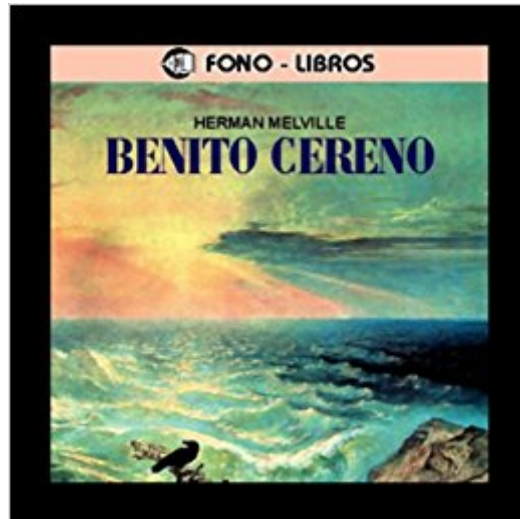




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BENITO CERENO (Spanish Edition)



Synopsis

An incredible odyssey of displaced people in the sea. During a maritime cruise, a group of black slaves revolted to force the return to their African home. This is the plot basis of Melville's beautiful novel, which is a part of an anthology called The Piazza Tales. All the stories have in common the description of people that live outlaw lives, that are displaced and in search of their roots. It is a book that brings both the pitiful condition of the slaves and moments of great suspense, as well as the right psychological portrait of ship captains that have to choose between what is legally correct and morally right.

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Customer Reviews

Escritor estadounidense, Herman Melville está considerado como uno de los grandes autores de la literatura universal. Con apenas veinte años, Melville comenzó una serie de viajes por todo el mundo que más adelante le servirían como base e inspiración para varias de sus novelas, incluyendo varios años trabajando como ballenero y pasando varias aventuras en las islas del Pacífico. El mar y su mundo son fundamentales en la obra de Melville, como ya se aprecia en *Mardi* (1849) o *Taipei* (1846). Dichas obras se convirtieron en un éxito de público aunque la crítica nunca acompañó su carrera. Su obra más conocida en la actualidad es, sin duda, *Moby Dick* (1851), adaptada al cine y la televisión en numerosas ocasiones, pero que en su época pasó completamente desapercibida. Pese a todo, Melville continuó escribiendo hasta lograr grandes cuentos como *Benito Cereno* o *Bartleby el escribiente*. Herman Melville murió en 1891 y no fue hasta la década de 1920 que la crítica recuperó su obra para situarla como una

de las más influyentes de todo el siglo XIX. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

rico !

"Benito Cereno" is one of the few really interesting short stories written by inconsistent American author Herman Melville. Set in the southern coasts of Chile in the year 1799, it tells us about the finding by an American sealer of the "San Dominick", a forlorn and decrepit Spanish ship, partly dismantled, which holds a cargo of Negro slaves and that seems to go adrift. American captain Amasa Delano, fearing that the crew in the foreign ship might have suffered difficulties, decides to go aboard and see what happens. Once Delano is on deck, he'll be the witness of a very peculiar spectacle. On board the "San Dominick", white sailors and black slaves intermingle together without any restriction. The disorder and lack of discipline are obvious for anyone to see. When he finally meets Spanish captain Benito Cereno, the American is quite shocked by his apathetic and melancholy character. The Spaniard's despondency curiously reflects in no small degree the pitiful state of affairs around him. Delano is also baffled about the mystifying relationship between the Spanish captain and his black servant, the ubiquitous Babo. At first sight, both individuals seem to play their respective roles appropriately, but appearances can be deceptive, and, who's really the master and who the slave? Nothing in "Benito Cereno" is what appears to be in the eyes of the casual observer. This tale is one of the best ever written about human perception. From the moment Delano sets foot on the ship, he undergoes a very slow process of awareness about the situation and the people he's dealing with. His personal view about matters on deck is always limited and inaccurate. Basically, this is a story about "deceit", and the American skipper is unable at any moment to find the ultimate key in order to get out from the perceptive maze he's in. Only at the very end will he be able to discover the elusive truth. On a symbolical level, the meaning (or one of the possible meanings) is quite obvious: the juxtaposition of two captains and two ships, each one of them representing their respective nations. On the one hand, the declining Spanish Empire, personified in the wasted figure of Don Benito and his run-down ship; and on the other, the rising United States of America with the naive, proud and inexperienced captain Delano symbolising a country which has just recently come into existence. The first appearance of the "San Dominick", wreathed in dense ribbons of mist is also a very powerful image, and beautifully anticipates the masquerade Delano's going to face ("shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come"). Some of the criticism about "Benito Cereno" has arisen from people accusing the story of perpetuating some racist stereotypes. Personally, I'm unable to appreciate any kind of favouritism or

contempt towards the portrayal of the characters. As a matter of fact, I don't think that the black people might be described as "stupid" or as the only ones guilty of barbarism. Their behaviour is not more "primitive", at any rate, than the force displayed by the whites to subdue them or the punishments employed in the colonial courts of law at the end of the story. Of course, not to mention the fact that both civilizations (Spanish and American) did make use at that period of time of the detestable institution of slavery. Anyway, Babo is not precisely a half-wit and, ironically, captain Delano's racial prejudices are exactly one of the main reasons why the American can't understand what's really happening on board the "San Dominick", because his white pride prevents him from thinking of Babo as the schemer and deceiver he actually is. The black man, considered by the whites as an inferior, manages to outwit everybody. Herman Melville is not exactly one of my "top authors". I must confess that I have a love-hate relationship with him. His works have equally bored and enthralled me in almost the same degree. I personally enjoyed some of the passages in "Benito Cereno" (the "climax" of the story, its deep psychological insight, and the symbols employed are particularly intense). It is an important text for anyone interested in American or Nautical literature. My main criticism about it is the awful narrative pace. When it comes down to value a work of literature, I think that the "tempo" is a very under appreciated characteristic, and in this aspect, "Benito Cereno" certainly fails. The story is too long and drawn-out to be completely satisfactory, although, in a way, given the nature of the plot, it may be argued that that approach is inevitable. I am of the opinion that the narrative would have benefited from a division into several chapters, or, at least, by the inclusion of some new paragraphs now and then. The style is dense, obscure and rather torturous (one of Melville's most long-winded texts I've read). The vocabulary is pretty impressive due to its richness and complexity, and makes the book very hard to follow. As a foreigner, I found it excruciatingly difficult to read (though quite rewarding at the end). The problem is that, as the language used is also archaic and melodramatic, it is hardly useful for today's speakers and learners in general. In this respect, it is only worth reading for the historical importance of Melville's contributions to the English lexicon. All in all, I liked the book, but I seriously doubt I'm going to read it again in the future. The "content" is good but the "form" leaves something to be desired and it doesn't constitute my idea of a fluid and effective narrative. It is a fascinating story, but too slow and demanding for its own sake. Well, at least it is far better than the despicable novella "Billy Budd". I suppose that's better than nothing.

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