OVER the FADING LAUGHTER the SLOSHING OF HORSES' HOOVES through muddy water carries over into:

EXT. DUTCH COAST NEAR KATWIJK - *VLIET* RIVER BANK - NEAR DAWN

Campy's horses pull the canal boat slowly through the polders marked with small yellow flags that pop out among the wildflowers. The boat is pointed at both ends and houses a small cabin on deck.

On a battered red-cushioned bench at the bow, bundled in his overcoat, Baruch gazes above the horizon at the WANING CRESCENT MOON in a lapis colored sky.

Campy is curious to learn more about his taciturn passenger, who seems deep in his own thoughts.

CAMPY

Ever see that painting by Brueghel of a Dutchman pissing on the moon?

Baruch continues to look ahead at the waning night sky.

BARUCH

Can't say that I have.

CAMPY (O.S.)

Brueghel's moon happens to be in the exact same phase as this one.

Baruch is amused by the irreverent captain, but continues to stare ahead.

BARUCH

You don't say.

CAMPY

This moon is 26 days old. Plus or minus a few hours.

Campy points to the same area of the sky.

CAMPY (CONT'D)

Now look just a few degrees northeast of it. Can you see those two stars?

Baruch squints his eyes to discern the stars from the moonglow.

CAMPY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

'Over the edge of the world now comes forth Great Orion... hunter of the stars... behold the gleaming star-fire of his sword.'

BARUCH

(impressed)

Who said that?

CAMPY

I did.

Campy GUFFAWS at his own joke. He winks at Baruch.

BARUCH

'Can you tie cords to Pleiades or undo the reins of Orion? Can you lead out Mazzaroth in its season, conduct the bear with her sons?'

CAMPY

That's good. Who said that?

BARUCH

Job. Chapter 38, verses 31 and 32.

CAMPY

My luck I'd get a preacher on board.

BARUCH

A preacher? Hardly.

CAMPY
Name's Camphuysen. What's yours?

BARUCH
(pauses)
Benedictus.

Campy scrutinizes Baruch.

CAMPY
That your family name or your
Christian name?

BARUCH
Neither. It's my *nom de guerre*.
I've abandoned the old one.

CAMPY
I don't mean to pry into your private
affairs, mister, but 'Benedictus' is
too Latin, too long and too fancy.
You'd be better off with... 'Benny'.

Baruch smiles for the first time at this likeable man.

BARUCH
I'll tell you what, Minjeer
Camphuysen. You may call me 'Benny'
if I can call you 'Campy'.

They both laugh.

CAMPY
It's a deal. Where you staying in
Leiden, Benny?

BARUCH
I am renting a room from a surgeon
in Rijnsburg. Just a short walk
from the University.

CAMPY
A scholar, are you?

Baruch's smile quickly fades as he retreats into a vivid
memory and gazes into the muddy water.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
My son, the scholar.

MORTERA (V.O.)
A scholar is he? Our sage, Avtalyon,
says: 'Scholars, watch your words,
lest you be punished by exile to a
place of bad water.'

EXT. FIELD OF TULIPS -- DAY

Red and scarlet tulips wave in the cool spring breeze, stretching to the horizon dotted with windmills, farmhouses and cattle, in bucolic splendor.

EXT. HERMAN HOOMAN'S HOUSE -- DAY

A plaque made from Delft tile entitled H. Hooman, Surgeon is fastened beside the front door of the thatched roof, red-paneled cottage house.

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM

Sunlight filtered through a single, leaded-glass window pane illuminates a small room which contains a peat-burning stove, desk, chair and a bed. A door affords a private entrance.

Baruch cursorily inspects the room. Satisfied, he nods to Dr. Hooman's young and pretty MAIDSERVANT who presents Baruch with a Lease Agreement, while giving him the "once-over."

Baruch signs Benedict Spinoza on the document and returns the contract with some cash. She lingers, brings her face close to his.

Baruch is tempted but he gently propels her toward the door.

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- LATER

Baruch unpacks his clothes and places them on his bed, to which the red canopy is now attached.

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Smoking a clay pipe contentedly, Baruch writes in his notebook. O.S. a timid KNOCK at the door. Baruch is startled.

BARUCH

Yes?

The Maidservant pokes her head in, flirtatiously.

MAIDSERVANT

I brought you fresh linens, Minjeer Spinoza. Would you like me to... make your bed?

BARUCH

Yes... thank you... Miss.

Distracted by the Maidservant's alluring behind as she bends to make his bed, Baruch removes his pipe and gapes. Sensing his gaze, she turns and smiles suggestively.

Baruch sighs, places the pipe back in his mouth and resigns himself to writing.

BARUCH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I realized that in order to survive
I would have to give up the ordinary
pursuits of honor, wealth and...
sensual pleasure---

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- DAY

A copy of Descartes' Optics lies open on a desk where Baruch sketches an optical ray-tracing pattern.

BARUCH (V.O.)
---because these goods seemed to be
fleeting and unstable, frequently
leading to our downfall and
destruction.

The steps of lens crafting have begun. -- MONTAGE

-- Baruch saws a glass blank from a raw slab of glass with a hacksaw.

BARUCH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Whereas, true good is the love of
something eternal and immutable.

-- Baruch's foot pushes the pedal of a lathe which turns a grindstone that grinds the glass. Glass dust fills the air. Baruch begins to cough.

BARUCH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Never the source of sadness, danger
or suffering. But only of joy.

-- Baruch fine-polishes a lens by hand with a rag and some red powder.

BARUCH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It is our striving for knowledge
that is the union the mind has with
the whole of nature.

END MONTAGE

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF LEIDEN -- DAY

On the tree-shaded campus, Baruch and a small group of professors wearing black frocked coats are huddled together in conversation.

BARUCH (V.O.)
And when we see the way in which
this is so, and strive so that others
(MORE)

BARUCH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
may see it too, then we have achieved
the highest human perfection.

EXT. RIJNSBURG - A COUNTRY ROAD OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE -- DAY

HOWLING WIND swirls autumn leaves and dust. HENRY OLDENBURG, mid 30's, short and pudgy, scurries after his hat. He catches up to it, but before he can retrieve it, a wind gust blows it away again. The chase resumes.

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

WIND WHISTLES through cracks in the door and window, swirling glass dust around.

Baruch holds two glass lenses in each hand between his thumb and forefinger so they are parallel, approximately twelve inches apart. He moves his crude hand scope in several directions, scanning the room. Stops.

BARUCH'S POV

A black widow spider suspended in a messy web is seen through the "telescope."

O.S. An EARSPLITTING SHRIEK carries over into:

(FLASHBACK) INT. SPINOZA HOME, BARUCH'S BEDROOM -- DAY

At the foot of the bed, a large BLACK WIDOW SPIDER clings to its strands. Its underside reveals the tell-tale red hourglass. A terrified Hana Devorah holds back Baruch at 6, Isaac, 9.

HANA DEVORAH
A Shoebutton spider! Stand back!
It's probably poisonous!
(calmer)
Don't move.

Hana Devorah hurries out of the room, leaving the boys transfixed on the spider.

Hana Devorah returns with a broom and dustpan which she hands to Isaac. Hana promptly SMASHES the spider with the end of her broomstick. It makes a hideous CRACKLING SOUND. Proud of her accomplishment, she sweeps the remains into the dustpan.

Baruch and Isaac stare at the spot where the killing occurred. A splotch of blood remains. Isaac is nauseous; he RETCHES.

A tear forms in the corner of Baruch's eye.

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM-- (BACK TO PRESENT)

Baruch creeps cautiously over to the spider and stares with childlike wonderment.

BARUCH
A 'Shoebutton!'

He inches a few steps closer.

BARUCH (CONT'D)
Latrodectus! Sneaky biter!

O.S. KNOCKS on the door. Baruch, shaken from his reverie, slowly backs away from the spider. He opens the door, startled to see a stranger; pudgy Henry Oldenberg clutching his runaway hat.

HENRY
Benedict Spinoza?

BARUCH
Yes.

Henry smiles broadly, revealing a gap between his front teeth that creates distorted sibilants in certain consonants. His English dialect is mixed with a thick German accent.

HENRY
Oh, praise heaven! My name is
Oldenburg. Henry Oldenburg.

A wind gust propels him through the door.

Papers fly everywhere. The SPIDER WEB is destroyed.

HENRY (CONT'D)
I believe I was driven here by fate.

BARUCH
Or by the wind. Come in, Mr.
Oldenburg.

Henry flashes a self-effacing smile.

HENRY
Henry. Please.

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Baruch sits on the *ledikant* opposite Henry who has settled into the desk chair. Henry's gaze drifts to the bookcase and the optical equipment on the desk.

Baruch steals another glance toward the now-tattered web, alarmed that the spider has apparently disappeared. His eyes frantically search the area.

HENRY

I represent a society of philosophers
and scientists from Gresham College
in London.

BARUCH

(distracted)

I have heard of it.

HENRY

It is our business to conduct
experimental inquiries into the
secrets of nature. I investigate
and report on new developments.

Intrigued, Baruch leans forward.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Men for whom I have the highest regard
say that you excel in the Cartesian
philosophy. Frankly, I was most
anxious to--

BARUCH

Who told you about me?

Henry LAUGHS good-naturedly, trying to brush him off.

HENRY

Oh, I have correspondents everywhere
in Europe, Mr. Spino--.

BARUCH

-- Do call me Benedict.

HENRY

Even those whom you have not yet
met... they know about you, Benedict.
I assure you. People in very high
places. You might be surprised.

BARUCH

You cannot say whom?

HENRY

(pondering)

I believe I've said it twice already.

Baruch does a double-take.

BARUCH

Indeed you have. Pardon me for not
listening more carefully.

(a beat)

Henry, would you like a beer?

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- LATER

O.S. cows MOO, cowbells CLANG. Sounds of farm machinery are heard in the distance. After a few beers, Baruch and Henry are relaxed and enjoying their budding friendship.

HENRY

I'm afraid my accent refuses to be subjugated to my will. You can take the boy out of Bremen but not Bremen out of the boy, do you know what I mean?

Henry LAUGHS self-consciously.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Dreadful language, I admit. A prince... I forget who... once said that he spoke French to his courtiers, Latin to his confessor and German to his horse!

Henry CHUCKLES at his own joke. Baruch smiles solicitously. Henry gets down to business.

HENRY (CONT'D)

But I am puzzled, Benedict. You tell me there cannot exist two substances in Nature. Unlike Descartes, you maintain there is only one--

BARUCH

--God. Infinite and supremely perfect.

HENRY

Yet you do not believe in divine will?

BARUCH

If God acts for the sake of an end, then He necessarily wants something which He lacks. Such a doctrine takes away God's perfection, does it not?

HENRY

I do not see how.

Baruch goes to his desk, lights his pipe and starts to pace.

BARUCH

Say a stone falls from a roof onto a man's head--

Baruch stops.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

-- and kills him. Why did the stone fall?

HENRY

Because God willed it! How else could so many circumstances have conspired to produce that result by chance?

Baruch resumes pacing. O.S. The WIND HOWLS.

BARUCH

A gust of wind may have launched that stone off the roof as the man passed by that way.

HENRY

What caused the wind to blow in the first place?

BARUCH

The sea churned the day before.

HENRY

But why was that man walking in that direction and at that time, exactly?

BARUCH

Perhaps a friend invited him for dinner.

HENRY

Yet, had that man passed by just a moment earlier or a moment later, the stone would have missed his head.

BARUCH

Yes.

Baruch sits on the *ledikant* and takes a few puffs from his pipe. Henry waits expectantly for the punch line.

HENRY

But I'm waiting for you to provide me with a cause!

BARUCH

I am certain you would like me to take refuge, ultimately, in the will of God.

HENRY

Yes!

BARUCH

The sanctuary of ignorance.

HENRY

No!

BARUCH

Final causes are nothing but human fictions. Nature, on the other hand, has no end set before it.

Baruch extinguishes his pipe. Henry is skeptical.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

Henry, do you really believe the Creator was so displeased with his creation that he would hurl a rock upon his head to destroy him?

HENRY

The Holy Scripture informs us that God is sometimes wrathful. At other times, merciful. How else do you account for miracles?

BARUCH

I don't. God doesn't contravene His own laws of Nature.

HENRY

Would you have me worship the rock instead?

O.S. KNOCKS at the door.

BARUCH

That must be my new student. I wasn't expecting him until later.

HENRY

(sarcastically)

Perhaps the wind accelerated his arrival.

BARUCH

Now you understand my point!

Baruch opens the door to JOHANNES CASEARIUS (20, blonde, tall and handsome) who helps Baruch close the door against the wind.

CASEARIUS

Whew! A flying stone just missed my head! It's a *miracle* I got here alive.

O.S. Henry BURSTS with LAUGHTER and downs some beer. Baruch stifles a smile. Henry's odd reaction takes Casearius by surprise.

CASEARIUS (CONT'D)

What's so funny?

(to Baruch)

Am I too early for my lessons?

Baruch winks at Oldenburg and puts his hand on Casearius' shoulder.

BARUCH

On the contrary. I'm afraid you may be too late for them.

EXT. THE HAGUE- INNER COURT OF THE *BINNENHOF* -- DAY

The remains of a moated medieval castle, surrounded by a small lake, enclosed by flanking wings pierced by arched gateways and outbuilding apartments-- government offices and barracks for the guard of the States General.

Three men, all in aristocratic attire, stride purposefully across the cobbled courtyard: CONSTANTIJN HUYGENS SR., a dignified elder statesman, mid-60's; CHRISTIAAN, his younger son, 30, slight build, a beautiful, almost effeminate face with strikingly fine features; and CONSTANTIJN JR., mid-30's, who carries a heavy, ornately decorated box which causes him to struggle to keep up.

CONSTANTIJN JR.

I'm going to drop your damn pendulum, Christiaan. Here.

They stop. Constantijn hands the box to Christiaan and shakes his arms out in relief. Christiaan's thin arms sag with the weight of the box. He GRUNTS.

CHRISTIAAN

You should have hired a coach, father.

CONSTANTIJN SR.

A *stadholder* would have been provided one. Grand Pensionary De Witt, however, is a bird of a different feather.

INT. THE HAGUE, OFFICE OF THE GRAND PENSIONARY TO THE STATES OF HOLLAND -- FOLLOWING

Large windows in a spacious, but not ostentatious, second floor office overlook the gardens in an inner court below.

JAN DE WITT, 35, tall, gaunt, with a thin mustache and a small goatee, calculates numbers on a pad of paper at his desk. O.S. A KNOCK at the door. An aide enters.

AIDE

The Honorable Constantijn Huygens and his sons have arrived.

AT A TABLE-- MOMENTS LATER

Sunlight glints on a brass, copper and chrome pendulum as De Witt carefully examines it. The Huygens look on.

DE WITT

You claim your clock is an improvement over Galileo's design?

CHRISTIAAN

A vast improvement. The escapement has been modified to compensate for the wide angle of the pendulum swing.

De Witt is skeptical.

DE WITT

We lost a vessel recently. The skipper crashed right into an island reef in the fog. Had no idea where he was. Will your instrument prevent such accidents from occurring?

CHRISTIAAN

We've had two trial runs thus far, Councillor. Neither ship deviated even a single degree off course. The clock maintained a perfectly constant rate on both occasions.

DE WITT

How were the seas?

CHRISTIAAN

Calm.

DE WITT

But can your clock pass muster under more challenging conditions?

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- DAY

Rays of the morning sun stream through the window. Glass dust is everywhere.

ON THE WINDOWSILL

Mirrors of a small microscope reflect the sunlight.

Baruch coughs lightly, rubs finishing polish on a small lens with jeweler's rouge as he dictates to Casearius who reclines on the *ledikant*.

Casearius suddenly jolts up to an upright position in consternation.

CASEARIUS

You are surely mistaken. I know
that I am *absolutely* free to choose!

BARUCH

(between coughs)

You just imagine you are-- in the
same way a baby thinks that it freely
desires milk, an angry child revenge
and a coward flight.

CASEARIUS

I am neither a slave to my passions,
nor my appetites!

BARUCH

No? Then why did you stop taking
dictation?

CASEARIUS

Just now?

BARUCH

A few moments ago.

CASEARIUS

Because I was offended by what you
said and I wanted to stop writing.

BARUCH

You may have thought you wanted to
stop, but you couldn't have prevented
it in any case.

CASEARIUS

What? I'm not some machine. I *made*
myself stop because I thought it!

BARUCH

No, you didn't--

Baruch COUGHS HARD.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

-- not any more than I can stop myself
from coughing by wishing it.

Another COUGHING SPASM while O.S. loud, insistent KNOCKS on
the door. Baruch gestures to Casearius who quickly opens
the door.

The Huygens brothers, Christiaan and Constantijn Jr. dressed
in the elegant manner of courtiers with fashionable cravats
and silk shirts, stride into the room.

CHRISTIAAN

(formally)

I am Christiaan Huygens. This is my brother, Constantijn. We have come at the urging of Henry Oldenburg-- to see Benedict Spinoza.

Baruch wipes his hands of glass dust and greets them. He is astonished by the unexpected appearance of the famous Huygens.

BARUCH

What a surprise and pleasure! You have no idea how long I've wanted to meet you, Mr. Huygens.

Christiaan gingerly touches Baruch's extended hand, still dusty with glass powder. Constantijn follows, but has no qualms about shaking it.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

May I introduce my transcriber, Johannes Casearius?

Casearius nods enthusiastically to Christiaan.

CHRISTIAAN

How sweet.

Casearius wilts under Christiaan's supercilious gaze and crumples onto the *ledikant*.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)

(to Baruch)

What are you writing?

BARUCH

A treatise on Descartes' Meditations.

CHRISTIAAN

Ah, yes. I remember now. Henry told me. Rene was my first algebra tutor, you know. Strange man. Very strange. Both of him!

CASEARIUS

Ha,ha. I got it. His mind-body dualism. Very funny.

Ignoring Casearius, Christiaan superciliously scans Baruch's modest accommodations as he fixes his gaze upon the microscope on the windowsill and the lens on the workbench.

CHRISTIAAN

I must admit that Henry's excessive regard for your talents prompted my visit, which surprises me all the

(MORE)

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)

more because I can plainly see that your lathe is quite crude. I suppose that explains why your lenses are by necessity so small...do you mind if I look at the one you're working on?

BARUCH

You're welcome to. It's finished.

Christiaan carefully examines both sides of the lens.

CHRISTIAAN

Why not *convex-concave*?

BARUCH

Plano-convex can be made in half the time, and at half the cost. Besides, you cannot get the rays to fall perpendicularly on a concave surface.

CHRISTIAAN

Too bad. I can.

Christiaan casually flips the lens to Constantijn, who looks at it cursorily and hands it back to Baruch.

CONSTANTIJN JR.

It *does* have an admirable polish.

CHRISTIAAN

(sits)

May I look through your microscope?

BARUCH

Of course.

With a rag, Baruch dusts off the instrument and presents it to Christiaan.

CHRISTIAAN

Have you a specimen?

From a drawer in his desk, Baruch removes a large glass jar containing the remains of several spiders. He pours the contents onto a piece of paper in front of Christiaan.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)

Good Heavens! I didn't mean an entire collection. Do you want to make me ill? What's that rotund, black creature?

BARUCH

Latrodectus.

(sadly)

I found it... just yesterday.

CHRISTIAAN
Perfectly revolting.

Christiaan places the black widow on the microscope viewing plate with a small forceps. He looks through the eyepiece of the microscope in surprise.

THROUGH THE MICROSCOPE EYEPIECE

Magnified view of the red hourglass on the spider's underside.

CHRISTIAAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Exquisite detail. I congratulate you, Mr. Spinoza. These optics are indeed superb.

(shudders)

Have a look brother. The creature's almost sexual, really. Reminds me of that Indian legend about the vampire... with a fanged vagina.

Constantijn quickly takes Christiaan's place. Christiaan looks over his brother's shoulder.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)
Gives you a queasy feeling in the pit of your stomach, doesn't it? Might cause you to think twice about inserting your *pijp* up the meat cleaver.

Constantijn CHUCKLES. Christiaan turns to Baruch to gauge his reaction. Baruch's expression is inscrutable. Christiaan tries a different tactic to incite him.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)
But perhaps I shouldn't assume that these matters would concern you--
(nods to Casearius)
--two.

Restraining himself, Baruch takes a deep breath.

BARUCH
While your imagination is vivid, Mr. Huygens, you should not be so quick to attribute to nature either beauty or deformity, order or confusion. Things are not more or less perfect because they please or offend you.

CHRISTIAAN
What makes you think I'm offended, Mr. Spinoza?
(hiding his amusement)
I'm merely... curious.

Christiaan taps his brother on the shoulder.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)

It's time to leave.

Constantijn jumps to do his brother's bidding.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)

We're hosting a party in honor of my father's 65th birthday at our Hofwijk estate. I have a surprise planned that should interest you. I shall see to it that you receive an invitation. We'd be honored if you would attend.

(an afterthought)

Do bring one of your excellent little telescopes. We'll be viewing the planets... and perhaps that new comet, weather permitting. Good day... gentlemen.

The door SLAMS as Baruch and Casarius exchange bewildered glances.

EXT. THE SINGEL -- DAY

O.S. Church BELLS TOLL. Withered linden trees drooping in the drizzling mist, line the canal. Human corpses wrapped in white sheets are stacked against a lamppost.

A few people scuttle across the *Kalverstraat*, cloaks and kerchiefs pulled close to their faces, ignoring the young PREACHER who YELLS in the middle of the street.

PREACHER

What is heard but swearing and cursing? What is to be seen but drunkenness and daily trafficking in vile gain? Turn from sin, O Netherlands!

Two men pull up in a horse-drawn cart. They unceremoniously drop the corpses into the cart. Lime flies in the air.

PREACHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

A star in the heavens plain was seen in the southeast, with rays great and small. What is this if not a sign that God will punish us all?

INT. IN DE KONST-WINKEL -- CONTINUOUS

Grief and tension lining his face, Simon de Vries sits at the front desk normally occupied by Clara or Van den Enden. His quill pen SCRATCHES on paper.

SIMON (V.O.)

Most upright friend, I have long wished to pay you a visit, but as you know the plague confines us to these quarters. Last week alone over 700 people died in Amsterdam.

CUT TO:

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- MORNING

Baruch and Casearius silently eat breakfast of oatmeal, raisins and milk as Baruch reads Simon's' letter. Casearius casually flips through the pages of a book.

SIMON (V.O.)

I am sorry to report that Franz's wife is gravely ill. Also, Pieter's young son is developing small red sores on the surface of his skin...

His appetite lost, Baruch shoves away his cereal and continues reading the letter.

SIMON (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I am planning to leave for Long Orchard within the week. I beg you to vacate your lodgings and join me immediately in Schiedam where the country air may spare you.

Baruch stares across the table at Casearius, who returns his glances and SLAMS his book closed.

CASEARIUS

I'm bored.

BARUCH

So?

CASEARIUS

I don't like being bored.

BARUCH

Then wait. Soon it will pass either to joy or sorrow.

CASEARIUS

I'm going for a walk. You coming?

BARUCH

No.

Casearius is disgusted. Baruch resumes reading.

SIMON (V.O.)

I envy Casearius who dwells beneath the same roof and can converse with you on the highest matters at breakfast, at dinner and on your walks.

O.S. the door SLAMS.

INT. IN DE KONST-WINKEL -- NIGHT

In the back of the shop, the "Pleiades" engage in an animated discussion around a paper-strewn table.

SIMON (V.O.)

Although we are physically so far apart, you have frequently been in my thoughts especially when I am immersed in your writings. Unfortunately they are still not entirely clear to the members of our group, which is why we have resumed our meetings, so that we may try and uphold truth against those who are religious and Christian in a superstitious way, and may stand firm against the onslaught of the whole world.

INT. IN DE KONST-WINKEL -- DAY

Alone at the bookstacks, a joyful Simon reads Baruch's reply.

BARUCH (V.O.)

My worthy friend. I have received your letter, long anticipated. For your cordial feelings towards me please accept my warmest thanks, and I accept your generous offer to join you at Long Orchard.

CUT TO:

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- DAY

Baruch packs up his lens-making equipment, COUGHS, stirring up glass dust.

Baruch gazes through the window at a tearful Casearius who wears a knapsack as he trudges down the path.

BARUCH (V.O.)

As for Casearius. There is no longer any reason for you to envy him. Indeed there is no one who was more troublesome to me, and no one with whom I had to be more on my guard.

EXT. CAMPY'S *TREKSCHUIT* -- NIGHT

In their familiar places on the boat and smoking their pipes, Baruch and Campy gaze at the star-studded sky.

CAMPY

Tell me what you see just below the belt of Orion.

BARUCH

Are you referring to that fuzzy patch of stars?

CAMPY

Yes. Orion's hairy balls. Now look just slightly to the east of them and you'll see a *thin* stream of stars.

Baruch squints his eyes, finally locating them.

BARUCH

Is that the infamous comet?

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL DUTCH COASTAL VILLAGE -- NIGHT

Several men, rags covering their noses and mouths, remove a sheet-wrapped corpse from a small cottage.

A Preacher waves a cross signalling a throng of villagers to set fire to the house and to the corpse.

As the corpse's family rush from the burning house, they are chased away by the mob with torches.

EXT. CAMPY'S *TREKSCHUIT* -- CONTINUOUS

CAMPY

Aye! Looks like the giant hunter's taking a piss, eh? Peeing plague into the streets of Amsterdam because the people can't stop their drinking and fornicating. At least that's what the preachers tell the people. And the idiots believe it, too!

BARUCH

People are dying, Campy. They're scared. I try not to ridicule, nor bewail, nor scorn human actions, but to understand them.

CAMPY

What's to understand? We're born. We die.

(MORE)

CAMPY (CONT'D)

Our lives are like streams that fall into the abyss of the ocean. Makes no difference if we're great rivers, middling ones or small trickles. When we finally arrive, we're all the same.

BARUCH

Then striving is pointless.

CAMPY

We're here to copulate and to populate. Far as I can tell, that's it, Matey.

Campy checks Baruch for a reaction. Baruch is thinking.

CAMPY (CONT'D)

But I'm just a wasted old barnacle now. You, on the other hand, I can't fathom.

Campy has piqued Baruch's curiosity. He challenges him.

CAMPY (CONT'D)

Why don't you have a woman, Benny?

BARUCH

(startled, blurts out)
Whom exactly would I marry? I'm an anathema-- a curse to my own people, and a Jew to everyone else.

CAMPY

But there is someone... isn't there?

BARUCH

(sadly, after a pause)
Was.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE *HERENGRACHT* BRIDGE -- NIGHT

Clara and Dirk stroll arm and arm under a full moon.

CAMPY (V.O.)

How long you plan to be in Long Orchard?

Their chaperone, Van den Enden, trails behind them at the other end of the bridge.

BARUCH (V.O.)

Until the plague passes.
(MORE)

BARUCH (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Then, I'm going to get my treatise
on Descartes published in Amsterdam.
When it's safe to return.

EXT. THE NORTH SEA/FARTHER ALONG THE COAST -- DAWN

As the sun gleams over the horizon, Campy scans the ocean waves. He throws a fisherman's net that lands at Baruch's feet.

BARUCH

What's this for?

Campy points to the waters.

CAMPY

Herring run.

Baruch's at a loss what to do.

CAMPY (CONT'D)

Just stick the net out there and
grab some. It doesn't take a genius.

Baruch reaches clumsily over the edge of the boat. Campy snickers at the comical sight. O.S. a SPLASH.

BARUCH

Look!

Baruch proudly displays a net full of fish, removes the smallest, notices its pumping blood-red gills and flings it into the sea. Campy, however has been distracted by --

CAMPY (O.S.)

Look! On shore!

ON THE BEACH

A huge sperm whale lies on the sand, near death. A crowd of onlookers surround it, their faces full of fear and awe. A line of men surveys the distance along the animal's back from its tail fins. One man measures its penis. Another man saws off a tooth.

The huge beast spasms--its final moment of life--knocking two of the men several feet with its tail. Many run away. Others use rocks and logs to beat the whale violently as its dead eyes stare balefully.

INT. IN DE KONST-WINKEL -- DAY

Baruch peers over the tall stacks of book and lingers there for a few moments studying Clara who typically has her head in a book, looking even more mature and beautiful.

BARUCH

(softly)

Clara.

Clara WHOOPS in delight. She runs around the counter and embraces Baruch. Baruch holds her close to him. She turns her face to Baruch who longs to kiss her. He brings his lips to hers.

O.S. THROAT CLEARING interrupts the kiss.

Van den Enden has been lurking nearby, unnoticed, irked by their display of affection.

VAN DEN ENDEN

The prodigal son returns.

Baruch awkwardly recovers and abruptly hugs Van den Enden, who half-heartedly returns the embrace. He seems heartbroken and much older, more subdued.

BARUCH

I am so sorry about Maria.

VAN DEN ENDEN

I'm afraid I'm not myself. It's been a shock, Baruch.

(nudging Baruch)

Go on back. Your friends have been waiting for you. And not so patiently, either. We'll talk later.

Disappointed, Clara sulks back to the counter.

AT THE TABLE

"The Pleiades", minus Simon and Pieter, congratulate Baruch as he triumphantly displays his manuscript.

BOUWMEESTER

Now that you've demolished Descartes, Baruch, whom do plan to take on next?

(a pregnant pause)

God?

Baruch grimaces in mild amusement at the sarcastic remark as the others LAUGH good-naturedly.

BARUCH

Only those who would despise the light of reason and curse it as a source of impiety.

INT. GRESHAM COLLEGE AT BISHOPSGATE, LONDON - HENRY
OLDENBURG'S OFFICE -- DAY

An expansive grassy courtyard and colonnaded archways are seen through a second floor office window. Henry Oldenberg and ROBERT BOYLE (40'S)-- tall, thin and aristocratic-- drink tea. A teapot rests on a table, alongside a closed copy of Spinoza's Principia Philosophiae Cartesiana.

Boyle lifts up Principia and waves it at Henry.

BOYLE

Your friend Spinoza speaks of God, Henry, but I suspect his God differs greatly from the true God that we Christians believe and worship.

HENRY

I can only speak of his moral virtue and character which I judge to be of a magnitude greater than most mortals.

Boyle slams the book down.

BOYLE

I believe the man's an atheist! He barely masks his contempt for our way of philosophizing. You have read his comments about my experiments on niter. He dismisses them as a waste of time.

HENRY

No, Robert. He merely trusts reason and intellect over the senses which sometimes prove defective.

BOYLE

Ah, yes. The mind of Spinoza soars above all... free and unfettered from the chains of human imperfection!
(points to the book)
In fact, there is absolutely nothing original in those pages. They are merely geometrical expositions of Descartes' principles.

INT. HENRY OLDENBURG'S OFFICE-- LATER

Henry writes at his desk.

HENRY (V.O.)

It gives me great pleasure to learn you are alive and well and remember your Oldenburg. Most gladly do I accept the gift of your treatise on Descartes.

EXT. CAMPY'S TREKSCHUIT-- SUNSET

Sitting on the *trekshuit* at sail, Baruch reads Henry's letter. Campy gazes "west" as the sun dips below the horizon.

HENRY (V.O.)

However, Mr. Boyle and I would like to see the offspring of your *own* talent brought to birth and entrusted to the warm embrace of the learned. We are confident that you will not disappoint us in this.

EXT. CAMPY'S TREKSCHUIT -- NIGHT

Baruch stares into the sky as Campy steers the boat.

BARUCH

I don't see Mercury.

CAMPY

No, the winged planet has long since flown off with the sun. But look to the east. See the red one?

BARUCH

Mars rising.

CAMPY

Harbinger of war.

BARUCH

You think?

CAMPY

Sure. The British are looking for any excuse. A month ago one of our ships cast ashore at Groningen with all men aboard her dead of the plague. Now the English think they're justified in strangling our trade routes. And the French will be next, mark my words.

Campy spits into the ocean.

CAMPY (CONT'D)

We'll be flooding the polders to seal off The Hague and Amsterdam from their armies. There'll be war. Men are sated only by blood.

BARUCH

Then let them die for their own good. As long as I am allowed to live for the truth.

CAMPY

I wish you well. Beware of those
who would deny you the right...
they'll chase you to your grave.

Campy points directly overhead.

CAMPY (CONT'D)

See that ruddy star in the midst of
Orion's smelly armpit. That's
Betelguese. He holds the sword.
He's protective of his power. And
he's poised to strike the Pleiades,
lovers of truth. Benny: you'd better
find your *Betelguese*. But quick.

INT. NUREMBERG, GERMANY-- A BEER HALL -- NIGHT

In a small, dark, private room a dozen men from the Alchemical
Society of Nuremberg drink beer at a table.

Gottfried Leibniz and BARON VON BOINEBURG, mid-40's,
aristocratic, hold court.

BARON VON BOINEBURG

Gentlemen, thanks to Herr Leibniz,
our adept secretary--

(nods to Leibniz)

We have managed to acquire a copy of
an unpublished document--

A DRUNKEN MEMBER interrupts.

DRUNKEN MEMBER

Filched, is probably more like it.

All LAUGH as Baron von Boineburg and Leibniz exchange guilty
glances.

BARON VON BOINEBURG

-- whose author we cannot certify.
Yet, we presume it is none other
than the renowned chemist, Robert
Boyle, of the Royal Society.

A CHORUS of approval. Leibniz rises.

LEIBNIZ

Thank you, Baron von Boineburg. In
this document Mr. Boyle describes
several apparently true accounts of
successful metallic transmutations,
including one incredible projection
that recently occurred at the home
of Friedrich Helvetius, physician to
the Prince of Orange, at The Hague,
which was reported as follows--

AT THE TABLE -- LATER

Leibniz and Baron von Boineburg are the only ones remaining.

BARON VON BOINEBURG
Gottfried, I continue to be impressed
with your... resourcefulness.

LEIBNIZ
I'm flattered.

BARON VON BOINEBURG
But I have a much bigger project
that will require a great deal more
of your ingenuity and discretion.

EXT. A DUTCH SAILING VESSEL ON THE HIGH SEAS -- DAY

GUNFIRE EXPLODES in the early morning fog

Blood spurts from the chest of a Dutch seaman.

EXT. A BRITISH WARSHIP -- MOMENTS LATER

The captain looks through his spyglass.

CAPTAIN
You got the bloody son of a bitch!
Now go get some more Dutchmen! The
Devil shits them by the bucketful!

CUT TO:

INT. THE GOTHIC HALL OF KNIGHTS (*RIDDERZAAL*) -- DAY

Delegates of the States General fill the cavernous hall
festooned with captured Spanish flags. Grand Pensionary De
Witt steps up to the podium.

DE WITT
It is my solemn duty to report that
our republic has been the recipient
of a cruel and unprovoked attack
from the British upon our fleet in
the North Sea. I regret to inform
you that all of our ships were either
sunk or captured. And we have lost...
three admirals, including Supreme
Commander Obdam.

De Witt points to a caricature on the fresco ceiling. The
boot of a larcenous British soldier, wearing red worsted
hose, points into the body of the hall.

DE WITT (CONT'D)

We will shed our last drop of blood
sooner than acknowledge England's
imaginary sovereignty of the seas!

INT. HUYGENS' *HOFWIJK* ESTATE- THE MUSIC PARLOR -- NIGHT

An ensemble of musicians PLAY *Lachrimae Pavan* on the lute,
violin and gamba for several dozen elegantly attired men and
women who listen attentively in high back cushioned chairs.

The MUSIC STOPS. Constantijn Huygens, Sr. rises and applauds
the musicians.

CONSTANTIJN SR.

At this time my sons will perform
Avertisti Faciem, my newest
arrangement of Psalm Thirty for voice
and lute.

INT. HUYGENS' *HOFWIJK* ESTATE/ ENTRY-- SIMULTANEOUS

Baruch, clutching his two-foot long telescope, protests to
the servant.

BARUCH

But according to the invitation, the
festivities were not to begin until
7 o'clock!

Unconcerned, the servant officiously opens the door.

INT. HUYGENS' *HOFWIJK* ESTATE- THE MUSIC PARLOR --
CONTINUOUS

O.S. Constantijn Jr., his voice a beautiful counter-tenor,
sings *Avertisti faciem* accompanied by Christiaan on the LUTE.

Heads turn as Baruch's shiny black boots conspicuously TAP
on the polished wood parquet floor. Baruch, embarrassed,
stops.

Constantijn Jr. gives Baruch a withering look, blaming him
for an unwanted flutter in his final note as the audience
politely APPLAUDS.

Christiaan barely conceals his glee at Baruch's "grand
entrance."

CHRISTIAAN

Ah! Our Jew from Voorburg has finally
arrived, bringing his *little*
instrument, which he will use no
doubt, to assault the heavens!

A woman impulsively SHRIEKS in LAUGHTER then quickly stifles
it when her husband reprimands her.

O.S. subdued CHUCKLES as Baruch self-consciously waves his telescope.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)

I have a wonderful surprise to share with everyone. Please, step outside and join me in the garden.

EXT. HUYGENS' *HOFWIJK* ESTATE GARDENS-- EVENING

Beyond a wooden deck, a gentle breeze nods the heads of several acres of tulips. Wispy clouds pass overhead.

An ornately carved oak balustrade forms the perimeter of the deck. Attached to the south railing is a twenty-foot high post to which is affixed a wooden saddle on wire pulleys that supports a thirty-foot rectangular telescope tube, covered in a black cloth. The other end is supported by a wooden yoke, also with pulleys, mounted on a bench on the west side of the deck.

The guests surround Christiaan, Constantijn and Baruch who, with his arms folded over his telescope, gazes smugly up at the night sky.

GUEST#1

Christiaan has chosen a good night.
Look at how those stars are twinkling!

BARUCH

Perhaps. But looks can be deceiving.

MURMURS of anticipation among the guests.

CHRISTIAAN

Quiet, please! Not since Galileo has God bestowed such favor upon any man who ever wanted to study the heavens!

The crowd MURMURS in agreement.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentlemen: In honor of our father's 65th birthday, my new 30-foot refractor will now see first light, to expose the glory of Saturn's ring!

Christiaan looks from his father, who beams with pride, to his brother on a ladder by the tall post. When Christiaan nods his head, Constantijn Jr. pulls the cloth from the telescope with a flourish.

O.S. A CHORUS OF GASPS, "OOH'S and AH'S." Maneuvering the pulleys, Constantijn Jr. elevates the instrument to its viewing position. A HUSH DESCENDS over the crowd.

Christiaan, at the opposite end of the telescope, twists the eyepiece lens. But something's wrong.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)
(under his breath)
Damn!

A group of men crowd their way to the telescope.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)
Conditions are unstable.

A few guests take turns at the eyepiece while Christiaan pouts nearby.

GUEST#2
I see only a shimmering blob.

Constantijn Sr. takes his turn at the eyepiece and grimaces.

CONSTANTIJN SR.
Perhaps the mounting needs adjustment,
Christiaan.

CHRISTIAAN
The mounting's fine, Father!

Christiaan, humiliated, herds the guests back inside.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)
All right! Let's call it a night!
It's getting too chilly anyway.

Christiaan glances briefly at Baruch who shakes his head in mock sympathy for his host. A woman points to Baruch.

WOMAN
What about *his* little... peeptube?

O.S. SNICKERS as Baruch places the telescope on top of the railing for support, kneels down on one knee, positions his telescope and looks through the eyepiece.

BARUCH
(after a few moments)
Ah! Here we are! Saturn's ring!

People rush back. Baruch holds the telescope stationary as each guest, including ladies in their long dresses, can kneel to view.

GUEST#3
I can't believe it's real! Are you
sure you didn't paint it on there?

GUEST#4

Why didn't Christiaan's telescope
work like this?

BARUCH

Sometimes a small instrument can
outperform a much larger one.

WOMAN

You see? Size does matter!

O.S. RAUCOUS LAUGHTER as angry Christiaan, gestures wildly
at his cowering brother.

EXT. THE 'FLEA MARKET' ON THE WHARF IN VOORBURG -- DAY

A lone telescope rests on a table where Baruch counts a stack
of money. A group of well-dressed, middle-aged men compare
their new telescopes nearby.

Some distance away Campy's boat is moored at the wharf where
Campy POUNDS a chisel into a large rectangular block of stone
with a hammer.

MAN#1

Look, mine is polished brass.

MAN#2

Mine's polished chrome.

MAN#3

Mine's covered in genuine red leather
with my initials monogrammed on it.

MAN#4

Where are my initials?

EXT. AT THE DOCK/CAMPY'S *TREKSHUIT* -- SHORTLY AFTER

Campy quickly covers the block of stone with an old towel as
Baruch, grinning broadly, approaches carrying a telescope.

CAMPY

Only one left? Have you struck some
kind of Faustian bargain?

BARUCH

I don't understand your meaning.

CAMPY

If only you give up trying to save
the world, the devil will provide an
unending demand for your peep tubes.

Baruch ignores Campy's sarcasm.

BARUCH

What are you chiseling? A gravestone?

CAMPY

(snarls)

Yes. It's yours. And if you dare mention it again on your next trip I'll knock you senseless with it, attach it to your neck with a rope and dump you overboard.

Baruch gives Campy the telescope.

BARUCH

This is for you.

CAMPY

A gift?

BARUCH

I trust you will use it for its intended purpose.

Baruch nods to the group of men still comparing their telescopes.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

I have my doubts about *them*. Either they will allow their telescopes to collect dust on a shelf, or they will place them on mountings and spy on corporeal bodies *below* rather than contemplate the heavenly ones on high.

Meanwhile, Campy has trained his scope on a SHAPELY YOUNG WOMAN who views some paintings on display in the flea market.

CAMPY

(mesmerized)

That's some nice-looking woman. Say, isn't that your new landlord, Reverend Tydemann, next to her?

Campy hands the telescope to Baruch.

THROUGH THE TELESCOPE LENS

The shapely young woman talks with a man who is dressed in preacher's clothes.

BARUCH (O.S.)

Yes. That's Tydemann. He's also an artist.

ON BARUCH AND CAMPY

Campy grabs the telescope back and views the scene again.

CAMPY

Well I hope he's a damn good one,
'cause from what I hear they've
rejected his bid to become the next
pastor of Voorburg's church--

Campy looks pointedly at Baruch.

CAMPY (CONT'D)

--on account of his tenant, a man
whom they say mocks all religions,
the vilest form of pestilence in the
republic! Could that be our Benny?

BARUCH

Campy, for someone who spends most
of his time on a barge, you trawl
for more gossip than a servant girl.

EXT. REV.DANIEL TYDEMANN'S HOUSE, VOORBURG -- DAY

A profusion of tulips line the entry way to the modest country
home where Baruch has rented a room.

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- DAY

Baruch, pale, sweaty, grinds optics at a lens mill. He stifles
a COUGHING SPASM with his hand and is alarmed to see blood.
He wipes his mouth and hand with a handkerchief.

Sensing someone's presence, Baruch abruptly turns to find
Dirk Kerckring watching him.

BARUCH

How long have you been standing there?

DIRK

A few moments. I knocked repeatedly
but there was no answer.

Awkward SILENCE.

DIRK (CONT'D)

Are you all right? You don't look
well.

Baruch puts the bloody handkerchief in his pocket and leans
against the edge of the desk.

BARUCH

I'm fine.

DIRK
(cheerfully)
I have finally graduated from medical school.

BARUCH
Congratulations, Dirk.

DIRK
To reward myself I've decided to purchase a microscope from you.

Dirk places a wad of bills on Baruch's desk. Baruch looks briefly at the money.

BARUCH
While my microscopes are dear, they are not *that* expensive. Anyway, payment is not normally required from my... *friends* until the instrument is completed.

DIRK
I insist you keep the money.

Baruch thrusts the money back toward Dirk.

BARUCH
I'm very busy. I doubt I could even start your microscope until year's end.

Dirk pushes away Baruch's hand.

DIRK
(awkwardly)
There's something I need to tell you, Baruch. Clara and I plan to wed by the end of the year... we hope you will attend our marriage ceremonies.

BARUCH
(flinches)
Of course.
(firmly clasps Dirk's hand with the money)
My congratulations to both of you. I insist you accept the microscope as my wedding present.

A COUGHING SPASM racks Baruch's body. He falls back on the *ledikant* and tries to stifle the coughs with his handkerchief.

Dirk immediately takes Baruch's pulse, places his ear to Baruch's chest then feels his forehead.

DIRK

You have a raging fever, Baruch.
I'm going to the druggist for some
conserve of red roses.

Dirk goes to the door.

DIRK (CONT'D)

If that doesn't help, I'm afraid
I'll have to open a vein and bleed
you because it looks and sounds like
the white plague.

BARUCH

You mean, 'consumption?'

Dirk nods affirmatively.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

(gamely)

Can I still smoke my pipe?

EXT. CEMETERY IN AMSTERDAM -- DAY

THUNDER RUMBLES in the distance. A young woman SOBS as clods
of dirt hit the wooden lid of Pieter Balling's coffin.

The rest of the Pleiades surround a freshly-dug grave. Baruch
looks haggard, his face deathly pale.

ON THE BROW OF A HILL -- LATER

Baruch and Simon look at the graveyard below. Baruch
struggles to breathe.

SIMON

The plague has taken my mother, my
brother, my sister-in-law, Pieter's
son, and now Pieter. Now I'm worried
about you, Baruch. The lens grinding
only worsens your condition. All
that glass dust flying into your
lungs--

BARUCH

--it's consumption, Simon. My mother
had it. So did my brother. I'm
afraid I'll have to live with it
too.

SIMON

Or die from it. Please, let me give
you some money so you won't have to
grind lenses to make ends meet!

BARUCH

Thank you for your generosity, Simon but I have no need of your money. You know me. I am like a serpent whose tail is in his mouth. I seek to have nothing left over at the end of the year, beyond what is necessary for a decent burial.

SIMON

It's a gift, damn it! Except for Trintje, all my heirs are gone... I probably won't be around much longer, either.

BARUCH

What are you saying?

SIMON

I've had dreams of my own death. Premonitions.

BARUCH

Nonsense! What you imagine cannot be an omen of things to come, Simon. Remember this: a wise man's thoughts do not dwell on his demise. On the contrary, he meditates on life.

Simon stops and grabs Baruch's arm.

SIMON

Don't lecture me, Baruch! Is it an effort for you to be so unsympathetic, or does it come to you naturally?

Simon storms ahead. Baruch is perplexed and hurt.

BARUCH

(shouting)

You're not going to wait for an answer?

SIMON

(shouting back)

I'm sick of your rational answers!

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Baruch smokes his pipe as he writes a letter at his desk. He is somber, intense and still very pale.

BARUCH (V.O.)

Dear Henry: you and Mr. Boyle will undoubtedly be pleased to learn that I have finally completed my

(MORE)

BARUCH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Theological-Political Treatise.
However, in order to protect my
publisher and myself, I have falsified
the name of the former, withheld the
name of the latter, written it in
Latin and distributed it in Germany.
The reasons that move me to do so
are many...

INT. AMSTERDAM TOWN HALL, CHAMBER ROOM -- DAY

Five magistrates sit at a large table opposite ADRIAAN
KOHRBAGH (mid-30's) and his younger BROTHER. Several books
are arrayed before them.

CHIEF MAGISTRATE
For the court, please state your
name, age and occupation.

ADRIAAN
Adriaan Kohrbagh. 34. Writer.

CHIEF MAGISTRATE
Are you married, Mr. Kohrbagh?

ADRIAAN
(pauses)
I do not have a wife.

CHIEF MAGISTRATE
Do you have any children?

ADRIAAN
(longer pause)
I have a three year old daughter.

CHIEF MAGISTRATE
When did the child's mother die?

ADRIAAN
The child's mother is alive and well.
We all live under the same roof.

O.S. THROAT-CLEARING.

MAGISTRATE#2
Are you the author of these two books?
(displays, reads)
A Flower Garden Composed of All Kinds
of Loveliness" and A Light Shining
in Dark Places.

ADRIAAN
Yes.

MAGISTRATE#2

Did anyone assist you?

ADRIAAN

Just my younger brother, who corrected
a chapter.

Adriaan glances reassuringly at his brother, who concurs.

MAGISTRATE#3

Mr. Kohrbaugh: Do you deny the
possibility of miracles, the divinity
of Jesus and the virginity of Mary?

ADRIAAN

If I did hold these opinions they
are certainly not reflected in my
writings whose sole intention is to
instruct the reader on the usage of
correct Dutch.

Magistrate #3 suspiciously raises an eyebrow.

CUT TO:

EXT. JAN RIEUWERTSZ' PRINT SHOP, AMSTERDAM -- DAY

The shop door bears a battered copper plaque which reads Jan
Rieuwertsz, Printer.

Baruch, carrying a large black briefcase, glances furtively
at his surroundings then KNOCKS on the door.

After a few moments the door opens a crack; Baruch nods,
glances briefly behind him, quickly enters the shop and closes
the door behind him.

INT. TOWN HALL, CHAMBER ROOM -- DAY

The hearing continues.

MAGISTRATE#4

Have you ever discussed your writings
with Benedict Spinoza or Franz van
den Enden?

CUT TO:

INT. AMSTERDAM, FRENCH CHAPEL OF THE CARMELITES -- DAY

O.S. the LOVELY STRAINS of lute wedding music. Facing the
congregation on a pulpit strewn with red tulips, Dirk solemnly
waits with a Catholic priest as Van den Enden escorts Clara,
gowned in white, down the aisle.

In the pews, Jarig steals a glance at Baruch who looks as
white as a ghost.

INT. CHAMBER ROOM -- DAY

The magistrate continues to question Adriaan.

ADRIAAN

I have spent some time with both men at their homes on different occasions but I do not recall ever discussing the content of these books with either of them.

The fifth magistrate turns to a page in one book.

MAGISTRATE#5

Would you read this passage, Mr. Kohrbagh?

ADRIAAN

'Altar: a place where one slaughters. Among those of the Roman Catholic faith, they are even holy places, where priests daily celebrate the divine service. But it no longer consists in the slaughter of animals, as among the Jews or pagans, but in a more marvelous affair, that is, in the creation of a human being.'

CUT TO:

INT. FRENCH CHAPEL OF THE CARMELITES -- CONTINUOUS

The priest performs holy communion upon Clara and Dirk.

ADRIAAN (V.O.)

'For they can do what even God cannot do, at any hour of the day: make a human creature from a small piece of wheat cake. This piece of cake remains what it was beforehand, and they give it to someone to eat while saying it is a man, not simply a man, but the God-man.'

IN THE PEWS

An astonished Baruch whispers to Jarig.

BARUCH

I can't believe Kerckring converted.

JARIG

He had to. Part of the deal.

BARUCH

What?

JARIG

Van den Enden's moving to Paris to
advise Louis XIV. You didn't know?

BARUCH

(louder, disbelief)
To serve an enemy of the Dutch
Republic?

Realizing others have heard him, Baruch grimaces
apologetically. But as he scans their faces, he is troubled
by something else; someone is missing.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

Where's Simon?

INT. SIMON'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

At Simon's bedside, Simon's sister TRINTJE mops her brother's
fevered brow, as Baruch looks on with concern.

BARUCH

We missed you at the wedding, Simon.

Simon does not respond.

TRINTJE

You should know that Simon's allocated
a portion of his estate to you in
the form of an annuity. 2,000
florins, annually.

Baruch acknowledges the news impassively. He kisses Simon's
forehead.

EXT. SAXONY, UNIVERSITY OF LEIPZIG -- DAY

Seasonal flowers arranged in precise groupings dot a manicured
lawn around a Teutonic style, five-story building with a red-
gabled roof. A wide, windowed turret dominates the center
of the building. Beside a massive wood-arched doorway, on
the facade, an engraved seal reads University of Leipzig,
Founded 1409.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF LEIPZIG- TURRET -- DAY

Clutching a book, Gottfried Leibniz, now late-20's, bow-
legged, clad in drab olive-colored breeches with dark
stockings, frantically climbs a winding spiral staircase.
He slips and slides as the soles of his shoes SCRAPE on the
steps.

INT. JAKOB THOMASIVS' OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

Leibniz races across a polished wood parquet floor and nearly
crashes into a door labeled with a brass plaque: Jakob
Thomasius, Professor of Theology.

Leibniz yanks the door open, startling Professor JAKOB THOMASIVS, late-40's. Leibniz triumphantly waves the book.

LEIBNIZ

(high-pitched voice)

I've got it, Professor Thomasius.
Just arrived at the bookseller's.
It's the most pestilential, vile
book I've ever read, but... it's
brilliant!

INT. JAKOB THOMASIVS' OFFICE -- LATER

Thomasius pages through the book very deliberately.

Leibniz impatiently TAPS his fingers on the surface of the desk and the armrest of his chair. Thomasius is annoyed.

THOMASIVS

Gottfried, I wish you would stop
fidgeting.

Leibniz stops.

LEIBNIZ

It says it was published in Hamburg,
but there is no publisher by the
name of 'Kunrath' there. I checked.

THOMASIVS

Sure. It *had* to be a fictitious
name. The book would have been
censured in Amsterdam.

Thomasius throws the book down.

THOMASIVS (CONT'D)

It's the work of a Jew named Spinoza,
a lens-maker, expelled from the
synagogue for his monstrous opinions.
I know of him through his mentor,
Franciscus Van den Enden.

LEIBNIZ

You *will* answer this devil-incarnate.

THOMASIVS

I am already too well-known for my
advocacy of Church supremacy. It is
unlikely he would respond to me.
But you, on the other hand--

Leibniz sneers and resumes tapping his fingers.

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM, VOORBURG -- MORNING

O.S. Light RAIN PATTERS against the roof. Baruch's lens grinding equipment is covered with a dirty sheet. At his desk, Baruch glumly shoves away a bowl of barely consumed watery oatmeal.

The RAIN STOPS. Baruch opens the first envelope on a stack.

LEIBNIZ (V.O.)

'Illustrious and most Honoured Sir,
among your other achievements, which
fame has spread abroad, I understand
is your remarkable skill in optics.
For this reason I venture to send
you this essay for I am not likely
to find a better critic in this field
of study.'

Rays of sunlight suddenly fill the room, distracting Baruch.

A small butterfly, trapped in a spider's web dangling from the window, flutters its wings. Drops of rain glisten like miniature prisms from the gossamer trap.

AT THE WINDOW-- MOMENTS LATER

Entranced, Baruch watches the spider methodically wrap a silk cocoon over the flailing butterfly. The spider injects poison into it's prey with each convulsion.

O.S. hard KNOCKS startle Baruch.

At the door, he is shocked to see Christiaan Huygens, smirking.

CHRISTIAAN

Aren't you going to invite me in?

Baruch gestures for Christiaan to enter and shuts the door.

His back to Baruch, Christiaan superciliously snoops around, examining various objects on the desk.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)

Do you consider yourself a gambler?

The peculiar question perplexes Baruch.

BARUCH

Not generally. But if I were to
wager I would do so only if my chances
of winning or losing were equal to
that of my opponent.

Huygens confronts Baruch.

CHRISTIAAN

Your *Theologico-Political Treatise* is one you will lose. All over the Republic it's being condemned as a vile and blasphemous book, the likes of which the world has never seen!

Huygens savors the opportunity to dig in the sword.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)

Did you know the local magistrates are conspiring to prevent further printings? I'll bet you didn't consider the possibility that you might suffer the same fate as the Koerbagh brothers who now spend their days pumping water at the *Rasphuis*.

BARUCH

The theologians of our time, with their customary spleen, might take offense to my unorthodox opinions but I have no fear that evil will befall me. My opinions have not been printed in Dutch, nor will anyone find my name mentioned anywhere in the publication.

CHRISTIAAN

Still, you must be... disappointed.

BARUCH

The objections to my book have their origin in ignorance.

CHRISTIAAN

Indeed?

BARUCH

I can do nothing about those who refuse to give my ideas a fair and unprejudiced reading.

Christiaan resumes fumbling around Baruch's desk.

CHRISTIAAN

I'm curious, then...did you calculate your chances that the weather would be *unfair* that night in Hofwijk when your telescope outperformed mine?

BARUCH

I estimated that the chances were even; the air would either be still, or turbulent. You, on the other hand, took the greater risk, because for you... much more was at stake.

Christiaan stiffens.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

Your pride.

Christiaan glares at Baruch.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

Your gamble. Not mine.

Christiaan turns to leave, but stops at the door.

CHRISTIAAN

But perhaps, in the long run, *your*
misfortune.

INT. IN DE KONST-WINKEL -- DAY

A cold, bleak day. The bookstore is virtually empty. Cheap paintings and old posters remain on the walls. A few books lay abandoned in their shelves, the rest are stacked in wooden boxes, strewn haphazardly on the floor.

Baruch, sick, pale and huddled in his overcoat, sits with Van den Enden on wooden boxes. Van den Enden's eyes appear tired and defeated. He has aged considerably and is on the defensive.

BARUCH

(COUGHS heavily)

Where in Paris will you be staying?

VAN DEN ENDEN

In the *Picpus* district. Baruch, I know what you're thinking and I beg you to stop looking at me with such a woeful countenance. I won't be alone. I'll be right in my *milieu*. The king is recruiting the best thinkers in Europe to form the royal *Academie des Sciences*--

BARUCH

--not to mention the best military strategists to plan his next foray... into The Netherlands.

Insulted, Van den Enden rises to confront Baruch.

VAN DEN ENDEN

Do not presume to accuse me of treachery!

BARUCH

I did not.

VAN DEN ENDEN

The Dutch Republic is to blame! In France, democracy may yet succeed.

BARUCH

Under the none too benevolent rule of Louis XIV?

VAN DEN ENDEN

(screams)

What choice do I have?

Van den Enden's seething anger softens into nostalgia. Collapsing onto the box, he WEEPS SOFTLY. Baruch rises and places a comforting hand on Van den Enden's shoulder.

VAN DEN ENDEN (CONT'D)

It was such a sweet dream, Baruch. And it's all turned sour. There is nothing for me here.

Baruch's silence acknowledges the sad truth. He glumly nods toward the empty counter where Clara once sat.

Van den Enden pats Baruch's hand.

VAN DEN ENDEN (CONT'D)

And nothing for you, either.

INT. SAXONY, AN ELEGANT BALLROOM -- NIGHT

O.S. BAROQUE DANCE MUSIC fills a luxuriously appointed hall at a wedding reception. Elegantly dressed couples dance a *Sarabande* in perfect synchronization.

The MUSIC STOPS. Gottfried Leibniz, finely attired, approaches the bride and groom.

LEIBNIZ

May I have the honor of dancing with your lovely bride?

The bride, apparently all too familiar with Leibniz, looks apprehensively at her husband, begging with her eyes to refuse Leibniz, but her husband does not pick up on the cue.

GROOM

Certainly. My pleasure.

ON THE DANCE FLOOR-- MOMENTS LATER

As the MUSIC ends, Leibniz takes the bride's hand.

LEIBNIZ

As they say, 'All is fair in love and war.' I bear no grudge, my dear.

Leibniz kisses the bride on both cheeks.

LEIBNIZ (CONT'D)

I wish to give you this wedding
present.

From his waistcoat pocket, Leibniz removes an envelope and
presents it to the surprised and grateful bride, who curtsies.

The bride returns to her husband's side and begins to open
the envelope.

IN A CORNER OF THE BALLROOM-- MOMENTS LATER

Leibniz has joined a group of gentlemen who leer at a group
of single young women.

GENTLEMAN #1

Then the rumor is true, Gottfried --
you've recently entered into the
service of the Archbishop of Mainz?

LEIBNIZ

Yes, and in a fortnight I'll be
leaving for Paris on a... diplomatic
mission.

GENTLEMAN #2

Splendid! Would you try to convince
Louis XIV to pick on the Egyptians
instead of us poor Christians for a
change?

The men LAUGH.

GENTLEMAN #3

Hah! The French will never wage a
holy war against the infidel.
(with a French accent)
It's too... *unfashionable*.

More LAUGHTER.

The bride strides up to Leibniz and abruptly slaps him across
the face. She crumples the paper he had given her earlier.

BRIDE

Schmuck!

The bride throws the crumpled paper at Leibniz and struts
off in a huff. The men react with shock and amusement.

GENTLEMAN #1

What did you do to provoke her?

Leibniz picks up the paper.

LEIBNIZ

Nothing out of the ordinary. It is my custom to give the bride a list of useful maxims... concerning marriage. Apparently my affection was not reciprocated.

One of the men grabs the paper from Leibniz' hand before he replaces it in his pocket. He peruses it.

GENTLEMAN #3

(reading)

'And lastly, don't give up washing now that you've secured a husband.'

GENTLEMAN #2

You obviously have a great future in diplomacy, *Herr* Leibniz.

INT. SIMON'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Near death, Simon is covered up to his neck in a plain, white sheet. He takes SHORT, LABORED BREATHS. Baruch, Trintje and Simon's physician, Lodewijk Meyer joins them at bedside.

TRINTJE

Simon's fever broke yesterday. I'm so glad you're here. He wanted to see both of you before--

(voice trails off)

Did you bring your manuscript, Baruch?

Simon's eyes drift to Baruch. Baruch holds up a stack of papers and winks at Simon.

BARUCH

The Ethics. First draft.

Simon smiles weakly.

TRINTJE

Simon, would it be all right if I leave you in the good hands of Dr. Meyer and Baruch for awhile?

Simon nods affirmatively and closes his eyes. O.S. the door CLOSES SOFTLY.

BARUCH

Simon?

Simon opens his eyes and nods.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

Do you want me to start with the definitions?

Simon shakes his head "no". Baruch is somewhat taken aback. Simon manages a thin, wry smile.

SIMON

Boring.

Baruch and Meyer exchange glances.

MEYER

At least you haven't lost your sense of humor, Simon.

BARUCH

Then, what *would* you like me to read?

SIMON

End.

BARUCH

I haven't finished it. Do you mean the fourth part? "Of Human Bondage?"

Simon nods.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

Very well.

Baruch thumbs through some pages and begins to read.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

'Man's lack of power to moderate and restrain his passions... I call bondage, for a man who is under their control, is not his own master, but is mastered by fortune.'

EXT. CEMETERY IN AMSTERDAM -- DAY

Baruch and the remaining 'Pleiades' carry Simon's coffin. Trintje trails slightly behind them.

BARUCH (V.O.)

'Thus, although he may see the better course of action before him, he is often forced to follow the worse. I propose in this part to demonstrate why this is, but before I begin, I should first say a few words about perfection and imperfection, and about good and evil.'

EXT. 'PLEIADES' CONSTELLATION -- NIGHT

One of the stars brightens briefly, then blinks off.

EXT. CAMPY'S *TREKSCHUIT*, *VLIET* RIVER -- DAY

Anchored next to a polder, Baruch languidly smokes his pipe. Campy, beside him, also smokes, gazing at the tulip fields.

BARUCH

(COUGHS intermittently)

There are many advantages to living the country life, Campy, but waiting for mail that arrives at a snail's pace isn't one of them. I can manage my correspondence more efficiently from the Hague and it will be much easier for my friends to visit me there.

CAMPY

(studies Baruch)

You look like hell. Getting ready to feed the fish, Benny? Do it downwind at least.

Campy touches Baruch's forehead, then grabs his wrist.

CAMPY (CONT'D)

Jesus, I can barely feel your pulse. Your skin's as sweaty as a clam. On second thought, I've seen better-looking clams than you. Maybe you should stop smoking.

BARUCH

Nonsense. Dr. Tulp says smoking is an effective prophylactic against the plague.

Benny stands, assuming an "heroic pose."

BARUCH (CONT'D)

Anyway, if I am to be a mollusk, I insist upon being an oyster, not a clam! An irritated oyster at least occasionally produces something of genuine and lasting value!

CAMPY

Try dropping those pearls of wisdom on your friendly clerics and magistrates at The Hague.

A sudden gust of wind RATTLES the deflated sails of the *trekshuit*, nearly causing Baruch to lose his balance. Campy snuffs out his pipe.

CAMPY (CONT'D)

Untie that sail, 'Matey.'

(MORE)

CAMPY (CONT'D)

Let's shove off. I want to get there
in time for *kermis*.

Baruch doesn't understand.

CAMPY (CONT'D)

It's 'Fat Tuesday.' Don't want to
miss all those waffles and pancakes
and sausages and ham pies. Do we?

Campy notices Baruch is about to get sick.

CAMPY (CONT'D)

Downwind!

EXT. THE HAGUE- INNER COURT OF THE BINNENHOF -- NIGHT

In a huge carnival scene, throngs of celebrants push and
shove their way through lines of stalls where vendors sell
all manner of foodstuffs, clothing and artwork.

From the steps of a building a preacher SHOUTS to the throng.

PREACHER

Worshippers of Baal! Papist
idolaters! Heed God's word. Lent
is near. Lent is near! Purge
yourselves of your sins!

Beside a food stand, Campy hungrily munches on a meat pie,
while he watches the "riffraff" pass by. Baruch COUGHS
heavily, reading a leaflet.

CAMPY

You sound bad, Benny. Real bad.
What are you reading there?

BARUCH

The Reformers are urging the States
to stop the 'licentious printing and
distribution of the pernicious and
godless work called the *Leviathan*
and the incomparably impious *Tractatus
Theologico-Politicus*.'

CAMPY

Now do you believe me?

EXT. THE HAGUE, VAN DER SPYCK HOME -- DAY

A modest-sized three story brick building, with three sets
of shuttered windows on each level trimmed in yellow and
white, faces the canal on *Paviljoensgracht*.

INT. VAN DER SPYCK HOME -- DAY

Baruch is greeted in the entry of the neat and cheery house by HENDRICK VAN DER SPYCK-- 40's, stout, ruddy-faced and friendly-- and his wife IDA, 30's, cherubic, cradling an infant. Their other children, two sons (9,10) and two daughters (5,6) excitedly greet their bewildered new tenant.

VAN DER SPYCK

Please come in and inspect your room.

Baruch nods, distracted by an impressive array of portraits and landscape paintings that fill the walls.

VAN DER SPYCK (CONT'D)

Children, take *Minjeer* Spinoza's belongings upstairs.

CHILDREN

(in unison)

Yes, Papa!

Baruch winks playfully at the children who fight over which pieces of luggage they will carry.

Van der Spyck and Baruch, followed by the children, ascend the stairs. Baruch continues to admire paintings lining the staircase wall.

BARUCH (O.S.)

Your paintings are excellent, Mr. Van der Spyck. I wonder: would you be willing to give me some instruction?

VAN DER SPYCK (O.S.)

It would be my pleasure.

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- DAY

Baruch's room, far more spacious than his previous ones, contains a small oak table, a three-legged corner table, two smaller tables, his lens-grinding equipment, a bookcase containing about 150 books, and Baruch's ubiquitous red-canopied *ledikant*.

A breeze billows the white-laced curtains that frame the open window, gently shuffling a stack of papers on Baruch's desk.

With shallow, labored breaths Baruch removes a piece of paper from the stack, dips his pen in an ink well and writes.

BARUCH (V.O.)

'To the most learned and noble
Gottfried Leibniz, Doctor of Laws
(MORE)

BARUCH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
and Councillor of Mainz: I have read the paper which you kindly sent me, and I am very grateful to you for letting me have it. I regret that despite your clear explanation I have not been able to fully grasp its meaning. I beg you to answer a few queries. First, why do you believe it is preferable to restrict the size of the lens aperture?'

INT. VAN DER SPYCK HOME-STAIRCASE -- DAY

Baruch descends the stairs carrying a small package.

BARUCH (V.O.)
I have no doubt that you know someone here at The Hague who would be willing to take charge of our correspondence. I should like to know who it is, so that our letters can be dispatched more conveniently and safely.

INT. VAN DER SPYCK HOME -- SHORTLY AFTER

Mrs. Van der Spyck cheerfully receives the packet from Baruch.

BARUCH (V.O.)
In the event the *Tractatus Theologico Politicus* has not yet reached you, I enclose a complimentary copy.

INT. HOTEL DES MUSES, PICPUS QUARTER- PARIS -- EVENING

Glasses CLINK among the chatter at a festive party in the salon of Van den Enden's new home and Latin School, a transplanted *In der Konst Winkel*, except for the elegant décor, furniture and neatly arranged books. A portrait painting of an austere Louis XIV hangs prominently on a wall.

A rejuvenated Van den Enden and his young, attractive new "trophy" wife, CATHARINA (30's) mingle with a roomful of guests.

IN A CORNER OF THE ROOM

Their backs turned away from the others, Christiaan Huygens and Leibniz converse in HUSHED TONES.

CHRISTIAAN
Spinoza's book must be demolished.

LEIBNIZ
Yes, but what is required is a learned refutation; one that is solid and incisive, rather than vituperative.

CHRISTIAAN

And you should be the one--

VAN DEN ENDEN (O.S.)

Christiaan Huygens!

Christiaan abruptly rises as he notices Van den Enden and Catharina approach. Leibniz follows suit.

Christian surveys the lovely Catharina as he gestures to the room, while Leibniz looks on lasciviously.

CHRISTIAAN

Congratulations, Franz, on your new... acquisition.

VAN DEN ENDEN

My wife, Catharina. We are indeed enjoying our new home.

Christiaan bows formally and kisses Catharina's hand.

CHRISTIAAN

My very great pleasure.

Momentary awkwardness as Van Den Enden realizes he does not know Leibniz.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)

I beg your pardon. May I introduce Gottfried Leibniz, Councillor of Mainz. Professor Van den Enden.

Leibniz and Van den Enden shake hands. Leibniz bows stiffly to Catharina.

VAN DEN ENDEN

(searching his memory)

Leibniz? Your name seems so familiar to me... where are you from?

LEIBNIZ

Leipzig.

VAN DEN ENDEN

Leibniz... from Leipzig. Do you, by any chance, know Jacob Thomasius?

LEIBNIZ

Certainly, he is my former theology professor.

Van den Enden makes the connection but Leibniz wishes to change the subject quickly.

LEIBNIZ (CONT'D)

But now I am under the masterful tutelage of Mr. Huygens here, who is teaching me a great deal about the Moderns.

VAN DEN ENDEN

You could not have a better guide.

CHRISTIAAN

Herr Leibniz is much too modest to admit that his metaphysical and mathematical abilities already far exceed my own.

VAN DEN ENDEN

And what are you doing in Paris, Herr Leibniz?

LEIBNIZ

I am on a... diplomatic mission.

Van den Enden wants to pursue the conversation further, but Catharina indicates they should move on.

VAN DEN ENDEN

Indeed. I look forward to further discussions, Herr Leibniz. A pleasure.

Led by Catharina, Van den Enden moves on to socialize with the other guests. He turns around briefly to scrutinize Leibniz, who returns the furtive glance.

CHRISTIAAN

(confidentially)

Kerckring, his wealthy son-in-law physician must have bought this place for him. It's the only way he could have afforded it.

LEIBNIZ

Perhaps the good doctor funded the young filly's affections, too.

INT. VAN DER SPYCK HOME -- DAY

At an artist's easel, painting on canvas, Baruch receives instruction from Van der Spyck. He has begun to fill in a sketch of a fisherman wearing a large cloak, carrying a net over his shoulder. The face of the fisherman is still featureless.

INT. VAN DER SPYCK HOME/LIVINGROOM -- DAY

O.S. little girls' LAUGHTER. Baruch crouches under a table partially hidden by a flower-print tablecloth.

He smiles with childlike glee while struggling to catch his breath.

CHILDREN (O.S.)
Mijnheer Spinazie! Mijnheer Spinazie! Where are you hiding?
Come out, come out, wherever you are... or we're going to find you.

One of the girls pokes her head under the tablecloth, sees Baruch and SCREAMS.

CHILD
I found him! I found him! He's under the table.

Baruch throws up his hands in mock defeat and hits his head hard against the table. The girl GIGGLES.

Baruch crawls out and rubs his head. Both children pile on top of him.

CHILDREN
We found you, *Mijnheer Spinazie*.
Now it's our turn. Start counting.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARIS, *THE BASTILLE* -- DAY

O.S. a HUBBUB of voices. The inner courtyard is packed with spectators. A line of royal musketeers is poised to shoot three men and a woman several yards away, bound and blindfolded. Some distance away, on a scaffold, the lifeless body of a man twists on a rope.

A HUSH falls over the crowd. The commanding officer signals.

COMMANDING OFFICER
Fire!

The captives collapse to the ground.

AT THE SCAFFOLD

Van den Enden's lifeless face swings into view.

INT. VAN DER SPYCK HOME -- CONTINUOUS

Baruch kneels, hands over his eyes.

The front door opens. Mrs. Van der Spyck enters with her two sons, carrying her infant.

Seeing his landlord's wife, Baruch awkwardly lifts himself up, straightens his clothing and grins sheepishly.

IDA

Now I know why they don't want to go
to Church on Sunday.

Baruch LAUGHS.

BARUCH

Did Reverend Cortes give a good sermon
this morning?

Ida hesitates. Baruch notices she is disturbed.

IDA

It was fine, but--

CHILDREN (O.S.)

Mijnheer Spinazie! We're ready!

BARUCH

Why hasn't your husband returned
with you?

Ida takes a deep BREATH. She grasps her sons' shoulders.

IDA

Go take your sisters and read them
their Bible lessons.

The boys obediently leave the room.

IDA (CONT'D)

Would you like some tea, *Mijnheer*
Spinoza?

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY OLDENBURG'S OFFICE, GRESHAM COLLEGE -- DAY

Henry Oldenburg, Robert Boyle, and Leibniz drink tea at the
table.

BOYLE

Your calculating machine is most
ingenious, Herr Leibniz.

LEIBNIZ

Thank you, Mr. Boyle.

HENRY

The Royal Society is grateful to
have a man of your erudition join
our ranks.

Leibniz nods his head in mock humility.

BOYLE

Herr Leibniz, while you were in Paris did you happen to meet the Dutchman, Franz van den Enden?

LEIBNIZ

Yes. We were introduced by Christiaan Huygens. He had a lovely wife. Half his age.

HENRY

Pity, to have met such an unfortunate end at this stage of his life.

LEIBNIZ

Indeed. However, if one is determined to conspire against the king, one must be more discreet.

BOYLE

As Henry well knows. He was imprisoned for several weeks at the King's 'pleasure' in the Tower of London for criticizing our conduct of the war against the Dutch.

Henry's thoughts drift in sad recollection.

LEIBNIZ

Huygens tells me Van den Enden was a mentor of your friend, the Jew-- Spinoza. Has he learned of the old man's death?

HENRY

I don't know. My correspondence with the dear man stopped several years ago when the war broke out.

LEIBNIZ

Perhaps it's time to rekindle your affections.

Leibniz removes a paper from his breast pocket.

LEIBNIZ (CONT'D)

I've prepared a list of questions on the subject of faith that you may wish to include when your correspondence is renewed--

Leibniz notices that Boyle is suddenly very interested.

LEIBNIZ (CONT'D)

-- in order to satisfy the curiosity of reasonable and intelligent Christians.

Oldenburg looks to Boyle for his assent and receives it.

INT. VAN DER SPYCK HOME -- LATER

Baruch and Mrs. Van der Spyck drink tea at the kitchen table.

IDA

I fear something dreadful is brewing at the *Binnenhof*. Right after the sermon everyone rushed out to find out what was happening. Hendrick, too. *Minjeer Spinoza*, I believe you are an honest and good man. I have been a devout Lutheran all my life, but lately I've had my doubts. If God is good... how can He permit such violence and bloodshed? Tell me truthfully: do you think my religion will save me?

BARUCH

Your religion is a good one and you need not look for another, nor doubt that you may be saved by it, provided that while you apply yourself to piety, you live a peaceable and quiet life at the same time.

O.S. SCREAMS and LAUGHTER from the childrens' room.

IDA

Well, *Minjeer Spinoza*, I'm afraid it's a little too late for that.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE HAGUE, INNER COURT OF THE BINNENHOF -- DAY

O.S. SCREAMS. A huge, angry mob gathers around a makeshift gallows on the grounds of the inner court as two naked men, already bludgeoned near death, are hoisted on the scaffold.

MOB

Death to the traitors! Death to the De Witts! Death! Death!

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- LATER

At the easel, Baruch puts the finishing touches on his painting of the fisherman. He steps back and studies the detail of the fisherman's face. The face is Baruch's.

O.S. the front door FLINGS OPEN.

VAN DER SPYCK (O.S.)

Ida! It's terrible, just terrible!
(MORE)

VAN DER SPYCK (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Jan DeWitt and his brother have just been murdered. Oh, God! I saw it with my own eyes. We could not stop the crazies!

Baruch throws down his paint brush and quickly descends the stairs. The terrified children emerge from their rooms.

IDA

(calmly)

Children. Go back to your rooms.

Van der Spyk trembles, choking back tears.

VAN DER SPYCK

(between SOBS)

The mob. They broke into the prison, overcame the guards and took the De Witt brothers. They began attacking them with clubs, guns, knives, even their bare hands. Then they hung them on the gallows by their feet.

Van der Spyk tries to catch his breath.

VAN DER SPYCK (CONT'D)

And then... the most dastardly scoundrels of all, those cowards who dared not strike their living flesh, began cutting the De Witts into pieces.

Van der Spyk begins to vomit. Ida sits him in a chair and tries to comfort him. He is inconsolable. She brings him a towel. Van der Spyk wipes his mouth.

VAN DER SPYCK (CONT'D)

What kind of world is this, Ida?
What future is there for our children?

(to Baruch)

Do you want to know the depths of depravity to which human beings can descend, Mr. Philosopher? Listen to this! On my way back home, several young hooligans stopped me in my tracks, holding something bloody and mangled in their bare hands. They wanted to know if I would buy pieces of Jan and Cornelius' flesh at ten sous apiece! 'Make a fine meal, sir... roasted and sweet!'

Van der Spyk WEEPS uncontrollably. Baruch, reeling from the horror, uncharacteristically-- loses control.

BARUCH

Barbarians! I'm going out there. I will make a sign and post it in the square: *Ultimi barbarorum!*

VAN DER SPYCK

(recovering)

You'll do no such thing. They'll gladly tear you to pieces as well. Don't you know how much they revile you too?

Van der Spyck strides to the door and locks the bolt.

VAN DER SPYCK (CONT'D)

You'll not be going anywhere tonight.

Baruch just as suddenly transforms himself. In an instant he is calm and silent. Ida is stunned by the transformation.

IDA

Are you all right?

BARUCH

Your husband is correct. Of what use is wisdom if we succumb to the passions of the mob, and lack the strength to recover ourselves again?

INT. JAN RIEUWERTSZ' PRINT SHOP -- DAY

Seated around a large table in front of a printing press, in somber moods, are the remaining members of the "Pleiades" (Baruch, Jarig, Rieuwertsz and Weber) along with two new additions to the group GEORGE Schuller and WALTER Tschirnhaus (early 30's).

Baruch, extremely pale, breathes with great difficulty.

BARUCH

With the death of the De Witts, whatever hope we had of a tolerant republic are all but gone. Soon the civic and religious authorities will increase their scrutiny of our work. Great care must be taken to avoid even discussing the contents of The Ethics outside our circle because there are too many who would undermine our efforts to publish it.

An awkward silence pervades the room as all eyes turn toward the two newest members of the group, Walter and George, who look as though they want to hide under the table.

WALTER

While in Paris we came in contact with a councilor of Frankfurt, a man named Leibniz: a man of remarkable learning. Most skilled in the various sciences--

GEORGE

-- and free from the common theological prejudices.

BARUCH

How did you meet him, Walter?

WALTER

Through the offices of Christiaan Huygens.

Baruch is momentarily stunned.

GEORGE

Mr. Leibniz has a very high opinion of your *Tractatus Theological-Politicus*.

BARUCH

So he claims. But I suspect you've been duped. He may even be a spy. Did either of you show him copies of my *Ethics* manuscript?

WALTER

No... but--

GEORGE

--we did... discuss... certain parts of it with him.

GRUMBLES of discontent from the group. Baruch begins to COUGH.

WALTER

Leibniz is on his way to Amsterdam from London. He's just met with your old friend, Henry Oldenburg.

GEORGE

And he desperately wants to discuss these issues with you personally, Baruch.

Baruch COUGHS heavily, expectorating blood. He removes a handkerchief.

Around the table are faces of alarm and concern.

BARUCH

No doubt he does, George. I have little choice now but to meet your Leibniz. Do I?

EXT. CAMPY'S TREKSCHUIT -- NIGHT

Campy drapes his arm over Baruch's shoulder. He points with his free hand directly overhead.

ON THE ORION CONSTELLATION.

CAMPY (O.S.)

Orion's at zenith. His sword is poised to strike. *Alcyone* must be cautious... but clever, for *Atlas* no longer protects the *Pleiades*.

Campy turns to Baruch, peering intently.

CAMPY (CONT'D)

Understand?

EXT. THE HAGUE, AT THE DOCK -- SUNRISE

Baruch, shaking and weak, steps off the boat, nearly losing his balance.

CAMPY

Watch your step, Landlubber.

Baruch picks up his satchel, throws his coat over his shoulder.

BARUCH

(teasingly)
Have you finished chiseling my gravestone?

CAMPY

Nearly. I warned you what would happen next time you asked about it.

BARUCH

Which is why I waited until I got off the boat.

Baruch turns serious.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

Campy, do you remember the name of my landlord?

CAMPY

Van der Spyk. Lives on *Paviljoensgracht*. Why?

BARUCH

He's a good man. If he sends you instructions, promise me you'll follow them.

CAMPY

Aye, aye, Captain.

Baruch suddenly drops his satchel and embraces Campy, catching him off-guard.

Campy senses this is the last time he'll see Baruch. He grasps him tightly, then releases him.

CAMPY (CONT'D)

There's something I never told you. When we first met, I already knew who you were.

BARUCH

How?

CAMPY

I gave your father his last ride.

Baruch searches his mind. He looks back at the *trekshuit*, then at Campy, and closes his eyes recalling his father's funeral procession.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE AMSTEL RIVER ON THE WAY TO THE JEWISH CEMETERY IN OUDERKERK -- DAY (FLASHBACK, 23 YEARS EARLIER)

Taking a puff from his long-stemmed pipe, Campy gently glides his *trekshuit* along the placid Amstel River, bearing a plain pine casket.

Along a river path, Baruch maintains a solitary pace with his father's funereal barge.

CAMPY (O.S.)

I never forget a face. You walked alone. In front of the others.

As Baruch watches his father's casket gently glide along on the barge, Campy acknowledges him with a respectful nod, then squints again into the glaring sun.

(BACK TO PRESENT)

CAMPY (CONT'D)

And you still do... Baruch. I love you for it.

EXT. VAN DER SPYCK HOME -- DAY

A shuttered window opens on the third floor. Baruch pokes his head through the window and looks at the canal below. He notices something on the opened shutter.

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

A spider dangles from its web on the window shutter.

Leaning far outside the window, Baruch traps a spider with a glass jar and immediately closes the lid.

Baruch places the container on his desk and begins to study the creature.

EXT. THE HAGUE, *PAVILJOENSGRACHT* -- CONTINUOUS

Carrying a black satchel, Gottfried Leibniz stops in front of the Van der Spyk home. He verifies the numbers 72-74 affixed in brass beside the door and rings a shiny brass bell set in a frame.

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Baruch opens the jar lid to get a closer view. The spider's belly is red, the shape of an hourglass.

O.S. An EARSPLITTING SHRIEK.

(RAPID MEMORY FLASHES)

RED-eclipsed moon.

Linda Alveres' too-RED lips.

RED tulips at Clara's wedding alter.

(BACK TO SCENE)

Baruch reflexively slams the lid on the jar and twists it closed. Then he reconsiders, turns the jar on its side and carefully removes the lid. The spider crawls out across the desk. Baruch is mesmerized.

O.S. KNOCKS on the door.

BARUCH

Yes.

Ida enters.

IDA

(cheerfully)

Herr Leibniz has arrived.

Baruch is momentarily flustered.

BARUCH

Oh, yes.

IDA

Would you like me to bring up a bowl of fruit?

BARUCH

Please. Thank you. Send him up, would you?

Ida turns to leave.

O.S. Leibniz' SHUFFLES up the stairs. Baruch suddenly remembers the spider. He scans the desk and begins to panic. The spider has disappeared. Baruch quickly drops to the floor, crouching on his knees, desperately searching around the desk for the missing spider.

Leibniz enters, greeted by a direct view of Baruch's rump.

LEIBNIZ

I must say: I believe this is, by far, the most novel and possibly best-deserved greeting I have ever received.

Baruch stands clumsily, smiles bashfully and shakes Leibniz' hand. Baruch, sweating, is out of breath.

BARUCH

Welcome, *Herr* Leibniz. Please forgive me.

Mrs. Van der Spyk enters with the bowl of fruit and places it on the desk.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

Thank you, Ida.

She cheerfully acknowledges Baruch and his guest and leaves. Baruch points to his desk chair.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

Have a seat.

Leibniz puts down his satchel, adjusts himself on the chair while Baruch slumps on the *ledikant*.

In awkward silence, the two philosophers regard each other. Baruch's eyes drift to the floor below the desk. Leibniz notices Baruch is apparently preoccupied.

LEIBNIZ

Are you looking for something, *Herr* Spinoza?

BARUCH

Yes. I collect insects for my microscopic studies. One of them has crawled away.

Leibniz briefly scans the floor.

LEIBNIZ

Then we shall both maintain a vigilant watch for the--

BARUCH

Spider.

Alarmed, Leibniz looks around frantically.

LEIBNIZ

A *spin*? I hate *spinnen*, Herr Spinoza!
(realizes his faux
pas)
Perhaps I shall call you *Benedict*?

BARUCH

As you wish.

LEIBNIZ

Let us be forthright, then, Benedict. I have learned a great deal about you from Henry Oldenburg. And I've read your writings. Assiduously. But you know so little about me. You strike me as a cautious man, but I sense that you and I are similar in many ways, Benedict. Even as children we shared similar experiences. I lost my father when I was six. I know that you lost your beloved mother at the same age.

Baruch is impassive.

LEIBNIZ (CONT'D)

Surely you realize these experiences have a devastating and permanent influence upon our emotions, causing us to become cynical and skeptical about God's plan for us. We wonder about our salvation.

BARUCH

I am neither cynical nor concerned about my salvation.

LEIBNIZ

Please, Benedict. I have come here not to delineate our differences, but to celebrate our common natures.

Leibniz removes a pad of paper from his satchel.

LEIBNIZ (CONT'D)

Do you mind if I take notes during
our discussions?

Baruch gestures to his ink well on the desk.

BARUCH

Help yourself.

Leibniz drags the inkwell across the desk and balances the
pad on his lap.

LEIBNIZ

You do have a number of excellent
thoughts that agree with my own.
But there are a few paradoxes which
I do not find true... or even
plausible.

BARUCH

Such as?

LEIBNIZ

That you understand substance to be
in itself and conceived *through* itself--

BARUCH

-- the conception of which does not
require the conception of some other
thing.

Leibniz begins taking notes.

LEIBNIZ

Do you mean that any substance must
have one, or the other, or both of
these properties?

BARUCH

Both.

LEIBNIZ

(irritated)

You account for *no* individual
substances?

BARUCH

Just One. God.

Leibniz throws down his pen in frustration.

LEIBNIZ

But experience teaches us that we
are distinguished from another being
(MORE)

LEIBNIZ (CONT'D)

who thinks. Each of us is the embodiment of animating form in matter, an individual created substance.

BARUCH

Trust not the senses, but the intellect. You and I are merely *modes* of the divine substance. Can you conceive of me as not existing?

LEIBNIZ

(a little too happily)
Most assuredly.

Baruch catches the innuendo.

BARUCH

As I can similarly conceive of you, *Herr* Leibniz.

(pauses)

To whom then, if not to God, must we necessarily owe the explanation of our existence?

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- DUSK

Shadows have fallen across the room. Baruch is slumped wearily on his bed.

Leibniz, still fresh and energetic, reaches for an apple.

LEIBNIZ

(brightly)

Let's talk about sin.

(takes a bite)

And free will.

BARUCH

There is no such thing as free will.

Leibniz resumes taking furious notes.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

Everything that happens is a manifestation of God's nature. It is logically impossible that events should be other than they are.

Leibniz nearly chokes on the apple.

LEIBNIZ

Are you saying that since all things are decreed by God, they are therefore good?

(MORE)

LEIBNIZ (CONT'D)

Was it good that Nero killed his mother? Was it good that Adam ate the apple?

BARUCH

(calmly)

No. I am saying what is positive in these acts is good. Only what is negative is bad.

LEIBNIZ

(mollified)

Oh. We agree then.

BARUCH

But negation exists only from *our* point of view.

LEIBNIZ

I beg you to be clearer.

BARUCH

You and I are finite creatures, but in God, who is infinite, there is no negation because--

Baruch's stops mid-sentence. He directs his gaze to an area above Leibniz head.

LEIBNIZ

What is it?

The spider crawls down on the wall directly behind Leibniz.

BARUCH

There's the *Spin*!

Leibniz looks up and sees the spider. He "freaks." He picks up his satchel, and prepares to strike the spider with it.

LEIBNIZ

Where? I'll smash it!

Baruch frantically grabs Leibniz' satchel in midair.

BARUCH

(breathlessly)

No! Don't destroy it!

LEIBNIZ

Fret not for your poor *spin*, Spinoza. Even when a living insect is obliterated a certain part of it will always be as small as necessary to contain its soul. Pity you don't see that.

BARUCH

Look. It's getting late, *Herr* Leibniz. You can see that I am tired and a bit on edge. Let us resume our discussions tomorrow, shall we?

Leibniz snatches his satchel from Baruch.

LEIBNIZ

Very well.

Leibniz angrily stuffs his papers in the satchel. All the while, Baruch continues to eye the movements of the spider.

On his way out, Leibniz pauses in front of Baruch's painting of the young fisherman.

LEIBNIZ (CONT'D)

A striking portrait. Your work?

BARUCH

Yes.

Leibniz studies the face of the fisherman.

LEIBNIZ

It looks like you.

BARUCH

(pleased)

You think so? It's Mansaniello, the fisherman from Naples. Do you know the story?

LEIBNIZ

Vaguely. See you tomorrow then. In the meantime I shall pray for *your* soul.

Leibniz SLAMS the door behind him. Baruch SIGHS in relief, resumes the search for the spider.

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- NIGHT

A full moon shines through Baruch's window, illuminating the bowl of fruit on the desk, the portrait of Mansaniello, and Baruch's face, flushed and perspiring.

Baruch tries to focus his heavy-lidded, glazed eyes on objects in his room. He glances at the bowl of fruit, stares at the portrait and closes his eyes.

ON THE NET-- MOMENTS LATER.

The net transforms into a spider's web.

(DREAM SEQUENCE)

INT. A SMALL HUT IN NAPLES, ITALY -- MORNING

A young Baruch is MANSANIELLO, a young fisherman. He wakes up on his bed of straw, scrounges for some food and hungrily munches a crust of bread.

EXT. THE VICEROY'S PALACE, NAPLES -- DAY

Leibniz, the VICEROY, posts a sign on the palace walls.
Notice to Citizens of Naples: Effective today-- all fruit will be taxed.

EXT. THE CITY GATE, NAPLES -- LATER

Mansaniello, wearing his cloak, has rallied the townspeople. The mob, under his command, storms the city gate.

MOB
Burn the customs office!

EXT. CUSTOMS OFFICE, INSIDE THE GATE -- MOMENTS LATER

The Mob rejoices as the customs office goes up in flames.

MOB
To the palace! Get the Viceroy!

EXT. NAPLES, THE VICEROY'S PALACE -- LATER

Mansaniello escorts the Viceroy/Leibniz out of the palace, to the CHEERS of the mob.

MOB
Hail to Mansaniello, Commander in chief!

EXT. MANSANIELLO'S HUT -- NIGHT

Outside his hut, Mansaniello, still cloaked, fries fish on a CRACKLING fire.

The Viceroy approaches, holding Mansaniello's net.

Mansaniello offers the Viceroy a piece of fish.

VICEROY/LEIBNIZ
If the fruit tax is removed, will your people allow me to return to the palace?

MANSANIELLO/BARUCH
(sadly)
Yes. If I say so.

INT. VICEROY'S PALACE -- DAY

In a great banquet hall, the Viceroy drapes a magnificent gold chain and medallion around the impassive Mansaniello, still clad in fisherman's attire, holding his net.

VICEROY/LEIBNIZ

I propose a toast to the Captain
General of the Neapolitan people!

CROWD

Mansaniello! Mansaniello!

VICEROY/LEIBNIZ

Your Hero shall have a pension for
life!

The crowd CHEERS.

MANSANIELLO/BARUCH

I wish to return to my hut and fish.

Mansaniello removes the gold chain. The medallion becomes caught in his net.

The net becomes a spider's web. The medallion transforms to a black widow spider.

Mansaniello SHRIEKS and tries to cast off the net.

The spider bites Mansaniello on the neck. He becomes dizzy.

EXT. NAPLES, MARKET PLACE -- LATER

In a stupor, Mansaniello stumbles on top of a vendor's table smashing fruit under his feet. He SHOUTS incoherently to a bewildered crowd of people around him, and waves his arms maniacally.

The mob becomes angry. Someone throws a piece of fruit at him. Another throws a rock. Another throws a stick. A barrage of sticks, stones, and rotten fruit pummel Mansaniello until he falls to the ground, unconscious.

EXT. CITY GATE -- LATER

Mansaniello lies in a ditch. Fish SPLAT all over him as people throw buckets of herring into the ditch. He covers his face, smothered by slimy, squirming fish.

Suffocating, The young fisherman GASPS for breath as--

(END DREAM SEQUENCE)

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- DAY

Startled, Baruch awakens from his dream as he GASPS for breath. Relieved, he slowly lifts himself from the *ledikant*, his bed clothes soaked in perspiration.

INT. VAN DER SPYCK HOME/LIVINGROOM -- DAY

The Van der Spycks scurry about, preparing for church.

INT. VAN DER SPYCK HOME/STAIRCASE -- MOMENTS LATER

Baruch, pale and weak, slowly descends the stairs, gripping the bannister.

BARUCH
(gamely, COUGHS)
Goedemorgen!

INT. VAN DER SPYCK HOME/LIVINGROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Seeing Baruch, Van der Spyck and his wife show alarm.

VAN DER SPYCK
You've been ill for several days
Baruch and you don't seem to be
improving much. We've sent for your
friend, Dr. Weber. He assures us he
will arrive on the evening boat.

IDA
In the meantime, he's prescribed
some chicken broth. I've got an old
cock boiling in the pot.

BARUCH
You're very kind.

Baruch slowly lowers himself onto a chair.

BARUCH (CONT'D)
Reminds me of a story I heard about
Francis Bacon whose fateful encounter
with a chicken resulted in his
untimely death.

The children GASP. They gather around Baruch, sitting cross-legged on the floor, in rapt attention.

BARUCH (CONT'D)
Seems one cold spring morning, Bacon
took his customary walk to the market
where he bought a live chicken for
the purpose of conducting an
experiment.

(MORE)

BARUCH (CONT'D)

Apparently, the great English scientist wanted to determine how long snow could keep flesh from decaying.

The children make faces of disgust.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

So Bacon brought the chicken home, killed it, stuffed it with snow, and waited.

The children are wide-eyed with wonder.

BARUCH (CONT'D)

But shortly after doing so he himself became chilled and he went straight to bed and slept for quite awhile. When he awoke he apparently felt fine, for he wrote in his journal that his experiment had indeed gone quite well. Then, quite suddenly Bacon became feverish. He started to choke. He couldn't breath. And, well, that was that.

OLDEST BOY

What a pity!

BARUCH

Yes, poor Bacon had preserved the chicken, but it cost him his own life.

IDA (O.S.)

My stew!

Ida suddenly heads back to the kitchen.

Baruch tousles the oldest boy's hair.

BARUCH

So, we could hardly expect the poor man to be very fond of poultry after an experience like that, now could we?

Van der Spyk appreciates Baruch's nonsequitur. The children shake their heads in bewildered agreement.

IDA (O.S.)

(from the kitchen)

Bacon notwithstanding, *Minjeer* Spinoza will be eating chicken when we return home from Church.

Baruch rises strenuously from the chair.

BARUCH
Hendrick, would you accompany me
upstairs for a moment?

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Baruch opens his desk drawer where his letters are neatly
filed.

BARUCH
It occurred to me that you should
know where I keep all my papers and
letters in the event... something
should happen to me.

He opens another drawer containing his manuscripts.

BARUCH (CONT'D)
This desk and everything in it should
be sent to my friend, Jan Rieuwertsz,
in Amsterdam. Furthermore, only
Minjeer Camphuysen's *trekshuit*, and
no other, should convey them. Will
you see to it?

VAN DER SPYCK
Certainly. I promise.

Baruch is relieved. He shakes Van der Spyk's hand.

BARUCH
Thank you. For everything.

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- LATER

BREATHING LABORIOUSLY at his desk, Baruch scribbles some
notes.

BARUCH (V.O.)
I have now concluded all that I wished
to say regarding this present life.
Anyone who attends to my entreaties
shall understand how all the remedies
of the passions may be comprehended.
It is time to consider those matters
which pertain to the duration of the
mind, without relation to the body.

CUT TO:

INT. GRESHAM COLLEGE, OLDENBURG'S OFFICE -- DAY

At the window, Leibniz and Oldenburg view the expansive grassy
courtyard and colonnaded archways from Oldenburg's second
floor office.

HENRY

Were your meetings with him fruitful?

LEIBNIZ

Fruitful? If you mean did he show me a copy of his manuscript, the answer is 'no.' If you mean did we discuss its contents, the answer is 'yes'. He is full of wild, absurd and dangerous opinions. Should his work ever be published I resolve to devote every fiber of my being to assure that Spinoza is remembered for posterity as an atheist.

Oldenburg disappointedly shakes his head.

INT. BARUCH'S ROOM -- DAY

As Baruch writes, the black widow reappears and starts to cross the surface of the desk.

BARUCH

Proposition 21: The mind can imagine nothing, nor can it recollect anything that is past, except while the body exists.

The black widow crawls to the paper on which Baruch is writing. Baruch stops writing. The spider stops in its tracks. For a moment, Baruch and the spider seem to regard one another. Baruch calmly dips his pen in the inkwell.

The spider begins secreting its own oil on its legs.

Baruch resumes writing.

The black widow flings a thread of silk onto the pen. As Baruch continues to write, the spider continues to throw silk on Baruch's hand and on his pen.

BARUCH (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Proposition 22: In God, nevertheless, there necessarily exists an idea which expresses the essence of this or that human body under the form of eternity.

The spider flings its body onto Baruch's hand. Baruch GRUNTS. His hand briefly seizes, but he continues to move the pen.

EXT. THE NORTH SEA NEAR AMSTERDAM -- DAWN

Amsterdam's buildings are seen in the distance in the glow of sunset as Campy navigates his *trekshuit* carrying only

Baruch's writing desk that is roped securely to the bench where Benny would have otherwise been seated.

CUT TO:

INT. VAN DER SPYCK HOME/STAIRCASE -- DAY

Van der Spyck, Weber, Schuller and Tshirnhaus solemnly convey Baruch's body, covered in a white sheet, down the staircase.

EXT. A DOCK IN AMSTERDAM -- DAY

Campy, Rieuwiertz and Jarig load the writing desk into a horse-drawn coach. Campy shakes their hands and watches as Jellig and Rieurwiertz ride away.

BARUCH (V.O.)

Proposition 23: The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal.

EXT. JEWISH PORTUGUESE SYNAGOGUE, AMSTERDAM -- LATER

The coach passes by the newly constructed, brilliantly illuminated building during Sabbath services. O.S. VOICES of congregants in SONG emanate from within.

INT. SYNAGOGUE -- CONTINUOUS

The cantor leads the congregation in SONG-- a Hebrew HYMN, praising God.

ON THE ROOF

A DOVE FLAPS its wings.

CUT TO:

EXT. AERIAL VIEW OF AMSTERDAM -- DAY

The dove ascends in the dewey fog. O.S. Cantor's CHANTS.

DOVE'S POV

The city's canals stretch out in concentric circles from the center. Amsterdam looks like a giant spider web.

FADE OUT

AFTER
CREDITS,
CUT TO:

EXT. HERMAN HOOMAN'S HOUSE, RIJNSBURG -- DAY

Amidst a garden profuse with multi-colored tulips, Campy wipes dirt from his hands as he places on the ground

A STONE PLAQUE

Engraved: Alas, if all humans were wise and had more good will, the world would be a paradise. Now it is mostly a hell.