

Benito cereno

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The Razor In “ Moby Dick,” by Herman Melville, he writes about multiple gams between Captain Ahab’s ship, the Pequod, and other ships, yet because of Ahab’s selfishness, these meetings do not last a while unless there is information to be gathered about Moby Dick’s whereabouts. This differs from Melville’s novella, or short story, “ Benito Cereno,” in which Captain Delano’s ship, the Bachelor’s Delight, have a gam with Benito Cereno and his ship, the San Dominick.

We see a major difference in how Ahab acts and how Captain Delano acts in their meetings with other ships because of Delano’s willingness to help, but this good trait of his is what makes “ Benito Cereno” such a good story. He continually tosses hints of a slave revolt on San Dominick to the side because of he gives the benefit of the doubt to Benito Cereno. Some of these rebellion hints include the captives, or slaves, being free from chains, and slaves slashing axes together.

The biggest hint though is the razor that Babo shaves Benito Cereno. The razor is very important in this novella because it ties the entire story together as well as signifies multiple things such as power and fear. The razor symbolizes power, and even perhaps the balance of powers, because this is the first instance in which Babo, one of the slaves onboard the San Dominick, shows his dominance over Benito Cereno by keeping the razor close to Cereno’s neck and eventually cutting his cheek.

When this “ accident” happens, we hear no apology from Babo, only, “ See master- you shook so- here’s Babo’s first blood,” (Melville, p210), which shows that he might have meant to cut Cereno, but also that Babo is willing to make Cereno, and perhaps the rest of his oppressors, bleed more. This is

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important because Babo draws the first blood and the balance of power is possibly beginning to change through harming Benito Cereno physically and mentally. Although the razor represents power, it also represents the other side of the coin, being fear.

Because Babo holds down Benito Cereno with a razor to his throat, Cereno knows he is in Babo's full control. This evokes a fear from Cereno, knowing that his life could potentially be at stake, especially since Captain Delano is oblivious to the fact that the San Dominick has been taken over by the captured slaves. Not only do we see fear while the razor is close to Cereno's throat, but when Babo cuts him, we see him become very frightful of what might happen.

Melville writes, "No sword drawn before James the First of England, no assassination in that timid king's presence, could have produced a more terrified aspect than was now presented by Don Benito," (Melville, p 210) which shows that Cereno is scared that he might be killed, but yet is still frightened of the little blood of his that Babo spilled. Fear plays a major role in " Benito Cereno" because of the fact that Don Benito has already experienced the slave revolt on the San Dominick, and could be killed momentarily if he makes one mistake.

The razor keeps him in line during his conversation with Captain Delano because he fears what Babo could do to him if he makes one mistake. The razor not only symbolizes the balance of power as well as evil, but it is also meaningful in " Benito Cereno" because it ties the entire story together. First off, because the razor symbolizes power, we can relate this to Senegal, the

place that Babo and the rest of the slaves are forcing Cereno to sail to for their freedom, back to their rightful home.

This place could also be considered weak because of the people that are forced from their homes into the slave trade, and now the balance of powers is shifting. At one point during this journey, Benito Cereno was in full control of the slaves, bringing them to Lima, but now, Babo and the slaves that once lost their humanly rights, are now in control over the man who kidnapped them. The razor signifies this changing of power because in that scene we see that Babo is holding it to Cereno's neck and not vice versa.

Just like above, the razor to the neck of Don Benito signifies fear, but can also be connected to Cape Horn, which represents suspicion and lies. Fear and Cape Horn can be connected to one another because not knowing what something, or someone, might be can be frightening. As basic as this may sound, it is true because Cereno fears what Babo might do to him next, after cutting his cheek with the razor.

As little as the razor may be, it plays a big role metaphorically and literally. The razor is obviously used by Babo to shave Cereno, and while doing this, Babo cuts Cereno, asserting his control and putting fear into his enemy. The razor completes the story of " Benito Cereno" because without it, blood would not be spilled, showing the slaves' newly acquired dominance over their oppressors, which is best shown with a razor to the neck.