



# Benito Cereno: A Classic Novella

*Herman Melville*

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## **Benito Cereno: A Classic Novella** Herman Melville

Benito Cereno by Herman Melville. Benito Cereno is a novella by Herman Melville. It was first serialized in Putnam's Monthly in 1855 and later included a slightly revised version in his collection The Piazza Tales (1856). In developing the novella, Melville drew almost exclusively on the memoir of the real Captain Amasa Delano, whom Melville depicts as the main protagonist and focal character. Delano recounts how in 1805, his vessel Perseverance encountered the Spanish Tryal (not to be confused with the 17th-century British Tryall), a ship whose slaves had overthrown the Spanish sailors. The narrative of events in the novel closely follows the actual event. The story follows a sea captain, Amasa Delano, (the fictionalized version of a real-life adventurer by the same name) and his crew on the Bachelor's Delight as it is approached by another, rather battered-looking ship, the San Dominick. Upon boarding the San Dominick, Delano is immediately greeted by white sailors and black slaves begging for supplies. An inquisitive Delano ponders the mysterious social atmosphere aboard the badly bruised ship and notes the figurehead, which is mostly concealed by a tarpaulin revealing only the inscription: "Follow your leader." Delano soon encounters the ship's noticeably timid but polite Spanish captain, Don Benito Cereno. Cereno is constantly attended to by his personal slave, Babo, whom Cereno keeps in close company even when Delano suggests that Babo leave the two in private to discuss matters that are clearly being avoided. Delano, however, does not bother Cereno to ask questions about the odd superficiality of their conversation; he believes Cereno's assertion that he and his crew have recently gone through a debilitating series of troubles, having been at sea now for an unsettlingly long time. Cereno tells of these tribulations, including horrendous weather patterns and the fate of the slaves' master, Alexandro Aranda, who Cereno claims took fever aboard the ship and died.

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