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Benito Cereno



Synopsis

Captain Delano is approached on the open sea by a battered-looking ship lead by Captain Benito Cereno. Cereno, always accompanied by his personal slave Babo, explains that his crew was transporting a group of slaves from Africa when their ship was caught and damaged in severe weather. He is polite but always timid, and requests supplies for his ships remaining journey. Captain Delano agrees to help but begins to notice the strange social interactions and atmosphere of Cereno's crew and the slaves. Delano begins to believe that Cereno is hiding something, and turns out to be right, as a climactic battle breaks out between the two crews, Benito Cereno's greatest secret is uncovered.

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Customer Reviews

Herman Melville (August 1, 1819 - September 28, 1891) was an American writer and the author of *Moby Dick*, *Bartleby the Scrivener*, and *Billy Budd*. Although he experienced some success with his first three novels, Melville quickly faded from literary fame. His other work did not gain popularity again until the early 20th century, when *Moby Dick* was hailed as a literary masterpiece and paved the way for the critical celebration of his other works. Pete Cross holds a BA in Theatre from the University of Toledo and an MFA in Acting from the California Institute of the Arts. Stage experience includes Alexander in "Every Good Boy Deserves Favour," at Carnegie Hall. He has also acted in film, and served on faculty at Cal Arts and with Aquila Morong Studio in Hollywood. Pete has coached for film and theatrical productions, and continues to work with private clients all over the world.

Melville's prose is ornate and difficult to read, yet the story is gripping. An American merchant ship, the *Bachelor's Delight*, sailing up the west coast of South America encounters the *San Dominick*, a Spanish slave ship that is obviously in distress. Wanting to give assistance, the ship's captain, Amasa Delano, boards the ship and tries to find out from the captain, Benito Cereno, what has happened. What he sees -- an absence of ship's officers and of most of the crew, and Black who are freely moving about the deck of the ship without being confined to the lower decks astonishes him. Cereno's woeful story makes no sense to Delano, but Cereno's Black servant, Babo, will not leave him alone to ask further questions. The pacing of this book is masterly as Delano's suspicions grow and he gradually becomes aware of the grisly events aboard the *San Dominick*. The book is told from Delano's viewpoint -- and as such is morally ambiguous from the modern reader's point of view.

If you like Melville, but don't have time for one of his longer works (*Moby Dick*, etc.) this might be just the one for you! This edition of the kindle-book is okay. You know how some of them are cheap and full of typos; this one is not. Give it a try! You might like it. It has a suspenseful story line.

This lesser known novel of the sea by Herman Melville offers a glimpse into the slave trade as it occurred in the New World a couple of centuries ago. It is based on a true event, a rebellion on a slave ship in the waters off South America. The "hero" is a decidedly clueless, but good-natured ship's captain; the "villains" are slaves who try to win their freedom while at sea but do not have the skills to pilot the ship to freedom. A massive deception is at the center of the plot, but its success is not entirely convincing. Still, something like this apparently happened, and it's a sad tale in a sad history of the colonializing of the Americas and the human practice of slavery. Melville specializes in epic sad tales.

A combination of a Stevenson yarn and a house-of-mirrors, *B. Cereno* will hold your interest as the sad story unfolds. What is real and what is merely perception? A fascinating study of a fictional relationship, this is weird but good reading.

Melville presents a tantalizing tale of a slave rebellion aboard ship, at the turn of the 19th century. He was apparently way ahead of Styron's "*Nat Turner*" in his presentation of the anger of the slaves, and their violent response to their horrendous predicament. They were hardly the ignorant

dummies they were perceived as back then, by their white masters.

A gripping, terrifying story. Highly relevant to controversies about race in our time.

I read this because of the reference to it in Greg Grandin's "Empire of Necessity". A powerful story about an extraordinary situation, probably unique in history and reminiscent of Shakespeare (where you had, sometimes, a male actor playing the part of a woman impersonating as a man). Melville, great writer that he was, let's the implications speak for themselves.

Good read, kind of hard at first to understand what is going on, but definitely didn't expect the twist at the end.

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