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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 greatest secret is uncovered.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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.

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'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.

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.

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.

Melville is a genius. This short Gothic novella begins ploddingly and quite dull but builds in tension and horror almost imperceptibly (unless you already know the story) to a sudden and all-encompassing tragic climax. Based on a true story, it was written and left by Melville as an exposition of facts seen from all sides and leaves all the uncomfortable questions in a bloody lump on your lap, "here, you answer them." Screams to be read a second time.

As to substance, this is not my favorite Melville story. The harsh racism was hard to swallow. As to the format, not real happy with the Kindle ebook format in this instance. The text, spacing, and paragraphs were erratic in structure. It seemed that the transcriber meant to create intended to

create areas of quotes but whatever was the intention it made for clumsy reading. As much as I like to read on the Kindle I have to recommend against this version.

The novel is based on a true and near forgotten incident of a successful slave ship revolt. The style is stilted and it takes a long time to realize what is happening. Until then, there isn't much interest. Still, worth the effort. It is a short book.

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