

Chapter 1 : Benito Cereno by Herman Melville

"Benito Cereno" is, like "Bartleby the Scrivener," one of Melville's most hotly debated short stories. But unlike "Bartleby," where interpretation of the story's essential meaning is the main area of interest, "Benito Cereno" owes much of its popularity among literary critics to its subject matter: slavery.

Instants in the texts that raise doubts about the narrator surely qualify as such moments and merit closer examination. This narrator is clearly overt as he introduces himself to the reader in the very first line: This strange anonymity is intensified when the narrator provides an address and description of his work space, but omits the number: These omissions allow the narrator to remain unidentifiable, even though he provides ample information about the type of man he considers himself to be. Even though the proclaimed purpose of this narrative is to tell the reader about Bartleby, the reader learns as much or more about the narrator himself. Notice the dash indicating a hesitation - perhaps indicating a timely self-check and suppression of a stronger term. By including such information but then downplaying it, the narrator, for one, reveals that he cannot resist making the story about himself. Secondly, he reveals that he is aware of both the fact that he has an audience as well as the potential effects of such information on them. The language in which the details of the narrative are rendered has to be attributed to somebody. In the case of the detailed description of the setting, the language is that of the covert narrator Rimmon-Kenan. In the case of overheard conversations, the language is that of other characters. Here, the fact that reported speech is not clearly marked as such and that what is elaborated on are actually the perceptions of Captain Amasa Delano can cause some confusion: This narrator is actually reliable in the sense that the fictional facts of the unfolding events correspond to the narrative truth. Signs of unreliability occur throughout the story. The fact that the narrator openly admits that his knowledge is limited does not mediate this fact. What interest could the narrator then have in creating a narrative around him? Furthermore, this narrator displays definite personal involvement and thus gives the reader reasons to speculate about both the reasons for and the manner in which he spins his tale. They serve as a reminder that elements of the story may be forgotten, unmentioned, removed, added, embellished or understated, and that each of these elements present serves a purpose. The lawyer repeatedly shies away from conflict and cannot stand up to his employees. For example, his attempt to send his employee Turkey into retirement fails, and he tolerates many strange behaviors from him that are more of a nuisance than useful to the lawyer. In the case of Bartleby, the narrator admits outright that his treatment of Bartleby was not merely motivated by charity and compassion, but calculated for his own benefit and satisfaction: Even though he continuously proclaims to be even-tempered, the continued refusals of Bartleby aggravate the narrator more and more, and he barely succeeds in keeping his emotions from taking over: He acknowledges the increased likelihood of violence occurring in the absence of others, such as in a situation in which he is with Bartleby, and finds greater empathy for the perpetrator than the victim. After admitting to having grappled and thrown Bartleby, the narrator ventures into a philosophical explanation for his behavior, claiming to have acted out of Christian charity and quoting the Bible to underscore his point. Does he consider his actions charitable because he refrained from killing Bartleby? Why are the references to murder included if he acted benevolently? Is the narrator being deceitful? Furthermore, these instances in the text may incite speculation about what other elements of the text could be considered euphemisms and what additional omissions have taken place. Knowing the outcome, one can interpret the events perceived by Delano in a completely different manner upon re-reading the story. The huge disparity between the narrative reality and the events as justified and imagined by Delano for himself, shifts the focus away from the latter and onto Benito Cereno as well as the revolting slaves. Whereas the story is not retold in the words of Benito Cereno, the appended deposition recounts his experience in objective terms from a safe, legal distance. They foreground the way in which the story is being told and almost point out that omissions have taken place. Through the very process of being frustrated and duped, readers learn to take on a more active role, become more aware and critical, and fill in the gaps of what is not being said. Levine calls attention to this when he writes: *A Story of Wall-Street. Facts on File, His World and Work. November, and December,*

Chapter 2 : The Motif of the Imprisoning Microcosm

Herman Melville () is an American writer who is widely acclaimed, among his most admired works are "Bartleby, the Scrivener" and "Benito Cereno" which both first appeared as magazine pieces and only published in as part of a collection.

We have developed a set of discussion questions below for each story. When a New York lawyer needs to hire another copyist, it is Bartleby who responds to his advertisement, and arrives "pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn. Adapted from the Penguin edition. He is best known for his novel Moby-Dick and novella Billy Budd, the latter of which was published posthumously. After her husband Allan died, Maria added an "e" to the family surname. Overextended financially and emotionally unstable, Allan eventually declared bankruptcy, dying soon afterward and leaving his family penniless when Herman was Melville attended the Albany Academy from October to October , and again from October to March , where he studied the classics. This effort failed, and his brother helped him get a job as a cabin boy on a New York ship bound for Liverpool. He made the voyage, and returned on the same ship. His First Voyage is partly based on his experiences of this journey. After teaching for a stint , Melville spent the next four years at sea, travelling in the South Pacific Ocean, stopping off for periods in Hawaii and the Marquesas Islands where he lived among the Typee natives. He returned to Boston in These experiences were described in Typee , Omoo , and White-Jacket , which gave Melville overnight notoriety as a writer and adventurer. In , Melville married Elizabeth Shaw daughter of chief justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Lemuel Shaw ; the couple had four children, two sons and two daughters. In they purchased Arrowhead, a farm house in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, now a museum. Here Melville lived for thirteen years, occupied with his writing and managing his farm. While living at Arrowhead, he befriended the author Nathaniel Hawthorne, who lived in nearby Lenox. Melville, an intellectual loner for most of his life, was tremendously inspired and encouraged by his new relationship with Hawthorne during the period he was writing Moby-Dick Melville dedicated that work to Hawthorne, though their friendship was on the wane only a short time later, when Melville wrote Pierre Sadly, these works did not achieve the popular and critical success of his earlier books. His The Confidence-Man , winning general acclaim in modern times, received contemporary reviews ranging from the bewildered to the denunciatory. By his professional writing career can be said to have come to an end. In a notoriously corrupt institution, Melville soon won the reputation of being the only honest employee of the customs house. Her relatives repeatedly urged her to leave him, and offered to have him committed as insane, but she refused. In his oldest son, Malcolm, shot himself, perhaps accidentally. While Melville worked, his wife managed to wean him off alcohol, and he no longer showed signs of agitation or insanity. But recurring depression was added-to by the death of his second son, Stanwix, in San Francisco early in Melville administered with skill and good fortune. Upon his death in September , he left an unfinished piece; not until the literary scholar Raymond Weaver published it in did the bookâ€™which we now know as Billy Budd, Sailorâ€™come to light. Later it was turned into an opera by Benjamin Britten, a play, and a film by Peter Ustinov. For classic works there are few, if any, mainstream reviews online.

Chapter 3 : Comparison of Narrators in "Bartleby" & "Benito Cereno"

29, Benito Cereno in the Context of Slavery Herman Melville's novella Benito Cereno is a story that helps to express Melville's view on slavery. Contained within the text is an intricate story that sheds light on the ultimate underlying problems to the existence of slavery.

You will thank me later. I listened to this short-ish story on librivox, a site that I spend a lot of time on at my "sitting at a desk with headphones on performing monotonous tasks" day job. Scattered bits of information that swirl around in my brain like apparitions rather than being fully digested and excreted chunks of knowledge. Listening to but not actually watching Ted videos, because I have to actually work sometimes. Scoff at me, intellectual elite! Well, fuck u, yuh smartsy fartsies! Even being "clever" is easy! A multi-tasker it makes of me, you see. Fortunately, librivox provides links to the full text of the books that they have recorded, so you can make little notes to yourself about passages and particularly moving scenes you may want to go back and re-read, all scrawled out and waiting for you like the ramblings of a lunatic right there on the neon green post-it notes that you are supposed to be using in your "work. Getting back on target. What moved me toward reading more Melville was his story Bartleby, the Scrivener which I absolutely loved and related to in a "this is the tedium of your life slowly eating away at your soul until one day you may become completely comatose, and btw fyi you are currently experiencing an existential crisis but you are too numb to realize it" sort of way. But that is another review for another day This story is an examination of disingenuous social exchanges heightened to the level of a slowly uncoiling action-horror-suspense-drama film. The simple plot outline is this: You trudge along with the main character, Captain Delano as he attempts to rationalize his general uneasiness about the goings-on during his day on the ship, rather than considering it to perhaps be an instinctual response to a few fairly obvious signs that something is amiss. That is all I can say about that. Be forewarned that some passages may rub some readers the wrong way, and I mean "rub" as un-sexily as possible. In fact, Melville is making a hell of an argument here about good and evil by twisting your stomach up in knots about who you should be cheering for I mean, even the most happy-go-lucky seeming man has a dark side. The question is, whose side is darker? Is anything or anyone how or what they seem to be? This story is tightly and beautifully executed. There is so much to think about in the various symbols throughout. Along with giving me the spins, this story reminded me that I do love Melville, and should probably go back and reread Moby Dick. There is too much artsy stimulus in the world! Then again, why do we listen to songs over and over and over again and re-watch movies, tell the same jokes and listen to the same drunken friends tell the same drunken stories, but we so rarely reread books? I remember reading something about how Nabokov would finish a novel, then immediately flip to the beginning and start reading the whole thing all over again, since he considered this the only way to truly, truly experience a book. I respect that, and admit that my own number of book rereads is shamefully low I only tend to give a second go to the very tops of my personal literary experiences in ecstasy One final and quite unimportant thought. In one section of the story, Captain Delano notes this when describing Don Benito and the eerie feeling he gets from him: Have a lovely day.

Chapter 4 : Bartleby and Benito Cereno | UK education collection

Two of the most admired of these "Bartleby" and "Benito Cereno" first appeared as magazine pieces and were then published in as part of a collection of short stories entitled The Piazza Tales. "Bartleby" (also known as "Bartleby the Scrivener") is an intriguing moral allegory set in the.

Frontispice from his A Narrative of Voyages, Benito Cereno takes place in Wondering if the ship may be in distress, Delano boards his whale-boat and sets sail towards the suspicious ship. He learns that the ship is called the San Dominick and meets its captain, Benito Cereno. Upon arrival, Delano is greeted by Spaniards and black men and women who begs him for water and supplies. Delano is troubled by the amount of black people on board since they greatly outnumber the Spaniards. This disparity is explained by the collective cries of those on-board, claiming that they had been hit by a fever that killed more of the Spaniard crew more than the slaves. Assuming the standard roles of the races, Delano ignores many signs that troubles him about the ship. The ship is actually filled with rebel slaves who killed off their slave owner, Alexandro Aranda, and are in control of the Spaniards and Captain Benito. Captain Benito is constantly served by Babo, the leader of the rebellion, and Delano does not suspect anything despite the fact that Benito was never left alone. Due to all of the aforementioned conditions, the ship doubled its path several times. At this point, Don Benito stops and states, "I have to thank those Negroes you see, who, though to your inexperienced eyes appearing unruly, have, indeed, conducted themselves with less of restlessness than even their owner could have thought possible under such circumstances". Delano sends his men back to bring more food and water and stays aboard in the company of its Spanish captain, Don Benito Cereno, and his Senegalese servant, Babo, who is always by his side. Cereno is constantly attended to by his personal slave, Babo, whom he keeps in close company even when Delano suggests that Babo leave the two in private. Delano, however, does not bother Cereno to ask questions about the odd superficiality of their conversation. What disturbs Delano are incidents that he observes among the hatchet polishers and oakum pickers, such as when a black boy slashes the head of a white boy with a knife. Surprisingly, Cereno does not acknowledge or even seem to care about this behavior. This is also evident with Atufal, a slave who even in chains appears regal and rebellious. The whispered conversations between Cereno and Babo makes Delano feel uncomfortable. When The Rover arrives with supplies, Delano sends the dinghy back for more water while he continues to observe curious incidents. Their suspicious behavior continues when Babo first searches "for the sharpest" razor, and Cereno "nervously shuddered" at the "sight of gleaming steel. Cereno declines the offer, offending Delano, who is also increasingly irritated by the lack of opportunity to have a private conversation without Babo within hearing distance. Three Spanish sailors dive after him, just as Babo, "dagger in his hand", and a dark avalanche of slaves. Delano fears Babo wants to attack him, but the black loses the dagger when he falls into the boat. With a second dagger, Babo continues his attack. His purpose is now revealed: Delano, "now with the scales dropped from his eyes", realizes that a slave revolt has been going on aboard the San Dominick. He sees the remaining sailors taking flight into the masts to escape the "flourishing hatchets and knives" of the blacks who are after them. Delano secures Babo, and his men, under command of his chief mate, attack the Spanish ship to claim booty by defeating the revolting slaves. Eventually, legal depositions taken at Lima explain the matter. As Delano approaches, the revolting slaves set up the delusion that the surviving whites are still in charge. Delano asks the sad Benito: In , the Spanish schooner La Amistad with fifty slaves became the site of slave revolt between two Cuban ports, and two crew members were killed. An American naval vessel seized the Amistad when the ship had wandered off course near Long Island. Then followed a legal battle which went all the way to the U. Supreme Court ruling United States v. In the American Creole moved slaves from Virginia to New Orleans when nineteen slaves killed a white sailor and took command of the ship, which then set sail to the British Bahamas. In the Creole case , the slaves were set free under the British Act of Emancipation. Madison Washington, the leader of the revolt, became the hero of a novel a decade later, in March , when Frederick Douglass published the short novel The Heroic Slave in his anti-slavery newspaper North Star. We pulled as fast as we could on board; and then despatched the boat for the man who was left in

the water, whom we succeeded to save alive. We soon had our guns ready; but the Spanish ship had dropped so far astern of the *Perseverance*, that we could bring but one gun to bear on her, which was the after one. This was fired six times, without any other effect than cutting away the fore top-mast stay, and some other small ropes which were no hindrance to her going away. She was soon out of reach of our shot, steering out of the bay. We then had some other calculations to make. He merely rewrote this Chapter including a portion of the legal documents there appended, suppressing a few items, and making some small additions. First, while Delano does not describe the Spanish ship, Melville provides a description of a "Spanish merchantman of the first class," that had seen better days: Battered and mouldy, the castellated fore-castle seemed some ancient turret, long ago taken by assault, and then left to decay. Though the names of the captains remain unchanged, Melville changes the name of the confidential servant from Muri to Babo. Other additions include the two slaves attacking the Spanish seaman, the glimpse of the jewel, and the sailor presenting the Gordian knot. Meantime, the guns were in readiness, though, owing to the *San Dominick* having glided somewhat astern of the sealer, only the aftermost could be brought to bear. With this, they fired six times; thinking to cripple the fugitive ship by bringing down her spars. But only a few inconsiderable ropes were shot away. The real Delano describes this in one phrase "captain, mate, people and slaves, crowded around me to relate their stories" , but Melville expands the scene to one full paragraph. Historian Sterling Stuckey finds it unjust to restrict attention to chapter 18, because Melville used elements from other chapters as well. During his visit aboard the slave carrier, Hershel Parker observes that Delano "repeats a pattern of suspicions-followed-by-reassurance, with progressively shorter periods in which suspicions can be allayed. Unconsciously, Delano lets himself be distracted from pursuing his apprehensions. This event is related a second time, now in "the cumbersome style of a judicial exposition" for which the documents in the source provided the model. For Berthoff, the presence of these documents represent "only the most abrupt of a series of shifts and starts in the presentation" that constitute the narrative rhythm of "tension increasing and diminishing" and of "the nervous succession of antithetical feelings and intuitions. As his foot pressed the half-damp, half-dry seamosses matting the place, and a chance phantom cats-paw--an islet of breeze, unheralded, unfollowed--as this ghostly cats-paw came fanning his cheek; as his glance fell upon the row of small, round dead-lights--all closed like coppered eyes of the coffined--and the state-cabin door, once connecting with the gallery, even as the dead-: Seeing all was over, he uttered no sound, and could not be forced to. His aspect seemed to say, since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words. Put in irons in the hold, he was carried to Lima. During the passage, Don Benito did not visit him. Nor then, nor at any time after, would he look at him. Before the tribunal he refused. When pressed by the judges, he fainted. On the testimony of the sailors alone rested the legal identity of Babo. Some months after, dragged to the gibbet at the tail of a mule, the black met his voiceless end. The body was burned to ashes; but for many days, the head, that hive of subtlety, fixed on a pole in the Plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of the whites; and across the Plaza looked towards St. Feltenstein sees "a trace of nineteenth-century satanism in Babo," [42] and asserts that "Slavery is not the issue here; the focus is upon evil in action in a certain situation. In an inversion of contemporary racial stereotypes, Babo is portrayed as a physically weak man of great intellect, his head impaled on a spike at the end of the story a "hive of subtlety". The Americans display no better moral when they board the ship at the end of the story: The issue is "not his lack of intelligence, but the shape of his mind, which can process reality only through the sieve of a culturally conditioned benevolent racism," and Delano is eventually "conned by his most cherished stereotypes. Each time some anomaly occurs, such as the slave who stands unbowed before a white man trembling with fear, Delano contemplates the matter deeply and always thinks up a reason for feeling relieved. Apparently, Babo tests the blade across his palm, and for Delano the sound is that of a man humbling himself, while Cereno hears "the black man warning him: Then, just when Delano has preceded the other two out of the cabin, Babo cuts himself in the cheek. Delano is momentarily shocked by this Spanish cruelty, but when he sees Babo and Don Benito reconciled he is relieved to notice that the outrage has passed. On 19 April Curtis wrote to Dix he found the story "very good", even though he regretted that Melville "did not work it up as a connected tale instead of putting in the dreary documents at the end. Thus, the novella appeared in a "partisan magazine committed to the anti-slavery cause. Biographer Hershel Parker believes he

did this because Pictor had revealed the source for the novella. In the novella became the first separate edition of any of his short prose pieces when the Nonesuch Press published the text with illustrations by E. Bergmann, "Benito Cereno", "Bartleby", and "The Encantadas" were the most frequently praised by reviewers of the stories that make up *The Piazza Tales*. Some of the most influential critics had little regard for the novella. It was later revived off-Broadway in . In , Benito Cereno was performed in another off-Broadway production without the other two plays of the trilogy. The poem was first published in *American Poetry Review* in . A *Journal of Melville Studies* in

Chapter 5 : Bartleby the Scrivener (Melville) - LitLovers

Bartleby is a profound classic and also a lighthearted lark, so I suppose it makes sense to place it in juxtaposition to Benito Cereno, which is far more serious and dark in tone. I will never dislike reading Bartleby since it is simply a very amusing and spirited story - Melville clearly enjoyed writing it and winks at the reader throughout.

The Piazza When I removed into the country, it was to occupy an old-fashioned farm-house, which had no piazza -- a deficiency the more regretted, because not only did I like piazzas, as somehow combining the coziness of in-doors with the freedom of out-doors, and it is so pleasant to inspect your thermometer there, but the country round about was such a picture, that in berry time no boy climbs hill or crosses vale without coming upon easels planted in every nook, and sunburnt painters painting there. A very paradise of painters. The circle of the stars cut by the circle of the mountains. At least, so looks it from the house; though, once upon the mountains, no circle of them can you see. Had the site been chosen five rods off, this charmed ring would not have been. A winter wood road, matted all along with winter-green. Launching my yawl no more for fairy-land, I stick to the piazza. It is my box-royal; and this amphitheatre, my theatre of San Carlo. Yes, the scenery is magical -- the illusion so complete. And Madam Meadow Lark, my prima donna, plays her grand engagement here; and, drinking in her sunrise note, which, Memnon-like, seems struck from the golden window, how far from me the weary face behind it. But, every night, when the curtain falls, truth comes in with darkness. No light shows from the mountain. Bartleby, The Scrivener I am a rather elderly man. The nature of my avocations for the last thirty years has brought me into more than ordinary contact with what would seem an interesting and somewhat singular set of men, of whom as yet nothing that I know of has ever been written: I have known very many of them, professionally and privately, and if I pleased, could relate divers histories, at which good-natured gentlemen might smile, and sentimental souls might weep. But I waive the biographies of all other scriveners for a few passages in the life of Bartleby, who was a scrivener the strangest I ever saw or heard of. While of other law-copyists I might write the complete life, of Bartleby nothing of that sort can be done. I believe that no materials exist for a full and satisfactory biography of this man. It is an irreparable loss to literature. Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources, and in his case those are very small. What my own astonished eyes saw of Bartleby, that is all I know of him, except, indeed, one vague report which will appear in the sequel. There was now great work for scriveners. Not only must I push the clerks already with me, but I must have additional help. In answer to my advertisement, a motionless young man one morning, stood upon my office threshold, the door being open, for it was summer. I can see that figure now -- pallidly neat, pitifully respectable, incurably forlorn! I called to him, rapidly stating what it was I wanted him to do -- namely, to examine a small paper with me. Imagine my surprise, nay, my consternation, when without moving from his privacy, Bartleby in a singularly mild, firm voice, replied, "I would prefer not to. I remembered that he never spoke but to answer; that though at intervals he had considerable time to himself, yet I had never seen him reading -- no, not even a newspaper; that for long periods he would stand looking out, at his pale window behind the screen, upon the dead brick wall Being under no disgraceful charge, and quite serene and harmless in all his ways, they had permitted him freely to wander about the prison, and especially in the inclosed grass-platted yards thereof. And so I found him there, standing all alone in the quietest of the yards, his face towards a high wall, while all around, from the narrow slits of the jail windows, I thought I saw peering out upon him the eyes of murderers and thieves. Nothing reproachful attaches to you by being here. And see, it is not so sad a place as one might think. Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass. Benito Cereno In the year , Captain Amasa Delano, of Duxbury, in Massachusetts, commanding a large sealer and general trader, lay at anchor, with a valuable cargo, in the harbor of St. Maria -- a small, desert, uninhabited island toward the southern extremity of the long coast of Chili. There he had touched for water. On the second day, not long after dawn, while lying in his berth, his mate came below, informing him that a strange sail was coming into the bay. Ships were then not so plenty in those waters as now. He rose, dressed, and went on deck. Upon a still nigher approach, this appearance was modified, and the true character of the vessel was plain -- a Spanish merchantman of the first

class; carrying negro slaves, amongst other valuable freight, from one colonial port to another. In another moment the casks were being hoisted in, when some of the eager negroes accidentally jostled Captain Delano, where he stood by the gangway; so that, unmindful of Don Benito, yielding to the impulse of the moment, with good-natured authority he bade the blacks stand back; to enforce his words making use of a half-mirthful, half-menacing gesture. Instantly the blacks paused, just where they were, each negro and negress suspended in his or her posture, exactly as the word had found them -- for a few seconds continuing so -- while, as between the responsive posts of a telegraph, an unknown syllable ran from man to man among the perched oakum-pickers. Thinking that at the signal of the Spaniard he was about to be massacred, Captain Delano would have sprung for his boat, but paused, as the oakum-pickers, dropping down into the crowd with earnest exclamations, forced every white and every negro back, at the same moment, with gestures friendly and familiar, almost jocose, bidding him, in substance, not be a fool. Simultaneously the hatchet-polishers resumed their seats, quietly as so many tailors, and at once, as if nothing had happened, the work of hoisting in the casks was resumed, whites and blacks singing at the tackle. Seating himself in the stern, Captain Delano, making a last salute, ordered the boat shoved off. The crew had their oars on end. The bowsman pushed the boat a sufficient distance for the oars to be lengthwise dropped. The instant that was done, Don Benito sprang over the bulwarks, falling at the feet of Captain Delano; at the same time, calling towards his ship, but in tones so frenzied, that none in the boat could understand him. But, as if not equally obtuse, three sailors, from three different and distant parts of the ship, splashed into the sea, swimming after their captain, as if intent upon his rescue. The dismayed officer of the boat eagerly asked what this meant. To which, Captain Delano, turning a disdainful smile upon the unaccountable Spaniard, answered that, for his part, he neither knew nor cared; but it seemed as if Don Benito had taken it into his head to produce the impression among his people that the boat wanted to kidnap him. I suppose, though, that the mountains hereabouts break and churn up the thunder, so that it is far more glorious here than on the plain. Who is this that chooses a time of thunder for making calls? But let him in. Ah, here he comes. Those Canadians are fools. Some of them knob the rod at the top, which risks a deadly explosion, instead of imperceptibly carrying down the current into the earth, as this sort of rod does. Mine is the only true rod He sprang upon me; his tri-forked thing at my heart. I seized it; I snapped it; I dashed it; I trod it; and dragging the dark lightning-king out of my door, flung his elbowed, copper sceptre after him. But spite of my treatment, and spite of my dissuasive talk of him to my neighbors, the Lightning-rod man still dwells in the land; still travels in storm-time, and drives a brave trade with the fears of man. The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles Take five-and-twenty heaps of cinders dumped here and there in an outside city lot; imagine some of them magnified into mountains, and the vacant lot the sea; and you will have a fit idea of the general aspect of the Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles. A group rather of extinct volcanoes than of isles; looking much as the world at large might, after a penal conflagration. And indeed, sackcloth and ashes as they are, the isles are not perhaps unmitigated gloom. For while no spectator can deny their claims to a most solemn and superstitious consideration, no more than my firmest resolutions can decline to behold the spectre-tortoise when emerging from its shadowy recess; yet even the tortoise, dark and melancholy as it is upon the back, still possesses a bright side; its calapee or breastplate being sometimes of a faint yellowish or golden tinge. Moreover, every one knows that tortoises as well as turtle are of such a make, that if you but put them on their backs you thereby expose their bright sides without the possibility of their recovering themselves, and turning into view the other. But after you have done this, and because you have done this, you should not swear that the tortoise has no dark side. Neither should he who cannot turn the tortoise from its natural position so as to hide the darker and expose his livelier aspect, like a great October pumpkin in the sun, for that cause declare the creature to be one total inky blot. The tortoise is both black and bright. Humanity, thou strong thing, I worship thee, not in the laurelled victor, but in this vanquished one. As all along where the pine tree falls, its dissolution leaves a mossy mound -- last-flung shadow of the perished trunk; never lengthening, never lessening; unsubject to the fleet falsities of the sun; shade immutable and true gauge which cometh by prostration -- so westward from what seems the stump, one steadfast spear of lichened ruin veins the plain. From that tree-top, what birded chimes of silver throats had rung. A stone pine; a metallic aviary in its crown: So the blind slave obeyed its blinder lord; but, in obedience, slew him. So the creator was killed by

the creature. So the bell was too heavy for the tower. And so pride went before the fall. Return to the top of this page Contemporary Criticism and Reviews For some time the literary world has lost sight of Herman Melville, whose last appearance as an author, in *Pierre* or the *Ambiguities*, was rather an unfortunate one, but he "turns up" once more in *The Piazza Tales* with much of his former freshness and vivacity. Of the series of papers here collected, the preference must be given to the *Encantadas*, of the *Enchanted Islands* in which he conducts us again into that "wild, weird clime, out of space, out of time," which is the scene of his earliest and most popular writings. Melville is a kind of wizard; he writes strange and mysterious things that belong to other worlds beyond this tame and everyday place we live in. Those who delight in romance should get the *Piazza Tales*, who love strange and picturesque sentences, and the thoughtful truth of a writer, who leaves some space for the reader to try his own ingenuity upon, -- some rests and intervals in the literary voyage. One reads them with delight and with rejoicing that the author has laid his rhapsoding aside, which savored too much of Swift, Rabelais and other such works, as suggest that they were the fruits of his reading rather than of his imagination. But this book evinces that he has neither "run out" or been overpraised, for the same freshness, geniality and beauty are as flourishing as of old. The sketches of the "Encantadas" are the best in the volume. The opening sketch [*The Piazza*] is full of freshness and beauty. The author of *Typee* should do something higher and better than Magazine articles. Marked by a delicate fancy, a bright and most fruitful imagination, a pure and translucent style, and a certain weirdness of conceit, they are not unlike, and seem to us not inferior, to the best things of Hawthorne. It is a poem -- essentially a poem -- lacking only rhythm and form. The remainder of the volume is occupied by fine stories Melville might deserve to be added to the list is also possible; but in these *Piazza Tales* he gives us merely indications, not fulfilment. Under the idea of being romantic and pictorial in style, he is sometimes barely intelligible. The author who "flames amazement" in the eyes of his readers by putting forth such grand paragraphs as the [first three paragraphs of *The Bell-Tower*] must content himself with a very young public. Elder folk, however tolerant of imagery, and alive to the seductions of colour, will be contented with a few such pages and phrases, and lay by the rhapsody and the raving in favour of something more temperate. The tale entitled "*Benito Cereno*," is most painfully interesting, and in reading it we became nervously anxious for the solution of the mystery it involves. The book will well repay a perusal. Perhaps the admirers of Edgar Poe will see, or think they see, an imitation of his concentrated gloom in the wild, weird tale, called "*Bartleby*: As a companion for the sultry summer months, and a country residence, we can fancy no volume more agreeable:

Chapter 6 : Benito Cereno - Wikipedia

"Bartleby," (also called "Bartleby the Scrivener") is a haunting moral allegory set in the business world of 19th-century New York. "Benito Cereno," a harrowing tale of slavery and revolt aboard a Spanish ship, is regarded by many as Melville's finest short story.

In all three situations, the main characters are limited as to movement, self-expression, and choice in a small world, complete in itself. Bartleby, who loses his job at the Dead Letter Office, chooses a law firm as his next place of employment. A valuable low-level worker who at first seems "to gorge himself on [legal] documents," he inexplicably begins to build an invisible prison about himself as he avoids fraternization with his fellow workers, Ginger Nut, Nippers, and Turkey. As his mental condition worsens, he abandons the standard behavior of a copyist; instead, he begins staring at a blank wall and refuses to proofread his work. He erects an "austere reserve. Outspoken in his desire to maintain privacy, he instructs his employer to "walk around the block two or three times, and by that time, he would probably have concluded his affairs. His desk and its pitiful collection of personal effects serve as his link with reality. The lawyer tries to deal effectively with his deranged copyist, reorders his own relationship to Christian principles, but is limited in his understanding of neurotic withdrawal and unable to fathom the "dead-wall reveries" which later fetter Bartleby to his place. Repeatedly, the lawyer concludes that Bartleby, the "victim of innate and incurable disorder," suffers an involuntary malady and deserves kindness. When application of biblical texts fails to improve the situation, the frustrated lawyer moves to new quarters, leaving his burdensome albatross behind. With no room to nest in, Bartleby becomes a benign residential ghost, harmlessly "haunting the building generally, sitting upon the banisters of the stairs by day, and sleeping in the entry by night. As the lawyer later learns, the demented copyist is forceably dislodged from the hallway. Encased in his private retreat, he maintains his autonomy by marching uncomplainingly "through all the noise and heat, and joy of the roaring thoroughfares at noon. In the minuscule prison world, his immediate wants supplied by the state and by the grub-man, he purposely constrains himself with an even more prohibitive punishment by refusing to interact with others, especially his former employer, whom he holds accountable for his imprisonment. Just as Bartleby spent his days in the office, he lives out his final hours in sight of a wall and dies with staring eyes still examining the grim, unyielding masonry, as though looking for answers to some unexpressed question. Like the copyist, whose constrained conscious state forced him further into his private world, the letters, "on errands of life," sped to their deaths in the furnace. In both cases, the central figures suffer fatal emotional damage, which inhibits them as surely as a cage confines a sparrow. As Captain Delano draws near the floating prison which holds Don Benito captive, he must decipher the physical clues that enshroud the mystery ship. There are no identifying colors to mark the "whitewashed monastery," from which peer dusky faces cloaked in dark cowls. Within the fervid, pent-up environment of the San Dominick, a chattering throng rushes to envelope the visitor. Like an interloper in a medieval fortress, Captain Delano finds himself beset by a strange progression of details: Because Delano trusts his own world, where he maintains order by following naval protocol, he believes that his philosophy of shipboard behavior will suffice on the San Dominick. Applying standard manners and expectations to his meeting with the aristocratic Don Benito, Delano fails utterly to connect the slovenly atmosphere and lax shipboard discipline with the terrible mutiny that preceded his visit. Innocent to a fault, Delano does not question the unlikely behaviors and relationships of the Spaniards and Africans aboard the slave ship, where blacks wander at will, apparently without causing harm. Although he briefly considers the possibility that the ship may be a freebooter, he shoves suspicion from his thoughts and concentrates on philanthropy. Within sight of his own cheerful, efficient environment, Captain Delano, like the altruistic lawyer in "Bartleby the Scrivener," concludes that the situation calls for sympathy toward the moody, skeletal Don Benito and for charity in the form of fresh water, fish, bread, sugar, cider, and pumpkins. When Don Benito draws to one side to confer in private with Babo, Delano, who is uncomfortable with such shabby manners, takes the opportunity to venture from the poop deck and familiarize himself more fully with the ship. He surveys the crew — the "old Barcelona tar," the oakum-pickers, the sleeping black

woman with her naked infant" yet he never surmises their true role. Seized by a "dreamy inquietude," Delano leans against a carved balustrade and breaks through hidden decay, which causes the wood to splinter, nearly dumping him into the sea. His close call with the rotted wood "symbolic of the decadence which brought disorder to the ship, mayhem to its European inhabitants, and the curse of slavery to the New World" leads him to a false conclusion: With well-meaning, carefree banter, he banishes his misgivings: His conscience is clean. The busy thoroughfare of the main deck becomes a mob scene as blacks clamor for fresh water and food. Delano, to keep down further confusion, requires his men to remain on the Rover, thus keeping the hellish microcosm of the San Dominick intact. He returns as the only outsider to observe the perverse shaving scene, followed by a sterile, uneventful lunch. His perceptions are clouded by prejudicial notions that blacks are "natural valets and hair-dressers," good-humored musicians and comedians, and congenial companions, like "Newfoundland dogs. With the approach of evening, Delano concludes his day no wiser than when he first sighted the San Dominick. At this point, Don Benito grasps his only chance at freedom from Babo and leaps over the bulwarks. As though striving toward a new world, three Spanish sailors, following his lead, make a similar break and swim toward the Rover. At this point in the story, Delano looks back at the San Dominick and perceives its true nature "it is the imprisoning microcosm that has forced Don Benito and his surviving crewmen to perform an elaborate hoax. The Subconscious Microcosm Although Don Benito is physically free of his detainment cell at this point, he is no closer to freedom of the spirit. Don Benito, still weak, but alert enough to express gratitude for his release, discourages his savior from further endangering his life by returning to the doomed ship. By moonlight, the mate leads a heated battle, which ends in the subjugation of the black mutineers. Within two days, the San Dominick is ready for the return trip to Conception Concepcion and on to Lima, where the mutineers face justice. He points to the outward signs of nature "yon bright sun. Like Bartleby, Don Benito is unable to grasp his freedom. Don Benito, on the other hand, carries the full load of guilt for a nation founded on the twin transgressions of racism and slavery. Punished by the horror of seeing other men drowned and dismembered and the meatless skeleton of his friend Aranda impaled on the prow, he remains alive as a living figurehead. In each fictional work, the actors, like puppets on a tiny stage, play out their roles in a sparsely populated world. By controlling the amount of outside interference in the telling of his tales, Melville remains more fully in charge of the intense emotions that he unleashes in the abnormally limited environments. This autonomy over variables is one of the elements which allows Melville such complete mastery of his material. For the reader, he leaves the task of applying the lessons of the microcosm to the world at large, where despair and revenge, for whatever reasons, stalk all people.

Chapter 7 : Benito Cereno / Herman Melville

A summary of "Benito Cereno" (Part I) in Herman Melville's Melville Stories. Learn exactly what happened in this chapter, scene, or section of Melville Stories and what it means. Perfect for acing essays, tests, and quizzes, as well as for writing lesson plans.

This web edition published by eBooks Adelaide. Last updated Sunday, January 3, at HOWEVER, copyright law varies in other countries, and the work may still be under copyright in the country from which you are accessing this website. It is your responsibility to check the applicable copyright laws in your country before downloading this work. In the year , Captain Amasa Delano, of Duxbury, in Massachusetts, commanding a large sealer and general trader, lay at anchor with a valuable cargo, in the harbor of St. Maria – a small, desert, uninhabited island toward the southern extremity of the long coast of Chili. There he had touched for water. On the second day, not long after dawn, while lying in his berth, his mate came below, informing him that a strange sail was coming into the bay. Ships were then not so plenty in those waters as now. He rose, dressed, and went on deck. The morning was one peculiar to that coast. Everything was mute and calm; everything gray. The sky seemed a gray surtout. Flights of troubled gray fowl, kith and kin with flights of troubled gray vapors among which they were mixed, skimmed low and fitfully over the waters, as swallows over meadows before storms. Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come. Whether, in view of what humanity is capable, such a trait implies, along with a benevolent heart, more than ordinary quickness and accuracy of intellectual perception, may be left to the wise to determine. This seemed to prove her a stranger, indeed, not only to the sealer, but the island; consequently, she could be no wanted freebooter on that ocean. It might have been but a deception of the vapors, but, the longer the stranger was watched the more singular appeared her manoeuvres. Ere long it seemed hard to decide whether she meant to come in or no – what she wanted, or what she was about. The wind, which had breezed up a little during the night, was now extremely light and baffling, which the more increased the apparent uncertainty of her movements. Surmising, at last, that it might be a ship in distress, Captain Delano ordered his whale-boat to be dropped, and, much to the wary opposition of his mate, prepared to board her, and, at the least, pilot her in. On the night previous, a fishing-party of the seamen had gone a long distance to some detached rocks out of sight from the sealer, and, an hour or two before daybreak, had returned, having met with no small success. Presuming that the stranger might have been long off soundings, the good captain put several baskets of the fish, for presents, into his boat, and so pulled away. From her continuing too near the sunken reef, deeming her in danger, calling to his men, he made all haste to apprise those on board of their situation. But, some time ere the boat came up, the wind, light though it was, having shifted, had headed the vessel off, as well as partly broken the vapors from about her. Upon gaining a less remote view, the ship, when made signally visible on the verge of the leaden-hued swells, with the shreds of fog here and there raggedly furring her, appeared like a white-washed monastery after a thunder-storm, seen perched upon some dun cliff among the Pyrenees. But it was no purely fanciful resemblance which now, for a moment, almost led Captain Delano to think that nothing less than a ship-load of monks was before him. Peering over the bulwarks were what really seemed, in the hazy distance, throngs of dark cowls; while, fitfully revealed through the open port-holes, other dark moving figures were dimly descried, as of Black Friars pacing the cloisters. Upon a still nigher approach, this appearance was modified, and the true character of the vessel was plain – a Spanish merchantman of the first class, carrying negro slaves, amongst other valuable freight, from one colonial port to another. As the whale-boat drew more and more nigh, the cause of the peculiar pipe-clayed aspect of the stranger was seen in the slovenly neglect pervading her. The spars, ropes, and great part of the bulwarks, looked woolly, from long unacquaintance with the scraper, tar, and the brush. However, no guns were seen. The tops were large, and were railed about with what had once been octagonal net-work, all now in sad disrepair. These tops hung overhead like three ruinous aviaries, in one of which was seen, perched, on a ratlin, a white noddy, a strange fowl, so called from its lethargic, somnambulistic character, being frequently caught by hand at sea. Battered and mouldy, the castellated fore-castle seemed some ancient turret, long ago taken by assault, and then left to decay. Toward the

stern, two high-raised quarter galleries – the balustrades here and there covered with dry, tindery sea-moss – opening out from the unoccupied state-cabin, whose dead-lights, for all the mild weather, were hermetically closed and calked – these tenantless balconies hung over the sea as if it were the grand Venetian canal. But the principal relic of faded grandeur was the ample oval of the shield-like stern-piece, intricately carved with the arms of Castile and Leon, medallioned about by groups of mythological or symbolical devices; uppermost and central of which was a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked. Whether the ship had a figure-head, or only a plain beak, was not quite certain, owing to canvas wrapped about that part, either to protect it while undergoing a refurbishing, or else decently to hide its decay. As, at last, the boat was hooked from the bow along toward the gangway amidship, its keel, while yet some inches separated from the hull, harshly grated as on a sunken coral reef. It proved a huge bunch of conglobated barnacles adhering below the water to the side like a wen – a token of baffling airs and long calms passed somewhere in those seas. Climbing the side, the visitor was at once surrounded by a clamorous throng of whites and blacks, but the latter outnumbering the former more than could have been expected, negro transportation-ship as the stranger in port was. But, in one language, and as with one voice, all poured out a common tale of suffering; in which the negresses, of whom there were not a few, exceeded the others in their dolorous vehemence. The scurvy, together with the fever, had swept off a great part of their number, more especially the Spaniards. Off Cape Horn they had narrowly escaped shipwreck; then, for days together, they had lain tranced without wind; their provisions were low; their water next to none; their lips that moment were baked. While Captain Delano was thus made the mark of all eager tongues, his one eager glance took in all faces, with every other object about him. Always upon first boarding a large and populous ship at sea, especially a foreign one, with a nondescript crew such as Lascars or Manilla men, the impression varies in a peculiar way from that produced by first entering a strange house with strange inmates in a strange land. Both house and ship – the one by its walls and blinds, the other by its high bulwarks like ramparts – hoard from view their interiors till the last moment: The ship seems unreal; these strange costumes, gestures, and faces, but a shadowy tableau just emerged from the deep, which directly must receive back what it gave. They each had bits of unstranded old junk in their hands, and, with a sort of stoical self-content, were picking the junk into oakum, a small heap of which lay by their sides. They accompanied the task with a continuous, low, monotonous, chant; droning and drilling away like so many gray-headed bag-pipers playing a funeral march. The quarter-deck rose into an ample elevated poop, upon the forward verge of which, lifted, like the oakum-pickers, some eight feet above the general throng, sat along in a row, separated by regular spaces, the cross-legged figures of six other blacks; each with a rusty hatchet in his hand, which, with a bit of brick and a rag, he was engaged like a scullion in scouring; while between each two was a small stack of hatchets, their rusted edges turned forward awaiting a like operation. All six, unlike the generality, had the raw aspect of unsophisticated Africans. But that first comprehensive glance which took in those ten figures, with scores less conspicuous, rested but an instant upon them, as, impatient of the hubbub of voices, the visitor turned in quest of whomsoever it might be that commanded the ship. Struggling through the throng, the American advanced to the Spaniard, assuring him of his sympathies, and offering to render whatever assistance might be in his power. To which the Spaniard returned for the present but grave and ceremonious acknowledgments, his national formality dusked by the saturnine mood of ill-health. But losing no time in mere compliments, Captain Delano, returning to the gangway, had his basket of fish brought up; and as the wind still continued light, so that some hours at least must elapse ere the ship could be brought to the anchorage, he bade his men return to the sealer, and fetch back as much water as the whale-boat could carry, with whatever soft bread the steward might have, all the remaining pumpkins on board, with a box of sugar, and a dozen of his private bottles of cider. But trusting this would not long last, Captain Delano sought, with good hopes, to cheer up the strangers, feeling no small satisfaction that, with persons in their condition, he could – thanks to his frequent voyages along the Spanish main – converse with some freedom in their native tongue. But, under the circumstances, precisely this condition of things was to have been anticipated. In armies, navies, cities, or families, in nature herself, nothing more relaxes good order than misery. Still, Captain Delano was not without the idea, that had Benito Cereno been a man of greater energy, misrule would

hardly have come to the present pass. But the debility, constitutional or induced by hardships, bodily and mental, of the Spanish captain, was too obvious to be overlooked. A prey to settled dejection, as if long mocked with hope he would not now indulge it, even when it had ceased to be a mock, the prospect of that day, or evening at furthest, lying at anchor, with plenty of water for his people, and a brother captain to counsel and befriend, seemed in no perceptible degree to encourage him. His mind appeared unstrung, if not still more seriously affected. Shut up in these oaken walls, chained to one dull round of command, whose unconditionality cloyed him, like some hypochondriac abbot he moved slowly about, at times suddenly pausing, starting, or staring, biting his lip, biting his finger-nail, flushing, paling, twitching his beard, with other symptoms of an absent or moody mind. This distempered spirit was lodged, as before hinted, in as distempered a frame. He was rather tall, but seemed never to have been robust, and now with nervous suffering was almost worn to a skeleton. A tendency to some pulmonary complaint appeared to have been lately confirmed. His voice was like that of one with lungs half gone – hoarsely suppressed, a husky whisper. No wonder that, as in this state he tottered about, his private servant apprehensively followed him. Sometimes the negro gave his master his arm, or took his handkerchief out of his pocket for him; performing these and similar offices with that affectionate zeal which transmutes into something filial or fraternal acts in themselves but menial; and which has gained for the negro the repute of making the most pleasing body-servant in the world; one, too, whom a master need be on no stiffly superior terms with, but may treat with familiar trust; less a servant than a devoted companion. Marking the noisy indocility of the blacks in general, as well as what seemed the sullen inefficiency of the whites it was not without humane satisfaction that Captain Delano witnessed the steady good conduct of Babo. But the good conduct of Babo, hardly more than the ill-behavior of others, seemed to withdraw the half-lunatic Don Benito from his cloudy languor. Not that such precisely was the impression made by the Spaniard on the mind of his visitor. But this the American in charity ascribed to the harassing effects of sickness, since, in former instances, he had noted that there are peculiar natures on whom prolonged physical suffering seems to cancel every social instinct of kindness; as if, forced to black bread themselves, they deemed it but equity that each person coming nigh them should, indirectly, by some slight or affront, be made to partake of their fare. But ere long Captain Delano bethought him that, indulgent as he was at the first, in judging the Spaniard, he might not, after all, have exercised charity enough. Even the formal reports which, according to sea-usage, were, at stated times, made to him by some petty underling, either a white, mulatto or black, he hardly had patience enough to listen to, without betraying contemptuous aversion. This splenetic disrelish of his place was evinced in almost every function pertaining to it. Proud as he was moody, he condescended to no personal mandate. Whatever special orders were necessary, their delivery was delegated to his body-servant, who in turn transferred them to their ultimate destination, through runners, alert Spanish boys or slave boys, like pages or pilot-fish within easy call continually hovering round Don Benito. So that to have beheld this undemonstrative invalid gliding about, apathetic and mute, no landsman could have dreamed that in him was lodged a dictatorship beyond which, while at sea, there was no earthly appeal. Thus, the Spaniard, regarded in his reserve, seemed the involuntary victim of mental disorder. But, in fact, his reserve might, in some degree, have proceeded from design. If so, then here was evinced the unhealthy climax of that icy though conscientious policy, more or less adopted by all commanders of large ships, which, except in signal emergencies, obliterates alike the manifestation of sway with every trace of sociality; transforming the man into a block, or rather into a loaded cannon, which, until there is call for thunder, has nothing to say. Viewing him in this light, it seemed but a natural token of the perverse habit induced by a long course of such hard self-restraint, that, notwithstanding the present condition of his ship, the Spaniard should still persist in a demeanor, which, however harmless, or, it may be, appropriate, in a well-appointed vessel, such as the San Dominick might have been at the outset of the voyage, was anything but judicious now. But the Spaniard, perhaps, thought that it was with captains as with gods: But probably this appearance of slumbering dominion might have been but an attempted disguise to conscious imbecility – not deep policy, but shallow device. Neither were his thoughts taken up by the captain alone. Some prominent breaches, not only of discipline but of decency, were observed. These Captain Delano could not but ascribe, in the main, to the absence of those subordinate deck-officers to whom, along with higher

duties, is intrusted what may be styled the police department of a populous ship. True, the old oakum-pickers appeared at times to act the part of monitorial constables to their countrymen, the blacks; but though occasionally succeeding in allaying trifling outbreaks now and then between man and man, they could do little or nothing toward establishing general quiet. The San Dominick was in the condition of a transatlantic emigrant ship, among whose multitude of living freight are some individuals, doubtless, as little troublesome as crates and bales; but the friendly remonstrances of such with their ruder companions are of not so much avail as the unfriendly arm of the mate. What the San Dominick wanted was, what the emigrant ship has, stern superior officers. But on these decks not so much as a fourth-mate was to be seen. The best account would, doubtless, be given by the captain. Yet at first the visitor was loth to ask it, unwilling to provoke some distant rebuff. Would Don Benito favor him with the whole story. Don Benito faltered; then, like some somnambulist suddenly interfered with, vacantly stared at his visitor, and ended by looking down on the deck. He maintained this posture so long, that Captain Delano, almost equally disconcerted, and involuntarily almost as rude, turned suddenly from him, walking forward to accost one of the Spanish seamen for the desired information. But he had hardly gone five paces, when, with a sort of eagerness, Don Benito invited him back, regretting his momentary absence of mind, and professing readiness to gratify him.

Chapter 8 : Bartleby and Benito Cereno by Herman Melville

Two of the most admired of these "Bartleby" and "Benito Cereno" first appeared as magazine pieces and were then published in as part of a collection of short stories entitled The Piazza Tales. "Bartleby" (also known as "Bartleby the Scrivener") is an intriguing moral allegory set in the business world of midth-century New York.

Chapter 9 : Melville's Short Novels | W. W. Norton & Company

Benito Cereno is a novella by Herman Melville, a fictionalized account about the revolt on a Spanish slave ship captained by Don Benito Cereno, first published in three installments in Putnam's Monthly in