Moby-Dick Study Guide

Moby-Dick by Herman Melville

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Contents

Introduction

Now admired as a masterpiece of American literature and considered one of the greatest novels of all time, *Moby-Dick* was published to unfavorable reviews, and its author, Herman Melville, was subsequently unable to make a living as a writer. He wrote just three more novels after *Moby-Dick* and then retired from literary life, working as a customs officer, writing poems, a novella, and a few short stories. Not until the 1920s were the multi-layered qualities of his epic novel fully appreciated.

Ostensibly the story of a whaling voyage as seen through the eyes of Ishmael, the book's narrator, and the account of the pursuit of a white whale, the novel is concerned with many of the issues which dominated nineteenth-century thought in America. The relationship between the land and the sea echoes the conflict between adventure and domesticity, between frontiersman and citydweller. Captain Ahab's tragic monomania, as expressed in his obsessive pursuit of the whale, is an indirect commentary on the feelings of disillusionment in mid-nineteenth-century America and on the idea that the single-minded pursuit of an ideal is both vain and self-destructive.

Highly symbolic, tightly packed with philosophical musings, and interspersed with goading questions, the novel put off many of its early readers with what was seen as a rejection of basic storytelling principles. Each time some form of narrative tension is established, the author appears to launch off into obscure ramblings. They are only arcane, of course, when the reader does not perceive the hidden meanings within these passages; modern audiences have the advantage of being more receptive to disjointed narrative techniques. As for the novel's subtexts, only a few of these require sophisticated knowledge of nineteenthcentury thought; the majority concern the big and immutable questions of life.

Author Biography

Melville was born in New York City on August 1, 1819. He was the third of eight children born to Allan and Maria Melville. His father, an importer, died in 1832, having struggled in vain to establish a sense of financial security for his family. Although only thirteen years old, Herman immediately went to work as a bank clerk to help support his family. His older brother, Gansevoort, was always considered the most promising son, and for several years the family depended upon his business endeavors. But by 1837 Gansevoort was bankrupt and the Melvilles had to rely on wealthy relatives for financial assistance.

After a brief spell as a schoolteacher, Melville signed up to serve as a cabin boy on the *St. Lawrence.* Afterwards, he returned to teaching, but this early adventure had whetted his appetite for the sea. On January 3, 1841, he set sail aboard the *Acushnet,* a whaling vessel, sailing out of Buzzard Bay. At the Marquesas Islands in the South Pacific, he left his ship to live with a native tribe reputed to be cannibals. Melville later said that when he discovered their taste for human flesh (it was never proved they were cannibals), he escaped the island, finding passage on the *Lucy Ann,* a whaling ship from Australia. Melville then enlisted in the navy, spending a year on the frigate *United States.* He did not return to American soil until October of 1844, and then he almost immediately began writing about his adventures.

Melville's first novel, *Typee,* published in 1846, described his adventure and captivity in the South Seas. Melville began courting Elizabeth Shaw, the daughter of a Bostonian judge, and he wrote a second novel, *Omoo,* again based on his South Seas adventures. It was published in 1847 and, on the strength of its sales, Herman and Elizabeth decided to marry. The writing of *Moby-Dick* coincided with Melville's move to the Berkshires in Massachusetts, and the establishment of his friendship with fellow author Nathaniel Hawthorne. During the period of *Moby-Dick*'s composition, Melville held Hawthorne in very high regard, both personally and professionally, and in his correspondence he spoke of their role together as being the forefront of American letters.

Moby-Dick was written by Melville with an eye to establishing himself as a leading literary figure, which made its failure all the more difficult for him to bear. His next book, *Pierre* (1852), was written in a mood of depression. *Israel Potter,* a strange biographical novel published in 1854, did nothing to reestablish Melville's name, and an attack of sciatica heralded an insidious decline in his physical and mental health. *The Confidence Man* (1857) is now considered to be one of Melville's best books, a funny and sardonic look at human nature. Commercially, however, it was another flop, and Melville was forced to consider alternative employment. He sold his home, Arrowhead, to his brother Allan and moved to New York City, where, in 1866, he took up duties as an Inspector of Customs. Melville's literary output from then on consisted mainly of poetry. Several of his Civil War poems are among the best poems of their period. His huge epic poem, *Clarel,* about religious doubt, which preoccupied him for nearly a decade, had to be

published using private funds. Toward the end of his life he wrote a prose novel, *Billy Budd,* completed in the year of his death, 1891.

Plot Summary

Moby Dick by Herman Melville is a novel that explores the theme of revenge and how the need for revenge can lead to a person's ruin. Ishmael, an unwitting thrill seeker, joins the crew of a whaling ship on what Ishmael believes to be a typical whaling voyage but instead turns out to be a single-minded mission of revenge led by a crazed captain.

This novel was first published in 1851 and was the novel that earned Melville his place among the great American writers. It begins with Ishmael's introduction of himself and his desire to go to sea on a whaling voyage. Ishmael leaves behind his job as a schoolmaster and travels to New Bedford where he is forced to spend a few days waiting for a boat to carry him to Nantucket. During his time in New Bedford, Ishmael becomes the bedfellow of Queequeg, a cannibal harpooner who pledges with Ishmael his friendship to the death. Queequeg decides to travel with Ishmael to Nantucket and sign on to the same whaling voyage as Ishmael.

Once the two arrive in Nantucket, Queequeg sends Ishmael out alone to search out the perfect whaling ship for their voyage. Ishmael decides the Peqoud is the ship on which they should sail and makes the necessary arrangements to have both himself and Queequeg signed aboard. The men have a few days to wait before the ship sets sail. During this time, they meet twice with a strange man named Elijah. Through his unusual conversation, Elijah suggests the voyage is doomed for failure and the two should reconsider their desire to sail on it. In a few days, however, the ship sets sail with Queequeg and Ishmael aboard. During the first part of the voyage, Ishmael is troubled by the fact he has not yet met Ahab, the one-legged captain of the ship. There is much secrecy about the captain, who lost his leg during an encounter with Moby Dick, an infamous white Sperm Whale. Ishmael holds back his frustrations, however, and as the boat sails into warmer climates, the captain is seen more and more often on the deck of the boat.

One day, the captain calls together all of the crew and uncovers the main reason that he is aboard the Pequod. Ahab intends the whaling mission to be one of revenge. The only thing he is interested in is tracking down and killing Moby Dick. Ahab promises a gold piece to the crewmember who first sights the White Whale, then incites almost the entire crew to feel his personal hatred toward the whale. Only Starbuck, the first mate, openly disagrees with Ahab's quest for revenge. He argues that the crew should go after the White Whale if they should happen to come upon him, but should not concentrate their efforts on tracking just that one whale. In light of Starbuck's open disapproval, Ahab decides that he should allow the crew to act as if this were any other whaling voyage and go after whales as they see them. However, Ahab secretly tracks the path of the White Whale and commands the ship to sail in the direction of the area he believes Moby Dick will be found.

The crew of the Pequod is in for another surprise when they sight their first sperm whale. As the men prepare to lower their boats, a group of yellow-skinned whalers appears and prepares to board Ahab's boat. Until this point, no one on the ship was

aware of the presence of these men. It appears Ahab signed them up in secret to help fulfill his plan for revenge. Although members of the crew attempt to ask Ahab about the presence of these men and why they were hidden for so long, Ahab avoids their questions.

As the voyage continues, Ahab continues to track the path of Moby Dick. The crew of each whaling vessel the Pequod meets is questioned whether or not they have seen Moby Dick and if so, where. As they sail closer to the whale's location, the crew of the Pequod is met with another ship, the Rachel. According to the captain of the Rachel, men from the ship went after Moby Dick and were lost at sea. The captain's own son is among the missing. The captain of the Rachel pleads with Ahab to help him locate his son and the other men, but in his blind need for revenge, Ahab refuses to help and leaves the crew of the Rachel alone to hunt for their missing shipmates.

It is on a beautiful, clear day that Moby Dick is finally sighted by the crew of the Pequod. They lower their boats for him only to have one of the boats destroyed by the monstrous whale. There is, however, no loss of life on this first encounter. The next day, Moby Dick is sighted again. Again, boats are lowered to go after him and again the whale badly damages the whaling boats. In this encounter, however, men from all three boats are able to get darts into the whale. Moby Dick swims off from the damaged boats with a tangle of harpoons and ropes hanging from his back. In the process, Fedallah, the leader of the yellow-skinned men hired by Ahab for the whaling mission, is carried away by the whale. Ahab's ivory leg is also broken during this struggle with Moby Dick.

On the third day, Moby Dick is sighted again. As the boats are being lowered to go after Moby Dick for the third time, Starbuck, the chief mate of the Pequod, begs Ahab to reconsider his mission and not put the men at risk again. Ahab ignores the warning and once again goes after the whale. Ahab manages to get a harpoon into Moby Dick, but the whale lurches, damaging Ahab's boat and then swims quickly away. Moby Dick's attention is then turned from the small whaling boats to the ship itself. He swims full speed toward the vessel and smashes into it, badly damaging it so that it begins to sink. As the whale is quiet for a moment after the impact, Ahab gets another dart in the whale. This time as Moby Dick swims away, the rope from the dart becomes entangled around Ahab's neck, pulling him out to sea along with the whale. Meanwhile, the damaged ship sinks, carrying all of the crew except Ishmael with it. The next day, the Rachel, whose crew is still searching for its lost men, finds Ishmael and rescues him from the sea.

Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

Moby Dick by Herman Melville is a novel that explores the theme of revenge and how the need for revenge can lead to a person's ruin. Ishmael, an unwitting thrill seeker, joins the crew of a whaling ship in what Ishmael believes to be a typical whaling voyage but instead turns out to be a single-minded mission of revenge led by a crazed captain.

In this initial chapter, we meet Ishmael, the main character and narrator of the novel. Ishmael has come to the point in his life where he desires something different from his life as a schoolmaster and decides to hire on as a sailor on a whaling ship. He discusses in a rather conversational way the draw of the sea upon all men as well as the reasons behind his decision to hire onto a ship instead of going as a paying passenger.

As the story continues in the second chapter, Ishmael packs his bag and heads for Nantucket. He is waylaid in New Bedford looking for inexpensive lodgings until he can board a ship bound for Nantucket. Although New Bedford has surpassed Nantucket in the business of whaling, Ishmael only wishes to sail on a Nantucket ship. Since the first whale killed was hunted by aboriginal men in Nantucket, Ishmael sees this as the only place to join a whaling ship. Ishmael travels past two expensive looking taverns toward the seaward area of the town where he first accidentally wanders into a black church where the minister is delivering a message about darkness. He next finds a small, old inn called the Spouter Inn owned by Peter Coffin. Ishmael decides to spend his extra time here.

Chapters 1-2 Analysis

Chapter One gives the reader a look into Ishmael's personality. He is an intelligent person with a sense of humor and love for the sea. Ishmael desires something different from his job as a schoolmaster even though in his role as teacher he commands respect from his students. Ishmael is aware he will be bossed about on the whaling ship, but still desires a taste of this lifestyle. As the title of the chapter suggests, the reader gets a hint that Ishmael's experience on the whaling mission will not be the harmless adventure he seeks but will instead turn bloody and violent.

The theme of fate first appears in this chapter of the book. Ishmael suggests that fate was responsible for him choosing the whaling mission and that he has no free will of his own, only the ability to follow a plan that has already been lain out for him. In addition, the theme of Biblical imagery is introduced in this first chapter. Ishmael literally means "God has heard" and was the name given to Abraham's son through the maid Hagar. As told in the Bible story, Ishmael and Hagar were made to leave home when Abraham's

wife Sarah became jealous of the two. Therefore, the name Ishmael also refers to orphans and outcasts.

Set on a dark, cold December night, the tone of the second chapter is bleak and foreboding. Ishmael's ship to Nantucket does not sail for two days, so he is forced to wander the cold deserted streets looking for an affordable place to stay. Ishmael describes the biting cold, deep frost and his lack of money in his usual conversational way. Peter Coffin, the name of the owner of the inn Ishmael chooses to stay reminds the reader Ishmael's tale will not be a happy one.

It is also important to note the numerous references to Biblical persons and occurrences in this chapter. Not only does Ishmael accidentally enter a Negro church while searching for an inn, but he also equates the ashes from the ash box over which he accidentally trips with the ashes from the Biblical sinful city of Gomorrah. This city was destroyed by God's wrath after fewer than ten just people were found living there. Ishmael also compares the cold night winds to the Euroclydon, the wind that supposedly wrecked Paul's ship in Malta.

Chapters 3-4

Chapters 3-4 Summary

Ishmael enters the Spouter Inn and is disappointed to find there are no empty rooms. If he wishes to stay there, he must either sleep on a bench in the dining hall or share a bed with a harpooner. Disturbed by the idea of sharing another man's bed, Ishmael tries to make the bench work, but cold drafts and the inadequate size of the bench make that arrangement impossible.

The landlord again offers Ishmael the option of sharing the harpooner's room. The landlord has a bit of fun at Ishmael's expense when describing the harpooner and takes great pleasure in informing Ishmael the savage man is out selling heads and probably won't be in all night. Despite this information, Ishmael decides to share the room. As Ishmael tries to sleep, the harpooner, known as Queequeg, comes back from his night of head selling. As Ishmael watches, Queequeg performs a sort of heathen religious ritual, and then hops into bed, along with his tomahawk.

Startled at finding a strange man in his bed, Queequeg swings his tomahawk and threatens to kill Ishmael. Ishmael calls for the landlord, who quickly clears up the confusion and turmoil. Ishmael can tell that even at this point, the landlord still finds humor in the unfortunate circumstances. With the confusion cleared up, Queequeg politely offers Ishmael a spot in the bed and after the tomahawk is stashed safely out of the bed, Ishmael complies and sleeps peacefully.

Ishmael wakes from his sleep with Queequeg's arm wrapped around him in what is described as a matrimonial fashion. Ishmael describes how this tattooed arm blends in perfectly with the patchwork quilt on the bed. He then tries to struggle out from under the savage's grip. In his struggling, Ishmael finally manages to wake Queequeg who insists he dress first, and then leave the room for Ishmael to dress in private. This being decided, Ishmael watches Queequeg's unusual manner of dressing which includes crawling under the bed to put on his boots and then shaving his face with his harpoon.

Chapters 3-4 Analysis

Ishmael leaves his depressive tone behind when he enters the Spouter Inn. Once inside the inn, Ishmael returns to his jovial demeanor as he describes the interior of the inn and the people he meets there. Ishmael is unusually interested in a picture hanging in the entry of the inn. This picture is of a non-descript mass, which Ishmael decides to try to interpret.

Perhaps the most interesting part of this chapter is Ishmael's first encounter with Queequeg, the harpooner with whom he shares a room. Ishmael describes the man's odd clothing, tattooed skin and topknot of hair. In the tradition of American romanticism,

Ishmael chooses to look beyond the man's appearance and decides he must be good at heart.

Here, the novel's theme of the differences in races and cultures is introduced. Upon waking, Queequeg offers to dress first and allow Ishmael to dress in private, an offer quite polite for a "savage." Despite his polite American nature, however, Ishmael finds himself staring at Queequeg in a most impolite way as Queequeg goes about his unusual morning routine. The unusual features of Queequeg's routine are used to bring out the differences in the pair's cultures. For instance, Ishmael thinks it is barbaric the way Queequeg feels he must hide under the bed to put on his boots, but feels comfortable walking about the room, which can be easily viewed from the room across the street, with no clothes on.

Chapters 5-6

Chapters 5-6 Summary

Ishmael describes the rather uneventful morning breakfast with the boarders of the Spouter Inn. While Ishmael expects to hear some lively stories about whale hunting, he is instead met by an embarrassed and silent group of burly men. During the breakfast scene, Ishmael takes note of the manners and appearances of the other men at the table. Queequeg is of special interest as he uses his harpoon to snag breakfast foods from over the heads of others.

In this chapter, Ishmael describes the variety of people he meets on the streets of New Bedford. Ishmael soon loses his astonishment at Queequeg's oddities as he sees other people on the streets who are just as unusual and savage in appearance as Queequeg. Ishmael sees some people who are obviously well familiar with the whaling business. He also sees others on the streets who are newcomers to whaling, as seen by their lack of knowledge concerning how they should properly dress and what weapons they should carry on a whaling mission. Ishmael also notes the richness of some parts of town and credits this wealth to the whaling industry.

Chapters 5-6 Analysis

During both the breakfast and street scenes, Ishmael takes note of the differences in the men with whom he shares a table and those he meets on the streets. Ishmael points out the distinct differences between the working class people and those who own or make a great amount of profit from the whaling industry. The tone of this section of the novel is generally upbeat with an air of surprise which comes from all of the "odd" people Ishmael meets as he tours the town.

Chapters 7-9

Chapters 7-9 Summary

As is customary for those fishermen who are about to set out for sea, Ishmael goes to take in a worship service at a local whaleman's chapel. The weather has changed from clear and sunny to sleet and mist as Ishmael heads for the chapel. Once there, he is surprised to see Queequeg among the gathered worshippers. As they wait, most of the worshippers look at three stone tablets placed on the walls of the church on either side of the pulpit. These tablets are placed in memory of seamen who have been killed in service. As Ishmael waits for the service to begin, he contemplates that his fate might be the same as the men who are commemorated on the plaques. He considers the unnatural fear man has of death and the hereafter. In conclusion, he decides if his fate is to be the same as one of the men killed in service, he welcomes it.

Father Mapple the chaplain arrives. In his youth, this man was both a whaleman and harpooner and is greatly loved by the whaling community as he has experienced the hard life of a whaleman but has not allowed it to make him harsh or angry. Ishmael describes the chaplain as being in the winter of his life but appearing to be nearing a second bloom.

Interestingly, the high pulpit can only be reached by a ladder, the kind that is used to climb up the side of a large boat from a smaller one. Ishmael is surprised that after the chaplain climbs to his spot in the pulpit, he pulls the ladder up, rung by rung, so that he is in as way isolated and unreachable in the pulpit. Ishmael describes the rest of the church and its unusual sea faring décor. Above the pulpit is a painting of a storm tossed ship watched by an angel who peeks through the clouds. Also, the pulpit has been decorated and fashioned to look like the prow of a boat.

Father Mapple delivers a sermon to those gathered about Jonah and the whale. In this Bible story, the prophet Jonah refuses to do God's will and instead decides to hide in Joppa. The boat he sails on is caught in a storm that will not cease until Jonah is thrown overboard. Once overboard, he is swallowed by a whale. He repents while in the whale's belly and is spat out by the whale upon dry land.

Chapters 7-9 Analysis

The commemorative plaques in the church again act as a foreshadowing agent that Ishmael's voyage may be deadly. The reality of death at sea adds to the grim tone of the novel. Also continued is the theme of the mixing of different cultures as Ishmael discovers that Queequeg, a pagan, has also chosen to take part in the Christian worship service.

Melville incorporates a great deal of sea faring imagery into this chapter. For instance, as Ishmael explains, the chaplain pulls up the rope ladder of the pulpit after himself

signifying his isolation from the world and his dependence on the sustenance of the word of God. The painting on the wall of the storm tossed ship brings to mind that even in the hardest parts of life, there is a greater Being in control. Finally, the pulpit in the form of a ships prow can be said to symbolize the Word of God in relation to the world where the world is the ship and the pulpit, or Word, should lead the ship on its journey.

Using the familiar story from the Bible about Jonah and the whale, Father Mapple teaches the worshipers that it is always best to do the bidding of God. He teaches that it is always better to be secure in the will of God and misunderstood by men than to try to please men and be out of the will of God. Father Mapple chooses this particular passage for his sermon, because it is a topic the whaling men are sure to understand and to which they can relate easily.

Chapters 10-12

Chapters 10-12 Summary

Ishmael returns to The Spouter Inn where he finds Queequeg alone. Queequeg seems to be counting the pages of a book. As Queequeg counts, Ishmael studies Queequeg and finds he thinks the man reminds him of George Washington. It is at this point he decides to make friends with the pagan. Ishmael approaches Queequeg and attempts to teach him about the book and the pictures found inside. Soon the two engage in a sort of conversation about the things they had seen in town that day. The two share a smoke from Queequeg's tomahawk pipe and then Queequeg presses his forehead against Ishmael's. Queequeg then hugs Ishmael around the waist and declares the two are bosom friends. In Queequeg's culture, this friendship means the savage would die for Ishmael if needed. After supper, Queequeg gives Ishmael an embalmed head as a gift, and then splits all of the money he owns with him. Although tentative, Ishmael, who is a Presbyterian, even offers sacrifices to Queequeg's idol and joins in his religious ritual. The two again share a bed that night.

After talking and napping intermittently for several hours, Ishmael and Queequeg find themselves unable to sleep. They sit up in bed, smoking and talking intermittedly. Queequeg begins to talk about his homeland and though Ishmael can still not completely understand his speech, begs him to continue.

As Queequeg tells Ishmael about himself, Ishmael soon learns there is more to Queequeg than meets the eye. Queequeg is actually a descendant of royalty, the son of the High Chief or king of the island of Kokovoko. Queequeg came to America because he wanted to visit a Christian country and see if he could take these Christian ideas to his people and help them be happier. Although he wanted to sail to America on a Sag Harbor ship, the ship was full and despite his father's influence, the captain would not let him aboard. Therefore, Queequeg set out in his canoe to a secluded place and waited for the ship to pass by. Once it was near him, he climbed up the chains on the side of the boat and vowed not to let go of a ringbolt on the deck until he was allowed a place on the ship. After some time, the captain allowed him to stay aboard, and he became a whaleman on the ship.

Queequeg admits to Ishmael that he is unhappy among the Christians, seeing they are no more content than any other people are. Ishmael asks why he does not return to his own tribe and take over his royal duties. Queequeg responds that the time he has spent with the Christians has made him unworthy of this honor. Queequeg tells Ishmael of his desire to go to sea again as a whaleman. Ishmael reveals that he too is planning to go to sea on a whaling mission. Queequeg vows to be put on the same ship and shift that Ishmael serves. After another embrace, the two finally sleep.

Chapters 10-12 Analysis

In this chapter, Melville strengthens the bond between Ishmael and Queequeg, showing that although the two come from different cultures and share different values, they can still be friends. Although the chapter is entitled A Bosom Friend, the friendship is actually compared to a marriage in two places in the chapter. These occur when Queequeg first rubs foreheads with Ishmael and then again when the two are chatting in bed. Melville uses these references not to suggest the two are homosexual, but to give the reader an idea of the closeness that is felt between them.

Up until this point, what has been known about Queequeg has come through Ishmael's viewpoint. In this section, Queequeg talks about himself and how he came to be in the Nantucket area. It is interesting to learn that the man Ishmael has referred to as a savage is indeed the son of the king of his people. Queequeg came to America hoping to take Christian beliefs back to his people and make them happier. However, Queequeg says he finds Christians are no happier than pagans. Also of importance is Queequeg's reference to the fact he has been stained or tainted by the Christians and is no longer worthy of holding a place of honor in his community.

Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary

After settling his and Queequeg's bill at the Inn, Ishmael and Queequeg set off to meet the ship that will carry them to Nantucket. They carry their things in a wheelbarrow, a circumstance that brings to Queequeg's mind the first time he met a wheelbarrow. Misinterpreting its use, he tied his clothes chest to the wheeled tool, and then carried both upon his shoulder. Ishmael contends Queequeg should have known better, a statement that brings on another story from Queequeg. This story is about a ship captain who accepts an invitation to a wedding feast on the island of Kokovoko. The captain mistakes the sacred punch bowl of coconut milk as a place to wash his hands. In both instances, both the captain and Queequeg were laughed at because they were unaware of the customs of the people they visited with.

Once on board the ship, Ishmael and Queequeg enjoy the sea air. However, the others on the ship enjoy making fun of the odd pair. Queequeg catches one man mimicking him and throws him into the air as a form of punishment. The crew calls the captain who threatens to kill Queequeg if he tries any more funny business. At that moment, however, the boom of the main sail comes lose and begins to swing violently back and forth, knocking the man Queequeg had just punished overboard. Queequeg secures the boom and then dives overboard to save the drowning man. While those on board think he is due a reward for his heroic actions, Queequeg only wants fresh water to wash the sea brine from himself. With no further excitement, the two land safely in Nantucket.

Chapters 13-14 Analysis

In this section, Melville again plays with the theme of differences in cultures and the way each culture views itself. While Ishmael feels Queequeg was silly for not knowing the proper use of a wheelbarrow, Queequeg shows Ishmael there are instances in Queequeg's culture where Ishmael would not necessarily now how to behave himself.

Despite his pagan trappings, Queequeg shows that he had a kind and gentle heart when he rescues the man who just a few minutes before had been tormenting and making fun of him. During the rescue sequence, Ishmael makes note that after this show by Queequeg he chose to stay close by his friend, "till poor Queequeg took his last long dive." This statement foreshadows the coming death of Queequeg.

As the two land in Nantucket, Ishmael becomes preoccupied with talking about the town. He tells the legend of how the town began and how the Nantucketers own the seas. Ishmael borrows from Bible imagery saying that because those from Nantucket are so familiar with the sea, even Noah's flood could not stop them.

Chapters 15-17

Chapters 15-17 Summary

Once in Nantucket Queequeg and Ishmael search out the hotel recommended to them by Peter Coffin. The Try Pots is adorned outside with two huge black wooden pots hanging by donkey's ears from an old ship's mast. Once inside the two enjoy as supper of clam and cod chowder after a brief misunderstanding where Ishmael thinks they are only going to get one clam for supper. As they are off to bed, Mrs. Hussey, the landlady, demands Queequeg leave his harpoon downstairs as one tenant once was killed by a harpoon in one of the rooms.

As they bed down, Queequeg insists that his small black idol, named Yojo, says that Ishmael alone should choose which whaling ship they are to sail on. Ishmael is unhappy with this decision since he is an inexperienced whaler and had depended upon Queequeg's experience, but goes about his duty with energy and vigor. There are three ships about to sail for three-year voyages, the Devil-dam, the Tit-bit and the Pequod. After looking at the three ships, Ishmael decides the Pequod, named after a tribe of Massachusetts Indians is the ship for himself and Queequeg. The Pequod is a quaint old ship with sperm whale teeth decorating the open bulwarks. The tiller, which controls the ship, is carved from the lower jawbone of a whale.

Once on board the Pequod Ishmael meets Captains Bildad and Peleg, the principal owners of the ship. He requests from them a place on the ship and his request is granted. It is during this interview with Peleg and Bildad that Ishmael learns a man by the name of Captain Ahab will be the ship's captain for the voyage. Ishmael also learns how Ahab lost his leg during a recent whaling voyage.

After securing himself and Queequeg a position on the Pequod, Ishmael rambles about Nantucket until dusk so as not to bother Queequeg, as he observes the religious ceremony of Ramadan. Thinking that the holiday should be over by nightfall, Ishmael returns to the hotel room only to find the door locked. Ishmael calls for Queequeg and gets no answer. Concerned for his friend's safety, Ishmael looks through the key hole, only to see Queequeg's harpoon propped in the corner of the room.

Becoming panicky, Ishmael attempts to break open the door. He is unable to do so and calls for the landlady to bring an axe so he can break the door open. The landlady discourages this use of force and brings up a key that will fit the lock. To their surprise, they find Queequeg calmly squatting in the middle of the room holding his idol on top of his head. Ishmael tries to reason with Queequeg and get him out of his unusual position, but he gets no response or movement from Queequeg. Queequeg stays in his unusual position until daybreak the next day when he finally rises. At this point Ishmael tries again to reason with Queequeg and explain to him why his way of worshipping is unnecessary by Christian standards. Queequeg, however, does not pay much heed to Ishmael's sermon. Finally, the two set out towards the Pequod.

Chapters 15-17 Analysis

Melville once again foreshadows that the voyage will have a disastrous ending as Ishmael looks up at the ship's mast outside the Try Pots and notes that it looks like a galley with a place to hang two people, himself and Queequeg. Although this reference gives the chapter a gloomy feel, the tone warms as the two enter the inn and have supper.

Melville uses many Biblical references during Ishmael's first meeting with captains Peleg and Bildad. For instance, the entire time the two captains are discussing which portion of the lay Ishmael should receive, Bildad continues to mutter repeatedly the Bible verse that indicates one should not gather for themselves earthly treasures. This is perhaps to encourage the new recruit not to be too greedy. Ishmael is less than impressed with his offering the 777th lay, a comparatively tiny portion of the profits. However, when used in the Biblical sense, the three 7's is often interpreted as representing good fortune, the trinity or even God himself.

Also during his interview, Ishmael learns the name of the captain of the ship is Ahab. Like many of the other character names in Moby Dick, Ahab is taken from the Bible. Ahab was one of the most wicked kings who ever ruled in Israel. It is said King Ahab did more to displease and anger God than any other king before or after him. Peleg describes Captain Ahab as an "ungodly, god-like man" and gives the sense that the Ahab from the Bible and Captain Ahab may have a few things in common.

In the next chapter, the tone lightens as Ishmael returns to the hotel to find the door to the room he shares with Queequeg is still locked. Being unfamiliar with the celebration of Ramadan, Ishmael assumes something terrible has happened to his friend and creates quite a stir as he tries to break into the room. The sequence gives a humorous look at how easy it can be to misinterpret the customs of another culture.

Chapters 18-19

Chapters 18-19 Summary

As Ishmael and Queequeg near the boat, Peleg hails them and says cannibals and pagans such as Queequeg are not allowed on the Pequod. Peleg also demands to see Queequeg's papers proving he has been converted to Christianity. Ishmael defends Queequeg by saying Queequeg is a member of the First Congregational Church. Queequeg comes aboard and shows his skill with a harpoon. After Peleg and Bildad see how skillful Queequeg is with the harpoon, they forget about the papers and agree to give him a spot in the crew.

Queequeg, whom Peleg mistakenly calls Quohog and then Hedgehog, is unable to sign his name on the ship's papers. Instead of his name, Queequeg makes a mark on the paper, identical to one of his tattoos. After the papers are signed, Bildad gives Queequeg a religious tract and begs him to consider the message therein. Peleg, however, contends that by converting Queequeg, it will make him a less effective harpooner and that Bildad should leave the matter of Queequeg's soul alone.

After they are both signed onto the Pequod and are on their way back to the inn, an eccentric man named Elijah approaches Ishmael and Queequeg. Elijah questions them as to whether or not they have signed onto the Pequod and if they have met Captain Ahab. Elijah further questions whether or not they know all there is to know about Captain Ahab and his lost leg. At the end of the encounter, Elijah sadly says that since they have already signed their papers, it is too late to do anything now.

As Ishmael and Queequeg part from Elijah, Ishmael gets the feeling Elijah is following them. However, when he tests his feeling by turning and doubling back their route, Elijah goes on without turning back also. As the chapter ends, Ishmael contemplates this strange encounter and tries to figure the meaning of it.

Chapters 18-19 Analysis

Again, the theme of cultural differences comes into play. Peleg and Bildad see that Queequeg is a cannibal and immediately cry out that he is not allowed on board the Pequod. The captains next ask for papers proving Queequeg is a converted Christian. Queequeg has no papers, but when he demonstrates his skill with the harpoon, the matter of papers is suddenly no longer important. In fact, Peleg now insists Queequeg should remain a pagan because Christian morals might interfere with his ability as a harpooner. In short, when Peleg and Bildad see that Queequeg is different from them, they are ready to dismiss him. When Queequeg proves he is useful to them, however, these differences no longer matter.

Queequeg and Ishmael's encounter with Elijah also adds a mysterious tone to this section of the novel. Elijah plants questions in Ishmael's mind about the nature of Ahab

and the whaling journey. The name Elijah literally means The Lord is God. Like many other names in Moby Dick, Elijah is also the name of a Biblical character. In the Bible Elijah was a prophet during the time of King Ahab. Elijah passed judgment on King Ahab saying the king was so wicked he should be put to death. Ahab, however, was forgiven by God and the death sentence purged when he repented of his sins. With this background in mind, it is fitting for Melville to name the profit who warns Ishmael and Queequeg of the wickedness of Captain Ahab Elijah also.

Chapters 20-21

Chapters 20-21 Summary

Ishmael details the process of getting the ship ready to sail. Bildad carries about a list of things needed for the mission and is in charge of the purchasing while Peleg keeps a watchful eye on the men working on the ship. Bildad's sister Charity helps around the ship running and fetching things that are needed. Charity gathers supplies ranging from food and office supplies to the mainstays of the whaling business such as lances and harpoons. Ishmael and Queequeg have yet to see Captain Ahab. In the back of his mind, Ishmael finds himself unhappy with the idea of sailing with a captain he has never met, especially with the words of Elijah so fresh in his head. As the chapter 21 closes, the ship is ready to sail.

Ishmael and Queequeg hurry through the early dawn to board the Pequod, which will set sail at sunrise. Ishmael believes he sees some sailors ahead of them in the mist and moves even faster toward the ship when Elijah appears between himself and Queequeg. After questioning the two about whether or not they are really going to sail on the Pequod, Elijah leaves them. However, before he leaves, he asks Ishmael if he saw some men ahead of them and challenges Ishmael to find them.

The two reach the Pequod only to find the ship is still quiet with no one moving about. As Elijah indicated, there are no sailors to be found, only an old rigger sleeping in the scuttle. Ishmael and Queequeg sit, one on either side of the sleeping rigger, as they talk, share a smoke and wait for the rest of the crew to appear. Finally, the rigger awakes and asks the identity of Ishmael and Queequeg. He tells them Captain Ahab had come aboard the ship last night and that they are indeed set to sail that day. They begin to hear noises on the deck indicating the crew is moving about. They go to the deck to find the rest of the crew is coming aboard. Captain Ahab, however, secludes himself in his quarters.

Chapters 20-21 Analysis

The tone of Chapter 21 is upbeat with a certain excitement as the Pequod is prepared for her voyage. Ishmael asks often about Captain Ahab, still concerned because he has not yet met the man. As he looks back on the circumstances, Ishmael admits he should have been more honest with himself at the time instead of covering up how disturbed he was at not having laid eyes on the commander of the boat. To add to this uneasy feeling Elijah shows up again just as Ishmael and Queequeg are about the board the ship for their voyage. Ishmael has just seen some sailors running through the early morning mist toward the boat. Elijah challenges Ishmael to find the men and sure enough, when Queequeg and Ishmael reach the boat, there are no sailors to be found. This odd sequence of events adds to the mystery surrounding Elijah and his strange sayings. Do the men really exist? If so, who are they?

Chapters 22-25

Chapters 22-25 Summary

The Pequod sets sail around noon that day after Charity brings her final gifts of a nightcap for Stubb and a spare Bible to the crew. Captains Peleg and Bildad are still in charge of the ship and give orders. Captain Ahab has not yet made an appearance. The crew says Ahab has been sick and is not yet completely recovered, that is why he does not leave his quarters. Orders are given to take down the tent Peleg has occupied on the deck of the ship, and raise the anchors. Peleg orders about the ship in such a fashion that Ishmael involuntarily stops working in shock and leans for a moment on his handspike. At this point, Peleg kicks Ishmael in the rear and asks him if that was how he worked on the merchant ships. Peleg continues around the ship ordering the workers and using his foot whenever he felt necessary. As the ship makes its way out of the harbor and into the Atlantic, the time comes for Peleg and Bildad to go back to shore on the sailboat. They both seem uncomfortable and apprehensive at the separation but say their goodbyes and leave the ship in the hands of Ahab.

In the next short chapter, Ishmael tells of a man named Bulkington who is on board the ship. Ishmael draws a parallel between Bulkington and the ship. Even though the harbor and land provide warmth and comfort, if the ship is dashed upon the land in a storm, it would mean certain destruction. Ishmael believes it would be better to die at sea than be dashed against the shores.

In Chapters 24 and 25, Ishmael attempts to convince the average man of the importance and nobility of those who hunt whales. This tangent leads Ishmael to compare the virtues of the whaling profession those of the military. Ishmael asserts whaling is a noble profession and that some who have worked on whaling ships have even had noble blood flowing through their veins. In addition, Ishmael notes that at the coronation of kings, it is sperm whale oil that is used to anoint the king's head. Ishmael indicates there would be none of this oil if it weren't for whalemen.

Chapters 22-25 Analysis

In the first part of this chapter, Ishmael is busy studying the actions of Captain Peleg and Bildad and too surprised by Peleg's crassness to do his own work. As a result, he gets kicked in the rear as a punishment. Although the boat and men are covered with a freezing spray, Ishmael tries to set a pleasant tone, commenting that he is looking forward to happy times on the ship. The chapter ends dismally, however, as the men give heavy-hearted cheers as the ship heads out.

Chapter 23 appears to be a transition chapter between leaving harbor and being at sea. Ishmael praises a man by the name of Bulkington who seems unable to stay away from the sea. Ishmael indicates Bulkington will die at sea and this brief chapter in the book

will be his only epitaph. Ishmael compares a ship sailing on rough seas to a person's soul. People choose to stay in a life full of turmoil because by giving up the fight, they would be committing moral suicide.

In Chapters 24 and 25, Ishmael defends the whaling industry as honorable employment. Ishmael seems to have the mindset that ordinary people look down their noses on this profession. Therefore, he seems moved to use his scholarly knowledge to prove whaling has had positive impacts on all of mankind.

Chapters 26-28

Chapters 26-28 Summary

Ishmael begins Chapter 26 by introducing us to the ship's chief mate, Starbuck. Starbuck is described as a steady young man whose life is guided by his common sense and intelligence. Ishmael indicates that through the story he is about to tell, Starbuck remains the valiant and moral person he first appears to be. Ishmael ends the chapter contemplating that no matter how bad a person is, there is nothing sadder than a man who has lost his valor.

After spending a full chapter talking about Starbuck, Ishmael devotes the next chapter to the rest of the crew. In Chapter 27 Ishmael introduces the second mate Stubb. Stubb is a happy-go-lucky, brave man characterized by his pipe, an accessory he is rarely seen without. The third mate Flask is also fearless in nature and seems to feel the need to destroy all whales he encounters. Ishmael then indicates each of these headsmen, who will later command the whaling boats, is allowed to choose for himself a harpooner. Starbuck picks Queequeg, Stubb chooses Tashtego, a Gay Head Indian, and Flask chooses Daggoo, a Negro-savage.

The only other person in the crew Ishmael refers to by name is Pip, a black boy from Alabama. Pip plays the tambourine and is generally the ship's jester or clown. The only comment Ishmael makes about the remainder of the crew is that only about half of them are American. The rest are Indians or savages. The spots of command are reserved for the native-born Americans while the others provide the muscle power for the ship.

The men are now several days into their journey and Captain Ahab has not yet been seen. The only way the men know he is on board is that the three mates occasionally emerge from Ahab's quarters with new orders. Ishmael relates that now that they are at sea he is extremely uneasy not having yet seen the captain. This uneasiness is intensified when he remembers the words of Elijah concerning Ahab and the ship.

The days go by and slowly the ship moves into warmer climates. Ishmael is stunned one day to see Captain Ahab standing on the deck of the ship. Ahab stands on his quarterdeck with his prosthesis, made from the jawbone of a whale, secured in a hole that is augured into the deck for stability. Ahab is a striking figure. Ishmael describes him as seeming to be made from solid bronze. A scar or birthmark runs from his hairline to the collar of his shirt. Rumor aboard the ship has it that the scar runs the length of his body. No one seems to know where the mark came from. Perhaps as striking as his stance is the grim moodiness that hangs about the man. Ishmael says it looks as if he has a crucifix in his face.

After this initial appearance, Ahab comes to the deck nearly every day for a longer and longer span of time each visit. Ishmael notices that as the climate grows warmer and

more spring-like, the captain's moodiness seems to dissolve a bit and his countenance seems to soften.

Chapters 26-28 Analysis

Following the line of thought presenting whaling as a noble profession, Ishmael refers to the head crewmen in terms of nobility. Ishmael spends an entire chapter talking about the valor of Starbuck, the first mate. From this, it is obvious Ishmael respects Starbuck greatly and wishes not to mar his good reputation. Ishmael lumps the rest of the crewmen together in the next chapter. Of particular note is that only native-born Americans are allowed to be headsmen on whaling ships. This sets precedence for class relations on board the boat with Americans seeming to be more important and more able to lead than other peoples.

At long last, Ishmael lays eyes upon Ahab, the captain of the ship. The tone of the meeting is one of a solemn shock. Ishmael is taken aback by the man's grimness and comments on his lack of any signs of a bodily illness. Already there is superstition about Ahab spreading about the ship concerning a birthmark or scar that runs across his face and neck. These rumors add to the aura of mystery that surrounds the captain.

Chapters 29-31

Chapters 29-31 Summary

Ishmael opens the chapter by poetically describing the present spring weather. He then transitions into a discussion of the sleeping habits of Ahab. Ishmael indicates the captain slept very little and would often spend his nights pacing the deck. Generally, those working on the deck at night would try to keep things quiet for those sleeping below; however, Ahab does not consider this. He often wakes the sleeping crew when he paces the deck because his ivory leg making a thumping, thudding noise on the planks each time he steps. Stubb suggests finding some sort of material to wrap the leg in to keep it from making so much noise, but Ahab curses Stubb violently at the suggestion.

As Stubb contemplates his unpleasant encounter with Ahab, he tries to decide how he should react. He first thinks he should strike Ahab in return for the insult, but then decides instead he should pray for the man. Stubb wonders is Ahab is indeed mad as the ship rumors report.

After his confrontation with Stubb, Ahab calls for his stool and pipe. He then sits for a while on deck smoking his pipe. After a few moments, Ahab declares to himself smoking does not bring him the pleasure and relaxation it once did and throws the still lit pipe overboard. He then resumes the deck.

Stubb confides in Flask a dream he had that night concerning Captain Ahab. In his dream, Captain Ahab kicked him with his ivory leg and Stub, in response, tried to kick back and kicked his own leg off. Meanwhile in the dream, Ahab turns into a pyramid that Stubb keeps kicking at until a merman comes along and convinces him a kick by Ahab's ivory leg should be thought of as an honor and not a punishment. While Stubb recalls his dream, Ahab interrupts the discussion with the call that there are whales nearby. He makes a special point that he is to be notified if any of them are white.

Chapters 29-31 Analysis

In this chapter, the reader gets the first indication that something is not right with Ahab's mental status. In fact, Stubb refers to him as mad after Ahab reacts so violently to Stubb's suggestion that something be done to muffle the loud thumping of the captain's leg on the deck so the crew can sleep. Stubb also shares that Ahab is unable to sleep at night, a situation Stubb considers unjust. This connection of an unjust or otherwise mentally disturbed person and the inability to sleep is relationship commonly used in literature.

Ahab decides that in his torn and stressed state, he is not worth even the small comfort smoking once brought him. The action of throwing the pipe overboard shows the reader

how truly mentally anguished Ahab is. Even things that once calmed him, such as smoking, are no comfort to him now.

In Chapter 31, Stubb's dream shows how deeply the encounter with Ahab affects him. The dream may indicate the futility of trying to fight against Ahab and his anger. The merman in the dream reminds Stubb that Ahab is the captain of the ship and that any correction should be accepted gladly and without retort.

Chapters 32-33

Chapters 32-33 Summary

In the moment whales are first spotted, Ishmael pauses the action to give a long account of the classifications of the differing types of whales. He begins with a series of quotes that attest to the difficulty of classing these leviathan beasts, and then continues on to list a number of authors who have written about whales. Only one of these authors, Ishmael says, actually had experience with whales and that was with the Greenland whale, a creature he attests is much smaller and less magnificent than the sperm whale. Ishmael notes that although whales are generally considered fish, whales are actually different from fish because they have lungs and are warm blooded.

After much contemplation, Ishmael chooses to define a whale simply as a spouting fish with a horizontal tail. He divides these fish into three main types: the folio whale, the octavo whale and the duodecimo whale. The sperm whale, the type of whale that the crew on his voyage seeks, is classed as a folio whale. These sperm whales are the largest of the whales, and are the most profitable as they are a source of spermaceti, an oil burnt for light and used in some medicines.

In Chapter 33, Ishmael gives a little history of the whaling industry and reminds the reader of a time when the chief harpooner, or specksynder, shared command of the ship with the captain. At this time, the captain was in charge of navigation while the harpooner had charge of the things that actually had to do with physically chasing and catching whales. Ishmael also talks about the leadership qualities that make a captain great and wonders which of these virtues Ahab posses.

Chapters 32-33 Analysis

After much study into the divisions and classifications of whales, Ishmael leaves his chapter classifying the beasts incomplete. He believes grand things are never completed by their originator but left for other to finish. Ishmael prays that God will never allow him to finish anything he ever begins. This could perhaps be because of his idea grand things should be left unfinished. It is also a belief among some people that if a person still has work left to do, they will not die until it is finished. In the following chapter, Ishmael contemplates the qualities of leaders and wonders which of these qualities Ahab possesses. He indicates these qualities are yet hidden when he says they must be drug up from the depths or plucked from the sky.

Chapters 34-35

Chapters 34-35 Summary

Ishmael describes the dinner habits of the captain and three first mates of the ship. During these solemn, silent dinners, Ahab presides over the table, and serves each man his food. Although they have not been ordered not to, none of the men speaks or helps themselves to anything on the table. Ishmael seems particularly to pity Flask who is served last, and must be the first to leave the table. Flask admits these meals are the punishment for being selected as an officer. Although Flask has outward importance, he can never get completely full in the time he is allotted for meals. Flask wishes for the days when he dined with the other sailors and was allowed to eat his fill.

After the captain and first mates finish their dinner and leave the cabin, a much different scene emerges when the harpooners are called in to eat. They relish their food and eat their fill stopping sometimes to sharpen their knives on the whetstones they carry in their pockets. These men poke fun at and harass the cook and server. Their antics extend to the point of shaking the man, throwing forks at him and even bodily moving him and threatening to scalp him if he does not move quickly enough for their desires.

Although the mates and chief harpooners were allowed to eat in the cabin, it was the only time any of the crew was really allowed there, Ishmael says. The inaccessible Captain Ahab considered the cabin to be his and his alone. Those who did visit the cabin were greeted with a tense atmosphere and very little companionship or camaraderie.

In the following chapter, Ishmael relates his first experience serving watch in one of the Pequod's three mastheads. He compares his experience with that of the experience of Captain Sleet as detailed in his book written about Greenland whales. On Captain Sleet's boat, the men served watch in a crow's nest, which helped to protect them from the elements. On the Pequod, all Ishmael has to stand upon are two parallel boards. Only an extra coat will protect him from the elements. In the crow's nests, however, the men have a comfortable seat and places to stash extra belongings.

Ishmael also warns potential whale hunters not to hire melancholy and intellectual men, much like himself, to stand watch at the mast as they can become quickly engrossed in their own thoughts and forget their main duty. Ishmael also points out the care that must be taken to stay in balance on the mast. If he isn't careful, he says, he runs the risk of falling off the mast and into the ocean.

Chapters 34-35 Analysis

This chapter includes an interesting contrast of the eating habits of the higher classed officers and the harpooners. The solemn, tense dinner with Ahab contrasts greatly with the laid-back attitude of the harpooners. The men who eat with Ahab are on edge; there

is no talking, joking or laughing. In fact, one of the officers is not even allowed to eat his fill. The harpooners, on the other hand, enjoy their meal and act naturally, although rudely. This chapter is one in which Melville makes a definite statement about the different classes of people on the ship. While the officers appear to have clout, their circumstances are sometimes not as comfortable as those who fill more common roles.

In the following chapter, it is interesting that Ishmael warns those hiring a crew for a whaling vessel against hiring pensive, thoughtful men to stand watch. This statement is especially ironic since Ishmael appears to be one of these pensive men himself. Also in this chapter, the reader gets the feeling that Ishmael is not telling his story in the exact chronological order it happened. Although this chapter is placed far into the voyage, at least several months, you get the feeling it must have actually occurred prior and Ishmael is not actually serving his first watch in the mast three or four months into his journey. This is one example of the non-congruent view of time Melville gives in his book, deliberately throwing the reader off from knowing exactly the order in which the recorded events occurred.

Chapter 36

Chapter 36 Summary

Captain Ahab paces the deck; a deck which Ishmael indicates already bears many dents left by the tip of Ahab's ivory leg. It seems to Ishmael the Captain's forehead is also dented and wrinkled with the heaviness of the thoughts within him as well as the agony of not sleeping. Near the end of the day, Ahab stops his pacing, steadies himself in an auger hole and orders Starbuck to call the entire crew to the deck where he stands. As all the men are gathered, Ahab resumes his pacing and questions the men about what they are to do when they see a whale. Ahab shows excited approval when they answer each question to his liking.

Next, Ahab shows the men a Spanish ounce of gold, which he nails to the main mast. This ounce, he says will be a prize to the man who first spots the white whale Moby Dick. He then tells the men of his mission to search the seas to their ends and ultimately hunt down and kill Moby Dick, a mission that Starbuck thinks is bound only in vengeance. Starbuck tries to reason with Ahab and explains to him that vengeance against a whale who acted only out of instinct is useless and will profit little or nothing.

Ahab, however, points out to Starbuck that the entire rest of the crew is itching to search for the whale and Starbuck is outnumbered. Ahab then has a keg of ale passed among the men for them to drink. He then requests the harpooners cross their harpoons in an old sea custom. Ahab takes hold of the point where all three harpoons cross. Ahab then has the harpooners stand with their harpoons in front of them, fills the sockets with the liquor and has them drink again.

Chapter 36 Analysis

This chapter is a turning point in the entire novel. It is here that the reader learns the true intent of Ahab's heart and how far he will go to see Moby Dick put to death. Like an enthusiastic coach at a football game, Ahab stirs the crew to a frenzied excitement in catching the whale. He first entices them with money, then with the thrill of the chase. Ahab also uses the old sea rituals as a way to unify and draw the men together in their mission.

Only Starbuck seems to retain his composure and realize what a useless feat the idea of chasing only Moby Dick is when the crew's real mission is to chase all whales, not just one. He speaks up against Ahab's plan, but none of the crew will back him. Ahab uses this lack of backing against Starbuck. As captain, Ahab generally has the power to command the crew to do whatever his wishes as long as the majority of the crew does not rise up against him. With only one man openly opposed to his plan, Ahab has little to worry about.

At the end of the chapter, Melville gives us a hint of foreshadowing in the form of a hollow laugh that is heard coming from the hold of the boat. Also, as Ahab makes his announcement, the winds die down for a moment and the sails of the ship deflate. This makes it seem as if even the winds and the ship recognize the doom and misfortune in store for the ship and its crew.

Chapter 37-40

Chapter 37-40 Summary

Ahab is alone in his cabin thinking over the events of the meeting with his crew. He admits to himself he expected to find at least one to be distrustful of his plan as Starbuck was. Ahab notes that he no longer finds pleasure in life and seeks only vengeance. Although the men may think Ahab is mad, he knows he is mad. In addition, Ahab indicates that the loss of his leg was prophesized before it happened and he chose not to heed the warning. Ahab now prophesizes that he will dismember the whale as the whale dismembered him.

Starbuck leans against the main mast thinking back over the scene that just played out before him. Although he wants to disobey Ahab and go against his orders, he feels in a way tied to the man and obligated to do his bidding. Starbuck indicates his only hope is rooted in the size of the sea. Since the whale has the whole ocean to swim in, he reasons, there is always the chance the ship and the whale will not meet up during their voyage. As Starbuck mulls things over on deck, he hears the reveling of the crew below. He wonders if any of them have any humanity in them at all and wonders how they could so easily follow such a mad man. Also, he admits that he now knows the true horror that life can hold.

When alone with his thoughts, Stubb admits all he can do is laugh about the circumstances in which he finds himself. He says it is the only way to handle what is queer about life. Stubb takes the mindset that if he is predestined to be on board a ship commanded by a mad man, then that is his destiny. There is nothing he can do about it.

The remainder of the ship's crew aboard the ship is busy with their merry making and dancing. Their talk soon turns to women. A fight is about to break out between Daggoo and a Spanish sailor when the men are called to man the boat because a squall has blown up. Pip, a small boy who plays the tambourine for the dancing ends the chapter by praying for the safety of the men on board the ship, even those who don't have the sense to feel fear.

Chapter 37-40 Analysis

While they were with Ahab, all of the crew except Starbuck showed reckless excitement at the idea of chasing Moby Dick to his death. These four chapters shed light on the inner thoughts of two of the headsmen and one of the crewmembers after they have had time to think about Ahab's announcement. Starbuck has already shown displeasure with Ahab's plan. He believes the only hope is that Ahab will not be able to find Moby Dick in the great expanse of the sea. Stubb, on the other hand, can only laugh at the queerness of it all. In line with the theme of fate that threads through the novel, Stubb

believes that if it is his fate to be involved in this doomed mission, he has not choice but to be involved.

The rest of the crew revels and makes merry after Ahab leaves them. They seem to have no thoughts about the futility of the deed they have just agreed to. Just as the men are about to break into a fight, a squall breaks up and the crew is called to work. After they leave, Pip, a small black boy prays for the safety of these men whom he says, "have not the bowels to feel fear." It should be noted some people, especially those in Old Testament times, considered the bowels to be the seat of the emotions, hence Pip's reference to the men's bowels. Pip also refers to God as white, a common misrepresentation but one that strengthens the idea that all commanders, including God, must be of Caucasian descent.

Also, Melville sets these chapters up in the form of play complete with stage directions. The soliloquies presented by Ahab, Starbuck and Stub much mimic ones Shakespeare might have written for one of his plays. Melville may present this particular section of the book in this way because it is the only way to allow each character to speak for himself in private without the narration having to pass though Ishmael. For the remainder of the book, Melville returns control of the narration to Ishmael.

Chapters 41-42

Chapters 41-42 Summary

Ishmael admits to being one of the crew who made its vow to Ahab to hunt and kill the whale because, he says, of the dread in his soul. At this point, he tells the story of the whale, Moby Dick. According to whaling lore there is one white whale in particular that was larger and more powerful than any other in the ocean. Any crew who had tried in the past to kill this beast had encountered all sorts of calamity during the chase. At the end of their efforts, the whale would completely escape them. Therefore, it was during Ahab's experience with the whale. In fact, Ishmael explains, the ways of life at sea had made the stories and rumors of Moby Dick to become so inflated that few crews wanted to meet up with the this whale, much less go to combat with him.

There are rumors, Ishmael tells, of this whale being bloodthirsty, of other fish actually killing themselves in the presence of the white whale to avoid the oncoming conflict. Other rumors say the whale has been spotted in two opposite places of the world at the same time. Some even believe the whale is immortal. The things most remarkable about this whale, Ishmael says, is not his size or his color, but the unmistakable intelligence and cunning that he shows in the way he handles the attacks by whaling crews.

It appears that at the point of his amputation, Captain Ahab had been in battle against the whale and had tried to drive a six-inch knife into the massive whale. At this point, the beast had taken the captain's leg. Ishmael tells that at that point, Ahab began to equate all things that are loathsome and hateful with the whale and set his heart upon killing the beast. Ishmael believes it was not in the moment of his wounding that Ahab became mad, but the time that was spent in anguish in his hammock during the journey back to land that produced the madness in him. At times, Ahab had to be bound in his hammock as he thrashed about in a frenzied rage. Finally, he seemed to come to his senses one day and the crew was glad their captain was back. However, it is at this point Ishmael says that the lunacy only changed perspectives, becoming deeper and more subtle.

By the time they reach land, Ishmael says that Ahab appeared only to be grieved by the loss of his leg. Because of his experience in whaling, Ahab is seen as being fit to serve as captain on another voyage. Had he seemed mad and hungry for revenge, would not have been allowed to command the ship because those hosting its voyage want to make money for their efforts, not just pay for a revenge mission.

In the next chapter, Ishmael admits that it is the whiteness of the whale that frightens him more than anything else about the creature. Ishmael names a long list of symbolic uses for the color white such as regal, innocent or happy occasions. However, he says white is also a color that it associated with deformity and horror. For instance, he says people are often afraid of albinos simply because they are so odd and different.

Chapters 41-42 Analysis

Here Ishmael reveals the true character of Moby Dick. He is known in folklore as an immortal, omnipresent being, a description that seems uncannily similar to that of God. However, unlike God, Moby Dick wrecks havoc on all those who try to catch and kill him leaving a wake of death and destruction in his path. Ishmael indicates the roots of Ahab's madness are not in the actual wound but in the time he had to think about the dismemberment. In the next chapter, Ishmael discusses the symbolism of the whiteness that makes the whale so terrifying.

Chapters 43-44

Chapters 43-44 Summary

As the crew stands in a cordon passing buckets to fill the scuttlebutt one of the men says he believes he hears a noise coming from the after-hold. The man reports he believes another strange man not yet seen on deck is on board the ship. He believes the captain is aware of the stowaway, he says.

Ahab sits in his cabin studying nautical charts and logbooks, trying to chart the path of the sperm whale. This is not a one-time event, Ishmael says, but something that takes place nearly every evening. Ishmael reports that it is not as useless a task as it may seem, many men have been able to successfully chart the migratory patterns of the whales based on food sources, etc. In fact, Ishmael says that when moving from source of food to source of food, this type of whale will generally take the same vein, or route. For this reason, whaling ships most always have good luck when looking for whales when in these particular areas of the ocean.

Chapters 43-44 Analysis

The crew begins to suspect there are stowaways on board the ship. This suspicion may grow out of their growing distrust in Captain Ahab. The tone of the chapter shows the crew is becoming aware there is something strange going on, but does their best to complete their work and ignore their feelings. In the following chapter, Ahab is becoming more intent in his studies to find where his enemy, Moby Dick, is located. There is a feeling of gathering stress during this chapter.

Chapter 45-46

Chapter 45-46 Summary

Ishmael contends this chapter is the most important one in the novel as it touches on the behaviors of whales. First, Ishmael cites three instances in which a whale was wounded by a harpoon, managed to escape, and then was later killed by the same men who first wounded him. Ishmael also asserts land men do not fully comprehend the dangers of whale hunting first because those injured or killed upon these missions are not well publicized, and second, those on land do not realize how big and powerful these creatures actually are.

Next, Ishmael gives examples of times that Sperm Whales have been knowingly and maliciously destructive to men and their ships. These examples give evidence the whale is not simply a dumb creature that acts on the basis of instinct, but instead an intelligent beast that acts on the basis of cunning and well thought out methodology. Ishmael gives three examples of whales that have done great damage to whaling vessels acting in what seemed an intelligent fashion. Finally, he points to an example where a ship struck an object large enough to raise the ship three feet out of the water and cause damage severe enough to have the ship sail immediately to harbor for repairs. Ironically, this happened after the captain said there was not a whale large enough that it could damage his ship enough that it would take on even a small amount of water. Ishmael ends with the story of a sea monster in Constantinople that regularly caused damage to ships. Ishmael reasons this creature was not a monster at all, but rather a sperm whale.

In the chapter following this long discussion of the destructive nature of sperm whales, Ishmael describes Ahab's thoughts on how he will run the ship. Ahab knows that his first mate is not entirely in line with his desire to chase down and capture only Moby Dick. He also knows that after he has displayed the true cause of the Pequod's voyage, the crew has the right, both morally and legally to usurp his command. Ahab is also aware the men will want some money at the end of their voyage. Therefore, Ahab decides to continue to run the ship just the way he would if his revengeful desires did not come into play. He decides to allow the crew to chase and kill the whales they meet, and not save themselves only for Moby Dick.

Chapter 45-46 Analysis

This chapter is injected to illustrate just how large and dangerous a sperm whale can be. The information in the chapter sets the stage for the coming battle with Moby Dick. Armed with the information in this chapter, it is easy to understand why certain whale hunters would rather avoid Moby Dick. If a meeting with an average sperm whale is dangerous, it stands to reason trying to hunt and kill Moby Dick would be even more treacherous to the crew and ship.

Captain Ahab, though mad, is not dumb and realizes his crew can at any time choose not to heed his command. In order to keep their loyalty, Ahab plans to watch the crew carefully and let them go about business of whaling as usual. This reasoning on Ahab's part shows how truly intelligent the man is. He is a master at knowing how to get what he wants from the people with whom he deals

Chapter 47-48

Chapter 47-48 Summary

As the chapter opens, Ishmael and Queequeg are weaving a mat. As he weaves, Ishmael considers that the mat is like life and he is the shuttle weaving in and out of it. Queequeg drives the yarn home with a wooden sword which he uses carelessly, hitting sometimes sideways and sometimes straight on making differences in the pattern of the mat. Ishmael equates these sword hits to chance or free will that changes the pattern of one's life.

Ishmael's quandaries are interrupted by a cry from Tashtego that he sees whales on the horizon. Immediately the lazy crew leaps to action preparing to go after their destined prey. Boats and crew are ready to go when they are surprised by a cry from Ahab. The entire crew turns to look at the man who appears to be surrounded by five dusky phantoms.

The crew of the Pequod stares in shock as five men - who were unbeknownst to them until this point - ready the captain's boat for lowering. At Ahab's command, all boats are lowered and pulled out from the ship. Ahab commands the ships to spread out, but his command is not followed because the crew is busy staring at the strange men who have just appeared. Ahab commands again, and this time Starbuck, Stubb and Flask do as he bids, commanding their men to pull the boats in differing directions to cover as much territory as possible. Discussion ensues among the men as to the sudden appearance of these strange men. Archy brags that he knew they were there all the time, referring to the instance where he told the crew he heard someone moving about in the hold of the boat.

Stubb reassures the original crew that the new men are only there to help and should not be looked on in any superstitious manner. Meanwhile, all of the three first mates encourage their men in their own unique way to pull their oars hard and hunt down the whales. Ishmael considers the appearance of the strange men in light of the sailors he believed he saw running through the fog the morning the Pequod first sailed. The words of Elijah also echo in his mind.

Meanwhile, as the boats near where the whales were spotted, a squall breaks out. The boat in which Ishmael and Queequeg ride nears a whale and Queequeg is ordered to throw the harpoon. The harpoon misses, but the boat is upset by the storm and all the men are thrown into the sea. They swim around the swamped boat gathering oars and then pull themselves back into their seats. Their attempts to bail out the boat are negated by the storm, so the men sit and wait it out. Queequeg holds a light out over the boat to alert the others of their location. They sit there until dawn when the form of the Pequod moves out of the mist and quickly toward them. The ship comes so quickly they are forced to jump from it in order to save themselves from being hit. The whaling boat is hit by the ship, but all men are found safely and taken on board the Pequod.

Once on board, they learn the others had given up their pursuits of the whales once the storm approached and had gone back to the ship.

Chapter 47-48 Analysis

Once again, the theme of fate is visited. This time, Ishmael contemplates fate in the analogy of a mat he and Queequeg are making. The contemplative, lazy tone of the chapter is interrupted by the announcement whales have been sighted. Just as the men are ready to lower their boats, they are greeted with a new shock. Ahab has apparently hired his own personal crew to man his whaling boat. The appearance of these men perhaps answers Elijah's questions about the men in the mist, but also makes Ishmael remember the words of the man changing to tone of the chapter to one of awe and wonder. The crew shares with each other their opinions of the stowaways, but Ahab refuses to speak about the men.

Chapter 49-50

Chapter 49-50 Summary

After his first experience at whaling, Ishmael decides the whole thing is a huge joke at his own expense. He questions Queequeg, Stubb and Flask if the prior events were a typical example of a day in the life of a whaler. When he receives a positive answer from all three men, Ishmael decides it is time for him to prepare his will and takes Queequeg as a witness. After the affair is finished, he reports feeling at ease to live out the rest of his days.

This chapter begins with a discussion between Flask and Stubb of the wonder of Captain Ahab personally going after the whale. The Ishmael describes how it is often questioned whether an able-bodied captain should actually take part in the chasing of the whales. This is particularly so since Ahab is handicapped. Ishmael admits the crew had seen Ahab fitting out the spare boat with the necessary equipment and preparing the thigh board just to his liking, but they had never thought Ahab would actually have his own crew to man the boat. The crew also never thought Ahab would actually go after any whale but Moby Dick.

Ishmael ends the chapter with a description of Fedallah, the headman of Ahab's crew. Ishmael says that while the other strange men found their places among the crew, Fedallah's did not try to fit in with the others. Both his past and his reasons for being on the voyage remained a mystery.

Chapter 49-50 Analysis

The best way to describe the tone of Chapter 49 is disillusioned. It is interestingly named after an animal known for its ability to make a sound like a human's laughter. Melville borrows this animal's name as the title for the chapter because Ishmael feels as if he is at the butt of a cruel joke and the whole world is laughing at him.

In the following chapter, Ishmael describes the crew's reactions to the appearance of Ahab's strange crew as well as his presence on one of the whaling boats. Surprise is the emotion felt by all of the crewmembers that the crippled Ahab would actually try to man a boat himself. It is at this point the crew begins to realize how serious Ahab is about his intent to kill Moby Dick.

Chapter 51-53

Chapter 51-53 Summary

As they continue on their voyage, the crew of the Pequod begins to see a whale spout once nightly every so often. The whale is never caught and its spout never seen twice on the same night, so rumors circulate among the crew the whale is Moby Dick, luring them on. As the ship enters the Cape of Good Hope, the waters become rough and stormy. Strange fishes circle the boat, and birds try to roost on the stays of the Pequod. Even through the storms and rough seas, Ahab keeps his watch windward and does not sleep. He is also seen studying his logs and charts.

For the first time, Ishmael records the meeting with another whaling ship. Captain Ahab calls out to the crew of the vessel asking them if they have seen the White Whale. The captain of the other ship starts to answer but somehow drops his megaphone over the side of the boat. Ahab calls to them again and in the midst of his calling, notices the fish in the ocean swim away from him.

In Chapter 53, Ishmael discusses the proper etiquette that is followed when one whaling ship meets another in fair weather. These social meetings of ships are referred to as gams. In a gam, the captains of the two ships meet on one boat while the two first mates meet on the other. When transferring from one ship to the other, the captain stands in the boat, aware that all eyes are upon him least his fall or hold onto anything to steady himself.

Chapter 51-53 Analysis

The tone of the novel becomes mysterious again as crewmen begin to occasionally see the spout of a whale in the distance. Sometimes, the spout is seen daily. Sometimes, it disappears for a day or two. Yet, it always seems to be drawing the ship toward a certain destiny. Also, the crew of the Pequod meets with another ship but is unable to glean any information from its crew as the captain drops his megaphone overboard. As a hint of Ahab's cruel nature, even the fish of the sea swim away from him as he leans over the ship's railing.

As with all other social meetings, there are certain rules to be followed when two whaling ships meet each other on the ocean. In order to keep his honor, a captain must remain standing in the boat as he approaches the visiting vessel. Although it is not said, it would be very difficult for Ahab to perform this feat of honor with his ivory leg.

Chapter 54

Chapter 54 Summary

Ishmael details how he tells this story to a group of Spaniards at a hotel called the Golden Inn. The story was told by the crew of another whaling ship to the crew of the Pequod. According to the story, two members of the Town-Ho's crew are at odds with each other. One day when one named Steelkilt is working the pumps to help keep the boat from sinking, the second man named Radney comes to Steelkilt and orders him to sweep the deck. It's a task usually done at the end of the day and generally done by the youngest men on the ship. Steelkilt refuses to obey the order and a fight follows.

The captain of the boat enters the scene of the fight and thinks the worst. He is unaware Radney had been tormenting Steelkilt and assumes Steelkilt is causing trouble. The captain asks Steelkilt to calm down to which Steelkilt agrees and asks only that he not be flogged. The captain refuses to listen to Steelkilt and has he and his 10 followers locked in the scuttle of the boat. The men are left there several days. During these days, seven of the men ask for pardon and are allowed out of the scuttle. Steelkilt arranges with the remaining men to break out of the scuttle and take charge of the ship. Instead, the two turn on Steelkilt the next morning, and all three are hung from the rigging. Two of the men are flogged, but the captain seems unable to harm Steelkilt.

After this episode, the men return to work as usual. Because of low morale on the ship, however, the crew decides among themselves not to call out even if they do see a whale. One day without thinking, a man on deck calls out when he sees the huge white whale in the distance. Despite their agreement not to, the crew lowers their boats to go after the whale. During the chase and fight, Radney is eaten by the whale, who escapes from the men without being caught.

Chapter 54 Analysis

The Town-Ho's story employs the literary device of a story within a story. This narrative could literally stand on its own as a short story out of the context of Moby Dick. Although the story seems unrelated to the voyage of the Pequod except for the fact the crew of the Town-Ho had an encounter with Moby Dick, Melville uses this story to make an important point.

The story of Steelkilt mirrors the Biblical story of Jesus to some extent. Like Jesus, Steelkilt is doing his work and minding his own business until he is unfairly accused of a crime. Like Jesus, all of Steelkilt's supporters run away during his time of trial. Also like Jesus, Steelkilt is hung up in the ship's rigging with one man on each side of him, an illustration that closely resembles the crucifixion of Jesus.

Unlike Jesus, who is ultimately killed for a crime he didn't commit, the captain is unable to flog Steelkilt as he had planned and allows him go back to work without punishment.

In the end of the story, Radney, the man who started the fuss in the first place is eaten by Moby Dick. In this illustration, Moby Dick is the avenger in the story, bringing upon the wicked his rightful punishment. In a sort of poetic justice, Moby Dick rights the wrong that had been done to Steelkilt by Radney.

Chapters 55-57

Chapters 55-57 Summary

Ishmael informs the reader of his intent to portray the whale as it really is, not as it appears in some works of art. Ishmael scorns some works of art for their inaccurate depiction of the fish. In addition to scorning works of art, Ishmael also ridicules some of the inaccurate drawings of whales done by those claiming to be part of the scientific, intelligent community. Ishmael excuses these attempts as he says, they are made by observing a stranded whale which would be like drawing a picture of a wrecked boat and passing it for a normal vessel. Ishmael also notes that when alive, the majority of a whale's form is hidden underwater. Also, studying the skeleton cannot even give an adequate idea of what these beasts look like.

Ishmael starts by discussing some of the less inaccurate representations of whales and the whaling business. The best pictures of whaling scenes, Ishmael says, are engravings taken from portraits by a man with the last name of Garnery. Ishmael goes on to describe each engraving. He then points out two other French engravings that he considers being among the best representations of whales.

Ishmael continues his lecture on the portrayal of whales in art. He first notes a beggar in Nantucket who holds a painting of the whale who took his leg, saying the beggars drawing is as good as some scientists. Ishmael then moves to the creatures the whaling crew carves from whale teeth or bones. These are also good representations, he says. Also true to life are the wooden carvings often found on whaling ships. Ishmael also notes that replicas of whales can be found used as doorknockers or weathercocks. If you look closely enough, he says, you can also trace the image of these beasts in the outlines of rocks and mountains or hills as well as the stars in the sky.

Chapters 55-57 Analysis

Again, Ishmael attempts to describe what a whale truly looks like. In doing so, he points out several renderings of whales that are not at all similar to the actual animal and some that are better. He ends his discussion by saying the basic shape of a whale can be found most anywhere, from the stars in the sky to the seas. It is nearly impossible, however, to tell what a whale truly looks like since most of its body is underwater and unable to be seen.

Chapter 58-60

Chapter 58-60 Summary

After his brief detour, Ishmael returns to his talk of the voyage of the Pequod. The ship is now sailing northeast from the Crozetts through a sea covered with brit. This brit is the food of a Right Whale. As the men watch the whales from above, Ishmael comments they look more like huge rocks in the water than living beings. He comments that people do not look upon the creatures of the sea as they do upon dogs and horses. Although the feeling has waned somewhat, most people still consider sea creatures to be unsocial and repelling. Ishmael then equates the human soul and life to the differences in land and sea. He insinuates there is within the human soul places, like the sea, that are cold and unappealing.

In the following chapter, Ishmael notes that the mysterious whale's spout is still seen occasionally by the crew. One morning while on watch as the main mast, Daggoo sees a white mass rising and falling in front of the ship. Thinking it is the white whale, he calls for the crew to be ready. Ahab sees the white mass and calls for a lowering. As soon as they reach the mass, Starbuck recognizes the animal as a great squid. These squid are rarely seen but are believed by the men to be the food of the sperm whale.

Here Ishmael describes and talks about the rope used for whale hunting. Whaling ships use Manilla rope for this purpose, as it is stronger than hemp. Ishmael describes the rope as being 2/3 of an inch in thickness but extremely durable, holding up to 3 tons. The line is generally two hundred fathoms in length. This line is stored carefully in the whaling boat's tub so as not to have any kinks, which might cause injury to the crew. Ishmael then goes on to describe how the line is arranged in the boat as they are preparing to go after a whale. The rope snakes in and around the men in the boat, weaving a complicated pattern. Ishmael says it is easy to understand how men are so often pulled from the boat by the line when a whale is caught.

Chapter 58-60 Analysis

During the action of these chapters, the Pequod moves first through a sea covered with brit, the food for right whales, then meets with a huge squid. It is believed these squid are what sperm whales feed upon giving the idea the crew must be getting close to their anticipated prey. During the course of these chapters, Ishmael uses the analogy of the land and sea to describe the human soul.

Next, Ishmael talks about the importance of the rope used in whale hunting. He describes how is dangerous as well as useful. Again, Ishmael draws a parallel between the men surrounded by the whale lines and those involved in every day lives. He poses the question: Is one way of life really more dangerous than another?

Chapter 61-63

Chapter 61-63 Summary

Ishmael records the first successful whale hunt. The hunt happens on a lazy day when most of the crew is napping or dozing instead of paying rapt attention to their tasks. Almost all at once, the crew becomes aware of a whale near their ship and lowers their boats after him. They come as close as possible without making the whale aware of their presence, then start full fledged pursuit once the whale becomes aware of them. Stubb's boat is closest to the whale, so it is Tashtego who throws the harpoon. Darts are then thrown at the whale until the boat is able to come along side it. Once they are along side, Stubb sticks a long lance into the whale, which he turns around until the whale dies of a burst heart.

For those inexperienced with whaling, Ishmael describes in the next chapter the role of the harpooner while on a whale hunt. The harpooner is expected to set an example for the other crew in the boat by rowing harder and shouting louder than anyone else on board the boat. When the boat nears the whale, the harpooner must stand up, turn around and throw the harpoon, hoping to hit the whale even in his exhausted state. If the whale is struck by the harpoon, the harpooner and chief mate switch places from front to back of the boat so this mate can lance the whale thus killing him. Ishmael insists it would be much more successful if the same person were to both act as harpooner and lancer and if this person were to be free of rowing duties to be fresh when time came to throw the harpoon. In the following chapter, Ishmael more closely details the throwing of the harpoons and the purpose of the crotch.

Chapter 61-63 Analysis

The tone is one of jubilation as the crew of the Pequod kills their first whale. Although it is not Moby Dick that is killed, Ishmael has finally experienced what a successful chase is like. Ishmael seems to come away from the experience feeling as if things are not as well-planned as they could be. For instance, he is critical of the show the harpooner must put on while rowing out to the whale.

Chapters 64-66

Chapters 64-66 Summary

Finally, the crews of the boats are busy in their duty of hauling the whale back to the whaling ship. It is dark before they reach the ship and Ahab commands the whale be secured for the night, and then disappears into his quarters. Ishmael senses a form of dissatisfaction in Ahab when he looks at the whale corpse. Although Starbuck is first mate, he relinquishes command of the whale to Stubb. Stubb has the whale tied head and tail parallel with the length of the ship, then commands Daggoo cut him a steak from the tail of the whale, a dish that he particularly likes.

Later as Stubb eats his cooked whale steak, he calls for the cook and complains the steak is too tender and too well done. Meanwhile, a school of sharks has begun eating noisily on the dead whale tied to the ship. Looking for some fun, Stubb entreats the cook to talk to the noisily eating sharks and tell them they can eat all they want, but they must be quiet. The cook does so and Stubb eggs him on in good humor encouraging him not to curse at the sharks, but preach nicely.

In the following chapter, Ishmael details the history of the whale as a dish. He describes many instances where different parts of the whale are used for food. Ishmael also says that many people are appalled at the idea of eating a whale as they see the killing of whales as murder.

Relating to earlier action, Ishmael describes the plan of action for the boat if a whale is taken late at night. Since removing the blubber and preparing the corpse takes such a long time, the crew will only tie the beast to the ship and leave the work till morning. In the case where there are sharks in the area, the men must take shifts walking the deck to keep the sharks from entirely eating the whale.

Chapters 64-66 Analysis

Ishmael points out the irony of Stubb's eating of the whale by the light of a lamp fueled by whale oil. Ishmael seems to be intrigued by such occurrences as this one. In these chapters, he discusses the times whales have been eaten and also the human reasons for not eating them. He plays with the shifting sins of cannibalism and murder saying that, in a way, all humans are cannibals and murderers.

Chapters 67-70

Chapters 67-70 Summary

During this span of four chapters, Ishmael details the methods of cutting the blubber from the whale, beheading it and the preparing the corpse for its ocean burial. First, Ishmael explains the process of stripping the blubber, the fat from which the spermaceti oil is taken, from the whale. These long pieces of blubber that are removed from the whale are called blanket pieces because they envelope the whale like a blanket to keep him comfortable in all climates. Next, Ishmael describes what he considers the skin of the whale. This skin, he says, is a thin membrane covering the blubber. It is marked almost hieroglyphically. Ishmael believes these marks are caused by hostile contacts with other whales. After the blubber is removed from the whale, the headless carcass is dropped in the water for the sharks and other vultures to eat.

In Chapter 70, Ishmael backs up and describes the beheading of the whale, a process that is done before the animal is stripped of all of its blubber. After the men have removed the head and it hangs from the side of the ship, the crew goes below deck to eat lunch. Meanwhile, Ahab comes alone to the deck of the ship, leans over the side of the ship and speaks to the head as if it were still a living creature. He asks the head to give up its secrets of the depths of the ocean. A cry from the main mast that there is a ship on the horizon interrupts Ahab's soliloquy.

Chapters 67-70 Analysis

This section of the book largely consists of Ishmael's descriptions of the processing of the whale's carcass. A point of interest occurs in Chapter 70 where Ahab speaks to the head of the deceased whale and demands it to give up its secrets. To Ishmael, it appears the whale's head looks like that of a sphinx. According to Greek mythology, the sphinx is a symbol of death, doom and destruction. The use of this imagery foreshadows the doom that awaits the Pequod and her crew.

Chapter 71

Chapter 71 Summary

The crew of the Pequod hails the approaching ship, which appears to be a whaling vessel, as it goes by. Sending their own unique signals, the ships acknowledge each other. Starbuck orders a ladder to be lowered to allow the captain of the other ship to come aboard, however, a man on board the ship signals that he does not wish to come on board the Pequod. He explains that his boat's crew is infected with an epidemic and he does not want to infect the crew of the Pequod.

As the man communicates with the crew of the Pequod, the Pequod crew recognizes him as a crewmember they heard of in another tale. Supposedly, this man had been a prophet of the Neskyeuna Shakers, a group of people commonly considered crazy. He left the community and hired on as a green-hand on a whaling boat known as the Jeroboam. As soon of the ship moved out of sight of land, the man who had seemed normal up to that point returned once again to his crazy ways and asserted himself to be the angel Gabriel. Being ignorant and easily swayed, most of the crew was soon under the man's spell. The captain decided to let him off the boat at the next available port, but the crew insisted that if Gabriel was put off the ship, they would not stay on the ship either. For this reason, Gabriel was free to do mostly whatever he pleased. When men on the ship began to get sick, Gabriel took advantage of the situation and claimed it was a sign from God.

Ahab calls to the captain of the Jeroboam saying that he does not fear the epidemic and for him to come on board. Then Ahab asks if the crew has news of Moby Dick. The Jeroboam did have an encounter with the whale, which they proceed to tell. It appears Gabriel had warned the men not to chase this particular whale, saying it is the incarnated Shaker god. In time, however, the white whale is seen from the masts and one of the mates is able to persuade enough of the crewmembers they should go after the whale that he is able to man a whaling boat. While the crew is trying to lance the whale, it rises from the water, knocking the mate into the sea, dead. This sequence of events worked to give Gabriel even more power as most of the crew was under the impression he had forewarned them of the event.

Ahab continues to question the crew about the white whale and as soon as it becomes evident Ahab plans to go after the beast, Gabriel warns him that he will meet the same fate as the mate who was killed. Ahab interrupts Gabriel saying that they have a letter for one of the crewmembers. Unfortunately, the letter turns out to be for the dead mate. Gabriel tells Ahab to keep the letter as he will soon be dead himself and able to deliver the letter in person. Ahab, however, sticks the letter to the end of a lance and delivers it to the boat in this manner. Gabriel sends the letter back in the same manner and then orders the boat to leave.

Chapter 71 Analysis

Here, Ishmael tells the story of another ill-fated whaling ship the Pequod meets on its journey. This boat has been overtaken by a crazy man who holds the crew captive with his claim of being the angel Gabriel. Note that the name Gabriel literally means God's messenger. Gabriel tells the men they are not to chase the white whale, as he is a Shaker god. When a crew of men does go after the whale, one of them is killed. Because of this coincidence, the men now believe wholeheartedly that what Gabriel says is true.

The tone of the story turns chilling as Gabriel tells Ahab that the same fate that come to the dead mate also awaits Ahab if he chooses to go after Moby Dick. Ahab, however, chooses to ignore the warning of Gabriel. Note in this chapter that once again, Moby Dick is portrayed as the one that acts out the revenge of a god by eating the man who disobeyed Gabriel. Also, the story of the Jeroboam somewhat parallels that of the Pequod as the crew of the Pequod is also under the spell of a crazy leader.

Chapter 72

Chapter 72 Summary

In this chapter, Ishmael returns to his minute description of flensing the whale. He tells how Queequeg descends to the level of the whale, inserts the blubber hook into the original spade hole and then stays with the whale the whole time it is being stripped. As Queequeg's bowsman, it is Ishmael's duty to hold Queequeg up by what is referred to as the monkey rope. The rope is belted to both men, Queequeg at one end and Ishmael at the other. If Queequeg falls and sinks, Ishmael will go with him. In a footnote, Ishmael indicates it was Stubb who came up with this particular arrangement for the Pequod to ensure the "monkey", faithfulness and vigilance of the one holding the rope.

Queequeg finishes his business with the whale and climbs up the chains into the ship only to be met with a cup of tepid ginger water given to him by the steward. Stubb takes one whiff of the ginger and immediately rants to the cook for serving the savage ginger. The cook reveals it was Aunt Charity who told him not to give the savages liquor, only ginger water. Stubb then goes off and gets some strong liquor for Queequeg. He then throws the tea caddy used to make the ginger water overboard.

Chapter 72 Analysis

While hooked up to the monkey rope with Queequeg, Ishmael gets the chance to contemplate the ways in which life is much like being in a monkey rope all of the time. He insinuates that all humans are interdependent upon each other. If one person makes a mistake, it will ultimately affect everyone else.

Chapters 73-75

Chapters 73-75 Summary

Now that the men have captured their first sperm whale, it is made know to them that if the opportunity presents itself, they are to also kill a right whale even thought these animals were thought to be below the sperm whale. It isn't long before spouts are spotted and Stubb and Flask's boats are lowered to go after the whales. The boats soon move out of sight from the ship, but are then suddenly seen being pulled by the whale toward the ship at a very fast pace. It is only a bit of luck the whale doesn't plow into the ship. Stubb and Flask lance the whale and soon the battle is over.

As the two mates tie cords to the whale, they discuss why Ahab wanted them to kill a right whale. Flask informs Stubb it is because Fedallah has told a story about how a ship with a sperm whale's head on its starboard side and a right whale's head on its larboard side can never capsize. After this, the conversation turns to Fedallah and how neither of the mates likes the man. Stubb says Fedallah is the devil in disguise sent to trade Ahab's soul for the White Whale. The two continue to discuss the devil and Fedallah until they reach the ship. Sure enough, preparations are being made to hoist the right whale up on the lee side of the boat. The process evens out the weight in the boat, but still it does not float correctly.

Ishmael then goes about scholarly task of discerning the differences in the heads of the two whales now hanging from the Peqoud. He first notes the Sperm Whale's head is overall more majestic looking. Ishmael first compares the ears and eyes of these beasts, the two parts he says are most similar. The tiny eyes of these beasts are situated on the sides of their heads so they can't see either directly in front of them or directly behind them. Ishmael ponders what a whale's vision must be like having these eyes on either side of his head. Ishmael also describes the tiny ears both whale's have. He reasons that even if their eyes and ears were much larger, they wouldn't be able to see or hear any better.

Ishmael then takes us on a tour of the whale's mouths noting they are chaste and clean looking all covered with a bridal white membrane. The lower jaw is hinged and moves freely. As a result, many crews will remove this lower mandible. Once it is pulled onto the deck of the ship, the crew will remove the teeth for decoration and use the bones to carve various articles, such as Ahab's leg.

Ishmael notes that in general appearance, the sperm whale's head looks like a Roman chariot while the right whale's head resembles an oversized shoe. However, he states that if you view the head from one angle, it appears to be a gigantic bass violin. The head can also appear to be adorned with a crown of sorts. This crowned head carries with it, however, a pouting, sulking mouth.

Chapters 73-75 Analysis

Because of a story told to Ahab by Fedallah, the crew is asked to kill a right whale so that the head of this creature can also be hung from the Pequod. This action on Ahab's part indicates he does believe in superstition and also that he understands the dangers of whaling. Since Ishmael has both whale heads hanging for easy observation, he busies himself in describing the two heads. He gives the more favorable description to the sperm whale's head, a description that seems a bit prejudiced.

Chapters 76-80

Chapters 76-80 Summary

Returning to his detailed description of the whale, Ishmael describes the head of the sperm whale that can be equated to a boneless, but super hard mass, which the whale can use like a battering ram. It is this part of the head that contains the largest and the most pure quantity of sperm whale oil. For this reason, Ishmael refers to it as the Heidelburgh Tun. Next, Ishmael talks about the process of removing the oil from the head of the whale using buckets as collection tools.

While collecting the oil one day, Tashtego accidentally falls into the oil-filled head of the whale. During efforts to rescue the man, the hooks hanging the head from the ship break and the head, with Tashtego still in it, begins to sink. Queequeg rescues the man by jumping overboard and "delivering" the man from the head much like an obstetrician would deliver a baby.

Ishmael next describes the impressive forehead of the whale. He compares it to a prairie and says it is the most awe-inspiring sight he ever saw. Ishmael tries to describe the whale's head, brain and spinal cord as a phrenologist might. He says there is little to be known of the whale by feeling it's forehead as the brain is tucked so far back and away from this part of his anatomy. The brain is also quite small. However, what the brain lacks in size the whale's spinal cord provides compensation. Ishmael finishes his description by talking about the hump of the whale, which he calls its indomitableness.

Chapters 76-80 Analysis

First, note that Ishmael refers to the whale's head as the Heidelburgh Tun, a huge wine vat that holds in excess of 50,000 gallons of wine. This analogy compares the desirable oil to the desirableness of the aged wine. It also gives an idea of how much oil the head of a whale holds. Also at the end of the Chapter 78, Ishmael notes that if Tashtego had died inside the whale's head, he would have died a sweet death. Again, Ishmael makes a point to speak of the intelligence of the whale. He adds that although the whale has the forehead of an intelligent person, its brain is comparatively small.

Chapters 81-82

Chapters 81-82 Summary

Ishmael tells the account of the crew of the Pequod's meeting with a German whaling vessel. Ishmael notes the captain of this German ship seems more eager than usual to meet with their ship and upon first note seems to be holding a coffee pot in his hand. At second look, the crew sees it is indeed a lamp feeder and that the captain of the other ship probably wants to borrow some oil. Upon boarding the Pequod, Ahab immediately asks the captain if he has seen the White Whale, a question to which the captain replies in the negative. The captain tells Ahab he needs oil as his boat has yet to capture a whale. The crew fills his needs and he is on his way back across to his boat, The Virgin, when whales are spotted from both boats. Without even going back to his own boat, the Virgin's captain makes his way after the whales. Soon three other German boats are lowered.

Ishmael notes that included in the sighted whales there is an old, possibly sick whale following a pod of younger whales. They soon discover the whale has an odd pattern of swimming caused by a missing fin. All the boats in the water move in toward this older, slower whale. The German captain's boat is closest to the whale and he seems to mock the crew from the Pequod, making them angry because they were so hospitable to him just a few minutes before. The German boat would have beat the Pequod's to the whale had one of the German's oars not been caught by a crab. Time is lost as the man tries to free his oar from the creature's grasp. The German harpooner tries for a shot at the whale, but the Pequod's three harpooners beat him to it with all three of their darts striking the target at once. Then their boats pass that of the German's knocking these foreign men out of their boat. The whale disappears under the water, and then suddenly resurfaces as the men begin to throw their darts at him.

As the crew gets a closer look at the whale, they realize he is blind as well as crippled. Also, as he rolls in the water, Flask notices a lump that he decides to spear. Starbuck tries to stop him, but Flask has already shot a dart into the spot, causing the whale to lash toward the boat carrying Flask and his crew. Flasks boat is capsized in the process. The whale then rolls over in the water and dies. The body threatens to sink to the bottom of the ocean so with the boats holding it up as buoys, the Pequod's crew transfers it to the ship where it is tied tightly. When cutting into the whale, the crew finds the entire length of a corded harpoon as well as a stone lance head inside the whale. The crew is interrupted from finding any more treasures because the whale's tendency to sink is threatening to capsize the ship. Even as Queequeg tries to cut the fluke chains and free the ship from the whale, the fastenings holding the whale break and he sinks to the bottom of the sea.

Ishmael explains whales are generally buoyant; however, some have the tendency to sink. The reason why some whales sink and others don't is unbeknownst to whalers. Ishmael notes that some crews attach buoys to sunken whales so that when the death

gasses bring the whale to the surface again, the crew will know where to find it and will still be able to harvest the oil from it. Soon after the whale sinks, those on lookout on the Pequod announce the Virgin was lowering her boats again for another chase. Ishmael notes the men are in pursuit of a whale known as a Fin-Back, which has the reputation of not being able to be caught.

Here, Ishmael discusses the many different famous and influential people who have been involved in the whaling business since its beginning. He notes that Perseus, son of Jupiter, was the first whaleman. These were the days when whaling was done only as a way to assist others, and was not a greedy profession. Perseus kills the whale as it is about to carry off Andromeda, daughter of a king. He continues the chapter recalling instances of great whaling feats.

Chapters 81-82 Analysis

The Pequod meets with a whaling ship appropriately named the Virgin which has killed no whales and has run completely out of oil. Being courteous, the crew of the Pequod loans the Virgin some oil. As repayment for the courtesy, the crew of the Virgin mocks those on the Pequod when both ships spot whales and lower their boats for them. By chance, the oar of the Virgin's boat is bit by a crab which slows that boat down and allows the Pequod to score the whale. The victory is short-lived, however, as the dead whale's carcass sinks to the bottom of the sea before the men on the Pequod can harvest its oil. As the crew of the Pequod leaves the area, they see the crew of the Virgin undertaking what they believe to be another fruitless chase of a whale.

Chapter 83

Chapter 83 Summary

Ishmael discusses the historical implications of the Biblical story of Jonah and the whale. He seeks to denounce the reasons one man had for doubting the story. The first reason the man had for doubting the Biblical account is that a whale could not swallow a whole man. Ishmael retorts that according to the Bishop Jebb, the whale didn't necessarily swallow Jonah but could have had him housed in some part of his huge mouth. The second reason the man gave for his disbelief is that the whale's gastric juices would have injured or killed Jonah. Ishmael deflates this reason by assuming Jonah took refuge in the floating body of a dead whale or on another ship called The Whale. A third reason behind the man's disbelief is that the geography and time measures of when the whale swallowed Jonah and when he spat him out do not add up. Ishmael answers this by saying there are several ways the whale could have possibly made the journey. Ishmael ends his discussion by saying the non-believing Sag Harbor man was guilty of pride in his own minute education and ability to reason. Ishmael points out that people with minds much more brilliant than his whole-heartedly believed the story of Jonah and the whale.

Chapter 83 Analysis

Ishmael takes the opportunity to discuss the believability of the story of Jonah and the whale. He picks on one Sag Harbor sailor in particular who does not believe in the story. As the Sag Harbor sailor makes points concerning why he does not believe the story, Ishmael refutes each one. Both build their arguments on speculation rather than fact which makes it interesting that in the end of the chapter Ishmael denounces the man as being prideful and of low intelligence because of his disbelief. However, the man is actually only guilty of disbelief as his points are just as valid as Ishmael's.

Chapters 84-86

Chapters 84-86 Summary

Ishmael begins this chapter discussing the manner of oiling the bottom of a boat, a ceremony performed for good luck. Ishmael states the Queequeg believes vigilantly in this ceremony and performs it on the boat soon after their encounter with The Virgin. Next, Ishmael turns his attention back to whaling. Whales have been sighted and the crew lowers boats. Tashtego gets one iron in a whale, but the whale runs giving Ishmael the chance to witness and describe the method of pitchpoling. Stubb stands in the front of the boat holding a slender spear made of wood and steel. A long rope connects to the spear so it can be pulled back into the boat if the thrower needs to. With a quick precise movement, Stubb throws this spear at the whale striking him in the life point. Stubb and the crew then watch as the whale dies.

In all his infinite wisdom, Ishmael decides to go about confirming if a whale's jet is actually water or just vapor. Ishmael first goes about detailing the method by which a whale breathes, through his spout hole, and never the mouth, and through human lungs. Ishmael describes how the whales come up for air, breathe in and out and certain fixed number of times for each whale and then retire again to the depths where they may stay for an hour or more without resurfacing. Ishmael notes whales can neither smell, nor can they communicate. He argues with himself that even though he has seen the spout of the whale, even he is still unsure if it is water or vapor. This is because the jet is acrid making the skin sting upon contact. It is also rumored if a man were to stand with his face over the jet when it went off, he would be blinded. Although not set on proof, Ishmael gives and educated guess as to what the spout actually is made of. His guess is that the spout is just mist, a sign of heavy thinking.

In the following chapter, Ishmael describes the whale's tail. He describes what this body part looks like, how its fibers are woven together, and its size. Ishmael says it is here the strength of the whale is concentrated to a point, and that the whale could do great damage with its tail. Ishmael talks of the five reasons why the whale will use his tail. The tail is used for progression, as a mace in battle, as a sweeper, for peaking flukes and in lobtailing.

Chapters 84-86 Analysis

In these chapters, Ishmael covers three basic topics. First is Queequeg's dogged belief in the custom of oiling the bottom of the boat both for luck and speed. The second topic is a description of one of the procedures used by the whaling crew to catch a running whale. Finally, Ishmael returns to his description of the whale. While these sections of the book may seem tedious, they serve as a way to help the reader better understand how Moby Dick is able to destroy the Pequod at the end of the book.

Chapters 87-90

Chapters 87-90 Summary

The Pequod nears the sperm whale hunting grounds located close to Japan. So far, they have not docked at any port, nor have they touched land. The crew of the Pequod finds themselves in the midst of a large group of sperm whales. Queequeg and Ishmael's boat captures a baby whale with its umbilical cord still attached. In the course of the chase, the Pequod's crew is pursued by Malay pirates, whom they escape. During the course of the action, the crew of the Pequod marks several whales as theirs, but only comes away with one captured beast.

Ishmael next describes the grouping habits of whales. They can be seen either in large groups, as the Pequod had just encountered, or smaller groups, known as schools. While Ishmael sees these groups of female whales with their one male leader as a harem, he explains they are more properly called a school. The male leader is the schoolmaster. In Chapter 89, Ishmael goes about analyzing the laws of whale fishery, which are few. These laws allow for much gray area and many disagreements among whaling vessels. The following chapter details the English laws concerning whale fishing.

Chapters 87-90 Analysis

In the action of Chapter 87, Ishmael tells how even in the best of circumstances, whale hunting can go badly. Although the Pequod found a huge group of whales, they only came away with one as a result of poor circumstances. In the next few chapters, Ishmael seeks to clarify the circumstances and action of Chapter 87. In Chapter 88, Ishmael talks about the grouping habits of whales. Then in Chapter 89, he talks about the law as it applies to whale fishing. In this chapter, he breaks into a discussion that the entire world is comprised of fast and loose fish where ownership is granted by possession. So it is, he says, with the human mind.

Chapters 91-92

Chapters 91-92 Summary

Stubb has a bit of fun with the French crew of a whaling boat that has come upon one of the dead whales marked as the Pequod's. Instead of blatantly demanding the whale, Stubb uses humor and intelligence to outsmart the Rose-bud's green captain. The crew of the Rose-bud knows they won't get any oil out of the deceased animal and is glad to go along with Stubb's joke. Together they convince the captain the dead whales will make the captain and his crew sick and that they must clear the area as soon as possible. After the ship leaves, Stubb removes from the whale a substance known as Ambergis, which is highly coveted by druggists for use in colognes.

Chapters 91-92 Analysis

In a rather humorous departure from the dry tone of the past few chapters, Ishmael tells the story of the Pequod's meeting with the foul-smelling French ship the Rose-bud. Melville continues to play with the connection of good and bad smells throughout the chapter. For instance, the Rose-bud is foul smelling instead of sweet because of the dead whales that surround it. The captain of the smelly Rose-bud is a converted cologne maker. Stubb then pulls from these dead whales the substance which caused their death and stench. This substance will later be used to make fine, sweet smelling colognes and fragrances.

Chapters 93-98

Chapters 93-98 Summary

Pip, the small black boy who plays the tambourine on the Pequod, finds himself taking a turn in one of the whaling boats because one of the regular crewmen sprained his hand. During the first whale chase, Pip jumps overboard when the whale bumps into the boat. He becomes entangled in the whaling ropes, which must be cut and the whale turned loose in order to free Pip. Stubb warns Pip that if he jumps out of the boat again, Stubb will leave him where he falls. As expected, Pip jumps overboard once again and is left by the whaling boat as it is pulled off by the whale. The other boats are busy with their own whales and do not see the boy in the ocean. Therefore, he is left to float in the ocean for quite awhile waiting to be rescued. When Pip is finally rescued, the crew finds he has become insane because of his experience.

In the following chapters, Ishmael describes the process of getting the sperm oil ready for storage. Crewmen use their hands to break up the crystallized oil, making their work roughened hands soft and pliable. Also, men work in the blubber room cutting the blubber into pieces that can be more easily moved. These smaller pieces of blubber are taken to the mincer who dresses himself in the whale's penis skin as a way to protect himself while mincing the blubber. This minced blubber is then boiled down and the oil extracted using the try-works, a type of portable kiln found on every American whaler. Because of the nature of these vehicles, there is never a lack of light on whaling vessels. Ishmael notes each man has a store of lamps by his hammock and keeps the hold well lit. While the oil is still warm, it is poured into casks, then the casks stored in the hold of the boat. Afterwards, the crew is busy cleaning up the ship from the business of processing the whale. The whole process is repeated each time a whale is killed.

Chapters 93-98 Analysis

Ishmael explains Pip's madness as being the result of being touched by God. He then equates the insanity of the world with the sanity of heaven. In the following chapter, Ishmael speaks of heaven again, saying he sees angels lined up with their hands in jars of sperm oil. Next, Ishmael almost sacrilegiously talks of the mincer wearing the penis skin of the whale like a priest's robe. Later, as the harpooners tend the fires in the try-works during the night, Ishmael finds himself disoriented and turned around. He describes the horrifying feeling of not being able to see a compass where one should be. Ishmael describes the feeling as that of death. After the chapter on darkness, Ishmael lightens the tone by devoting a chapter to the abundance of lights on the ship. As they have so much oil on hand, these sailors are never in darkness.

Chapter 99

Chapter 99 Summary

The Spanish doubloon that Ahab nailed to the main mast of the Pequod for the crew member who first spots the White Whale is still nailed in its spot. Stubb watches as first Ahab and then Starbuck study the coin. They then walk away with an expression of sadness. Stubb himself looks at the coin to see what the others saw in it. Using a Massachusetts calendar, Stubb attempts to translate the meaning of the coin based on astrology. In the middle of his studies, Flask comes on the deck. Stubb spys as Flask looks at the coin and sees it in terms of the number of cigars it will buy. Queequeg comes next and appears to have no idea what to make of the coin. Next, the insane Pip only babbles nonsense at the sight of the coin.

Chapter 99 Analysis

In his interpretation of the doubloon, Stubb turns to the Zodiac, and then equates the Zodiac to life with each of the signs of the Zodiac inflicting its own punishment on the unsuspecting human. Mystery hangs with the doubloon, with all crewmembers wondering who will win it and how will they spend it. Stubb notes that if the ship were to sink, years from now those that found the boat would wonder how the doubloon came to be nailed there. This statement foreshadows the fate of the Pequod.

Chapters 100-101

Chapters 100-101 Summary

Here, the crew of the Pequod meets with a ship by the name of the Samuel Enderby. Like Ahab, the captain of this ship has also lost a limb to Moby Dick. Once Ahab sees the man's ivory arm and hears the White Whale was responsible, he quickly transfers to the other boat to hear the full story. It appears that although Moby Dick caused the wound which resulted in his arm being amputated, this captain holds no malice toward the whale, and does not seek another encounter with him. As soon as Ahab hears the direction in which the whale was last seen, he immediately goes back to the Pequod to track down the creature.

In the following chapter, Ishmael tells the story of the family of Samuel Enderby who financed the first English whaling voyage. Ishmael also tells of how many years later, he meets up with the ship the Samuel Enderby again and has a fine time socializing and eating with the crew of that ship.

Chapters 100-101 Analysis

In this chapter, Ahab meets with a man, who like himself has been mauled by the White Whale. In contrast, however, the captain of the Samuel Enderby does not hold a grudge against the whale and believes the creature acted only out of awkwardness. Also unlike Ahab, this captain does not want to encounter Moby Dick again.

Chapters 102-105

Chapters 102-105 Summary

Ishmael returns to his description of the anatomy of the whale. Here he presents the measurements of the skeleton of the average sperm whale. Ishmael claims he once saw the skeleton of a whale and took the opportunity to measure the beast. He states the average sperm whale is between 85 and 90 feet in length with the skill and jaw taking up 20 feet of this length. Next, Ishmael talks about the fossil records of whales, which lived hundreds of years ago.

In the final chapter of this series, Ishmael seeks to determine if the whale is shrinking in size over the years and if the species will one day become extinct. Ishmael answers no to both of these questions. He points to evidence that whales have indeed grown larger instead of shrinking over the years. Ishmael also says he doubts the species will ever become extinct first because whales live such long lives, second because it takes so many men to kill one whale, and third because the whales still have spots to hide where humans cannot reach them.

Chapters 102-105 Analysis

Ishmael, who seems to know a little about everything, now turns himself to dissecting the skeleton of the whale so as to determine its actual dimensions. While these chapters do not add to the action of the story of Moby Dick, they do give an idea of the majestic size and stature of these creatures the whalemen seek to kill. In the final chapter of this sequence, Ishmael alludes to the whale as being almost immortal as they were here before the time of land and outlived even Noah's flood without aid from the ark.

Chapters 106-108

Chapters 106-108 Summary

Ishmael returns to the action of the story with Ahab returning to the Pequod after his visit with the captain of the Samuel Enderby. In his perturbed state, Ahab twists his ivory leg so that he feels it must be replaced. For this task, Ahab calls the carpenter of the ship to form him a new leg out of the ship's finest stock of ivory. Also during this chapter, Ishmael lets a secret slip. He tells the real reason why Ahab was sequestered in his cabin during the beginning of the voyage. Apparently, the captain had fallen and injured himself quite badly one evening while on board the ship. The crew found it best to say he was ill instead of stating the real reason he was recuperating in his cabin. It is only much later in the voyage the real cause of Ahab's sickness is told.

In the following chapter, Ishmael introduces the carpenter of the ship. The carpenter's role varies as needed. He serves the ship as woodworker, ear piercer and even dentist. Next, Ishmael records an encounter between Ahab and the carpenter in which the carpenter measures Ahab for his new leg. Ahab admits to the carpenter he suffers with phantom pains from his missing leg and muses whether or not a person will feel the burn of hell's fires if they don't have a body.

Chapters 106-108 Analysis

Ahab's ivory leg, it appears, has given him trouble since the beginning of the voyage. He has now twisted it and must have it replaced by the carpenter. As the novel nears the end, it appears Melville presents Ahab as a more reachable person. Also, note that Melville returns to the play-like format in Chapter 108 as he tells of the encounter between Ahab and the carpenter.

Chapters 109-110

Chapters 109-110 Summary

One day while working on board the ship, the crew suspects some of the casks of oil in the hold of the ship are leaking. Starbuck goes to warn Ahab of this problem and is met with the captain's unconcerned attitude. Once again wrapped up in his single-minded quest of Moby Dick, Ahab expresses no concern for the leaking oil. Starbuck suggests the owners of the ship will be unhappy if the oil is lost. Ahab is irritated with Starbuck's insistence and raises a gun as if to shoot him. Starbuck leaves the cabin as instructed, but warns the captain he should be afraid of himself. After much thought, Ahab reconsiders his decision, goes to the deck of the ship and commands the casks of oil be searched to find the leak.

During the time Queequeg is helping the rest of the crew to find the leaking casks, he becomes very ill, almost to the point of death. He makes one request, that the carpenter make a canoe shaped coffin for him much like those made for Nantucket sailors. The carpenter does so and after Queequeg tries out the coffin to be sure it is a good fit, he becomes well again. The coffin is then used as a chest to store his extra clothes. Queequeg spends his extra time carving replicas of his tattoos into the coffin.

Chapters 109-110 Analysis

In this chapter, Ahab makes an almost fatal mistake of angering Starbuck. Had he thoroughly alienated the first mate, Starbuck could have taken control of the ship and thwarted Ahab's mission to kill Moby Dick. It is uncertain why Ahab changed his decision concerning the leaking casks, but nevertheless, it kept the peace on the boat. In the following chapter, Ishmael reveals the meaning of Queequeg's tattoos. These marks tell the history of the heavens and earth as well as the art of searching out the truth in life. It is in this chapter Melville begins to play with the roles of the casket. It is first intended to serve as a casket, and then is used to hold clothes. Also, Queequeg carves into it the patterns of his tattoos, a way of placing his personal signature on the coffin.

Chapters 111-115

Chapters 111-115 Summary

As the ship sails into the Pacific Ocean, Ishmael voices a certain amount of relief and comfort. Ahab, however, is still disturbed by the fact the White Whale is still alive and swims in the very sea he sails on. The next chapter tells of the blacksmith, a man who came to whaling after he lost his family because of his drinking problem. In the following chapter, Ahab has this blacksmith forge him a special harpoon meant only for Moby Dick.

Nearing the Japanese hunting ground, the crew is kept busy with whales. Ishmael describes the tranquil times spent sitting in the boats waiting for whales to resurface. Soon the Pequod meets another ship, The Bachelor that is gaily adorned and reverberates with the sound of rejoicing. The ship is bursting with sperm oil and on its way home. As the Pequod and Bachelor pass, Ahab is invited to come aboard the happy ship, but Ahab only appears to be irritated by the men's joy. Ahab asks only if they have seen the White Whale. The sailors say they haven't, and add that they don't believe there is such a creature.

Chapters 111-115 Analysis

It is clear that Ahab understands the depression and mental anguish the blacksmith is suffering as he asks the blacksmith why he doesn't go mad with the weight of his sorrow. During the span of these chapters, Ahab's moodiness seems to hang over them like a dense fog. Even when he meets with the Bachelor, Ahab only seems to be further irritated by their jovial nature. However, as the ship passes, Ahab pulls from his pocket a small tube of Nantucket sand, a sign that he does indeed miss his homeland.

Chapters 116-118

Chapters 116-118 Summary

The crew of the Pequod kills four whales. Three of them are close enough to be brought to the ship that day while the third requires Ahab's boat to stay with the corpse through the night. During this time, Fedallah dreams of hearses and tells Ahab of the dream. Before Ahab dies, Fedallah says, he will see one hearse not made by human hands and another made from American wood. Fedallah also predicts he will die before Ahab and that hemp is the only article that can kill Ahab.

Ishmael describes Ahab's practice of using the height of the sun to determine at which latitude the boat was located. Ahab followed this practice daily until one day he became frustrated with it. In the view of all the crew, Ahab dashed the apparatus upon the deck of the ship, vowing never to use it again.

Chapters 116-118 Analysis

Fedallah's dream lays out the plot of the ending of the novel. He will die first, with Ahab being killed with hemp. Ahab laughs at Fedallah's strange dream assuming that it means he, Ahab, is immortal.

Chapters 119-126

Chapters 119-126 Summary

The Pequod gets caught in a typhoon in which the masts of the ship somehow catch on fire. Members of the crew interpret the flames differently with some of the crew believing the flames are a good luck symbol. Ahab, however, believes the flames lead him to the White Whale. As the crew mulls the scene, Starbuck hollers for Ahab to look at his boat. There, the harpoon Ahab fashioned specifically for Moby Dick is burning. Starbuck takes this as a sign that God is against Ahab.

The following chapters detail the feelings of the men as they work the ship during the storm. Soon the storm abates and Starbuck goes below to tell the captain of the damage to the ship. He finds the captain asleep in his hammock and for several minutes ponders to opportunity to murder the captain and in doing so save the rest of the crew. Even though he knows what dangers chasing the White Whale holds for the crew, Starbuck finds himself unable to harm the captain. He sends Stubb below in his place to update the captain on the state of the ship.

The morning following the storm, Ahab comes on board the deck of the ship to find it going in the wrong direction! Apparently, in the course of the storm, the compasses were disturbed by electric forces and now point the wrong direction. Ahab compensates by making a compass of his own that he says will always read true.

In the following chapter, the ship's log and line, another form of determining the direction of the ship breaks. As the men are trying to fix the apparatus, the insane Pip comes on board. Ahab takes pity on the small boy and takes Pip to stay in his cabin.

In the final chapter of this series, the crew hears terrible cries. Some believe they are the cries of mermaids, but all believe the cries are a bad omen for the ship and crew. Ahab laughs at the men for being afraid of such a small thing. He says the cries were only those of baby seals that were lost. Next morning, a crewmember mounts the mast for his watch and falls off of it into the ocean not to be seen again. Although the life buoy is thrown out, no hand reaches for it. As the chapter closes, the carpenter has been employed to turn Queequeg's coffin into a replacement life buoy.

Chapters 119-126 Analysis

The tone of this first chapter is almost mutinous as Starbuck declares that God is against Ahab. Later in this series of chapters, Starbuck contemplates killing Ahab in his hammock but finds himself unable to do so. Although Starbuck seems to understand he holds the fate of the entire crew in his hands, he can not bring himself to murder Ahab. After the happenings during the storm, the crews' distrust and dislike of Ahab grows stronger. Still none of them steps out against him.

The feeling of fear on the ship deepens during the following chapters of this section. Ahab laughs at the men's superstitious feelings. When a man falls off the mast and dies the following day, however, the men feel they are justified in their fear.

Chapter 127

Chapter 127 Summary

Ahab ascends to the deck of the ship where he finds the carpenter turning Queequeg's coffin into a life buoy. Ahab asks the carpenter the meaning of his work and if he was not the one to also make Ahab's leg. Ahab ponders the meaning of a person who makes things for both the living and the dead. He also contemplates the idea that the coffin is being turned into a life buoy.

Chapter 127 Analysis

Melville uses this chapter to show how truly morbid Ahab's thoughts have become. Ahab admits he cannot look at the bright side of circumstances. They only seem to him a strange and unfamiliar mind-set. Melville also plays with the idea of a coffin, generally used to hold a deceased body, being made into a life buoy, which can be used to save lives.

Chapter 128

Chapter 128 Summary

The Pequod is met by a fast approaching boat. Ahab asks if the crew of this vessel, called The Rachel, has seen Moby Dick. He receives an affirmative answer, but the captain is too overwhelmed with his own troubles to talk about the whale long. Moby Dick had appeared the day before while the crew was trying to catch from a herd of whales. A single boat was sent after the white whale. The watch from the mastheads thought the crew in the boat got a harpoon into Moby Dick, but then disappeared from sight. The captain was looking for news of that boat or any of its crew. They hadn't been heard from since. Adding to the tragedy of the situation, the captain's twelve-year-old son was on board the missing boat. The captain asks Ahab's help in finding his boy. Although the Rachel's captain implores Ahab to think of Ahab's own son, Ahab refuses to help in any way. He instead fixes his eyes on Moby Dick and leaves the grieving captain to search alone.

Chapter 128 Analysis

It is here that Ahab proves how truly inhumane he has become in his quest for revenge against Moby Dick. Even though he faces the tragedy of an acquaintance, he refuses to help or even consider he might one day be in the same position. The need for revenge has turned his heart cold and unfeeling.

Chapter 130

Chapter 130 Summary

The mood aboard the Pequod has turned grim and solemn. Not even Stubb jokes and laughs. Ahab and Fedallah keep a constant watch on the crew and the nearby ocean. As if he doubts his crew would cry out if they were to see Moby Dick, Ahab rigs up a basket to allow himself to keep watch upon one of the masts. Interestingly, Ahab chooses Starbuck, the only man openly against Ahab's plan of revenge against Moby Dick, to watch the rope that secures his basket. As he watches from his perch, a sea-hawk flies near and steals Ahab's hat.

Chapter 130 Analysis

The theft of Ahab's hat is another bad omen. Ishmael recalls the story of Tarquin and Tanaquil. A bird flew round Tarquin's head three times, taking his hat, but then replacing it. At this, Tanaquil declares Tarquin will be king. However, the omen only became good when the hat was replaced. Ishmael notes Ahab's hat was never seen again.

Chapter 131

Chapter 131 Summary

The crew of the Pequod meet with another whaling vessel that has had an encounter with Moby Dick. The captain of the Delight reports that five men were killed during the encounter with the whale and their bodies never recovered. Another lies ready for a sea burial. Ahab commands the Pequod move forward before the body of the dead man is dropped overboard. As the captain of the Delight watches, he laughs as the Pequod sails away from the burial, yet a coffin hangs from its own taffrail.

Chapter 131 Analysis

Ishmael shares another story of the death and destruction the famed white whale is capable of performing. It can be inferred that Melvile wants to get the point across that one can't run from death. Even as Captain Ahab commands the crew to leave the Delight and not witness the sea burial, there on the Pequod hangs a coffin, the very symbol of death.

Chapter 133

Chapter 133 Summary

On the morning of a clear, beautiful day, Ahab stands by the rail of the ship. Overcome by the day's beauty, he sheds a tear while looking over the side of the boat. Starbuck witnesses the show of emotion. Ahab begins to talk to him of home, family and growing older. Hoping to take advantage of Ahab's emotions, Starbuck tries to persuade him to command the ship to turn back and to give up the chase. Ahab then begins to ponder why he must hunt Moby Dick to the death. While Ahab is still talking, Starbuck leaves him in despair.

Chapter 133 Analysis

Through his talk with Starbuck, Melville shows Ahab does have the same feelings and emotions as the other men, however, he feels compelled to finish his mission. This is the first time in the novel that Ahab seems to show any emotion at all.

Chapters 134-135

Chapters 134-135 Summary

The crew first sights Moby Dick and boats are lowered to chase him. The whale sounds and then disappears under the sea. Ahab waits patiently for the whale to resurface, only to see the whale's open mouth coming up at him from the bottom of the sea. Moby Dick grabs the boat in his mouth, Ahab tries to push Moby Dick's jaws away with his hands, but the whale breaks the boat in half and throws Ahab into the sea. Moby Dick then swims around and around Ahab and the broken boat creating a sort of whirlpool. Ahab commands the Pequod be sailed forward to drive the whale away from him. No men are lost in this first encounter, and the crew continues to chase the whale.

Again, Moby Dick is sighted and three boats are lowered to go after him. The crew manages to get darts into the whale, but with Moby Dick's weavings and swimming in and out, the lines become tangled. Two of the boats are thrown into each other and are destroyed. The whale then bangs the bottom of Ahab's boat with his head, turning to over and throwing the men once again into the sea. The whale then swims off with darts and tangled lines still hanging from his body.

Once back on board the ship, the crew notices Ahab is leaning on Starbuck and sees that his ivory leg has been broken off. Also, the crew notices Fedallah is missing. One of the men from the masts says he saw the Parsee being dragged along after Moby Dick as he swam away from the wrecked boats. The crew works through the night to prepare spare boats for the next day's chase. The carpenter also fixes up Ahab a makeshift leg from the broken hull of one of the whaling boats.

On the third day, it is after noon before the crew spots Moby Dick again. As Ahab is in the process of lowering the boats once again to go after the whale, Starbuck begs him to give up the chase, but Ahab ignores his pleadings. As the crews row out to the whale, sharks surround them and bite at their oars. They near the whale and, seeming maddened by the lances that still stick from his hide, Moby Dick once again damages the mate's boats with his tail. Ahab's boat remains untouched, however, and its crew is able to row alongside the whale where Ahab darts a harpoon into the whale. The whale rolls on his side causing the boat to tip and throw several men from it.

The whale's attention turns from the boat to the whaling ship itself. Ignoring the small boat, he swims full steam toward the ship hitting it and damaging it so that it begins to sink. After striking the ship, Moby Dick is still for a moment, and Ahab takes the chance to dart another harpoon at him. Feeling the dart, the whale takes off again. The rope of the harpoon accidentally winds around Ahab's neck and pulls him out to sea. Meanwhile, the whaling ship sinks to the masts and creates a whirlpool that pulls the ship, boat and crew down with it.

Ishmael alone survives the wreck. After Fedallah disappeared during the second day's chase, Ishmael replaced the Parsee in Ahab's boat. He was the one knocked astern during the confrontation with Moby Dick. As he was floating some distance from this ship, he was not sucked down with the ship like the rest of the crew. Queequeg's coffin floats up from the wreckage and becomes Ishmael's lifeboat. The crew of the Rachel picks him up.

Chapters 134-135 Analysis

The fight with Moby Dick lasts three days before the Pequod and her crew are ruined. Unlike the other whales the crew has fought, Moby Dick does not run from the boats, but instead meets them head on in an unfrightened sort of way. There is no loss of life during the first day's encounter. On the second day, the whale pulls Fedallah out to sea when he becomes tangled in the ropes and harpoons embedded in Moby Dick's back. Also, Ahab's ivory leg is broken during the second day's chase. On the third day, Ahab becomes tangled in the whaling ropes and is pulled to sea, being killed by hemp as Fedallah said he would be.

As Tashtego nails the flag to the mast, he catches the wing of a bird in his hammer, and pulls the bird down with the ship. Melville describes this image as Satan pulling a bit of heaven down to the depths of hell. The theme of fate resurfaces in the end of the novel as Ishmael says the fates had decided he should be the one to replace Fedallah in Ahab's boat, a fateful choice that saved his life.

Characters

Ishmael

Ishmael is the main character of the novel and narrator of the story. While he introduces himself as Ishmael, it is unsure if this is his given name or one he has adopted for the story. Ishmael is a Biblical name associated with orphans and outcasts. It is the name given to Abraham's first son through the servant Hagar. Hagar and Ishmael are sent away to die when Abraham's wife Sarah become jealous of the two. God watches over and protects Ishmael and his mother, however, and the boy grows to be the father of the Islam faith. In much the same way, the Ishmael in the novel is watched over and protected, as he is the only one to survive the encounter with Moby Dick at the end of the novel.

Before Ishmael's whaling mission, he serves as a schoolmaster. He appears to be very studious in nature and approaches the industry of whaling in a very calculated and meticulous manner. For instance, he has already decided he must sail on a ship from Nantucket because Nantucket is the place where the whaling industry got its start. Ishmael also takes great interest in describing the minute details of the whaling profession as well as the different types of whales themselves. His narration is full of references and quotes from other scholars meant to help prove and strengthen his points.

All that is known of Ishmael's background is that he was raised by a stern, unloving stepmother. He is also a Presbyterian, but is open minded enough about his religion to join Queequeg in offering sacrifices to Queequeg's pagan idol when Queequeg asks it of him. Ishmael also shares that he has been to sea a few times before on merchant ships, but now has the strong desire to sail on a whaling ship and see what this business is all about.

Queequeg

Queequeg is the cannibal harpooner with whom Ishmael shares a bed at the Spouter Inn in New Bedford. A native of Kokovoko, Queequeg is the son of the high chief of that island. As is customary for that area, Queequeg's body is covered with tattoos. He also carries his harpoon everywhere that he goes. After a rocky start, Queequeg becomes Ishmael's bosom friend and companion on the whaling voyage.

Because of his skill as a harpooner, captains Peleg and Bildad allow Queequeg to sign aboard the Pequod with no papers to prove he has been converted to Christianity. Queequeg is also to be awarded the ninetieth lay of the proceeds of the whaling voyage. During the voyage, Queequeg serves as the first mate's harpooner and the one who wears the monkey rope with Ishmael and is lowered to the dead whale to help remove its blubber.

At first look, Queequeg with his tattoos and embalmed heads seems to be a pagan and cannibal of the worst type. As his character develops, however, it is seen that Queequeg is actually a very affectionate and caring person. He has come to America to find ways to make his people happier, but finds the Christian Americans are no happier than pagans.

Captain Peleg

Captain Peleg is one of the part owners of the Pequod responsible for getting the ship ready for its three-year voyage. Peleg is a retired whaleman who has become quite wealthy in his profession. While the Pequod is in dock, Peleg spends much of his time keeping watch over who comes and goes from the boat in a tent that is pitched on the deck of the ship. When Ishmael first boards the Pequod seeking to become part of its crew, he mistakes Peleg as the captain of the vessel. As a result, Peleg has the first opportunity to question Ishmael concerning why he wants to sail on a whaling vessel.

Captain Peleg seems to be all bluster and bluff to cover a gentler nature. Although he questions Ishmael roughly, he allows him passage on the ship. Peleg also seems to be the more generous of the two primary owners of the ship as he wants to offer Ishmael the three hundredth lay of the proceeds of the ship.

Captain Bildad

Captain Bildad is the second of the part owners of the Pequod. Like Peleg, he is also a wealthy retired whaleman. Bildad is also in the process of helping to get the ship ready to sail. Bildad is a much stricter, sterner Quaker than Peleg and is often seen studying the scriptures. Unlike Peleg's generous offer, he offers newcomer Ishmael the 777th lay of the ship's profits. Later, Bildad gives Queequeg a Christian tract in hopes of converting him.

It should be noted that Bildad is another character who gets his name from a Biblical character. The Bildad in the Bible was one of the three friends who came to visit and comfort Job in his troubles. However, it is often noted Bildad was the least comforting of the three friends, somewhat like the stern and uncompromising nature of Moby Dick's Bildad.

Elijah

Elijah is a strange prophet-like man whom Ishmael and Queequeg happen to meet before they leave on their whaling voyage. Elijah raises questions in Ishmael's mind about Captain Ahab and the voyage in general. Elijah hints that the voyage is doomed for failure and that Ishmael and Queequeg should not sail upon the ship. It is interesting Melville chooses the name Elijah for this character, because it is the prophet Elijah in the Bible who declares King Ahab is so evil he should be put to death.

Captain Ahab

Captain Ahab is the acting captain of the Pequod during its three-year voyage. During the voyage, Ahab keeps to himself in his cabin and does not seem to become close to any of the other men on the ship with the exception of Pip after the boy becomes mentally unstable. The only other instance is when Ahab seems to develop affection for Starbuck because he associates the first mate with his own wife and child.

In a past encounter with a sperm whale named Moby Dick, Captain Ahab lost one of his legs when the whale bit it off. Captain Ahab has made the act of getting revenge on this animal the central point of the Pequod's voyage and allows his need for revenge to overtake his life. Ahab seems to believe the whale represents all that is evil in the world, and that by destroying the whale, Ahab will in turn destroy the source of trouble.

Following in his tradition of using Biblical names, Ahab's name is also the same as a Biblical character. Ahab was the cruelest and most wicked of all the kings of Israel. In fact, the prophet Elijah declared a death sentence upon Ahab, however, God purged this sentence when Ahab repented. The Bible indicates Ahab did more to provoke the anger of God than any other king in recorded history.

Starbuck

Starbuck is the chief mate of the Pequod. He is both a native of Nantucket native and a Quaker. Starbuck is described as being 30-years-old, thin and fit. He has a young wife and child waiting for him at home. It is also known that both Starbuck's father and brother were killed in the whaling profession. Ishmael describes Starbuck as being unusually conscientious and reverential for a seaman. Starbuck is a courageous man, but not one to take unnecessary risks.

Starbuck's actions are rooted in intelligence and as a result, he is not easily swayed by another's charisma as shown by his reaction to Ahab's desire to hunt only Moby Dick. Starbuck considers the purpose of the voyage, which is to catch as many whales as possible, and realizes Ahab is wrong in leading the crew to only pursue one whale. While he doesn't mind going after Moby Dick should he cross the path of the Pequod, he doesn't see the sense in just tracking one whale. Starbuck is also not afraid to speak his mind to Ahab even if it means angering the captain.

Stubb

Stubb, the Pequod's second mate, has a personality almost opposite that of Starbuck, the serious first mate. Stubb is a joyful, happy-go-lucky type of person. Despite his jovial nature, Stubb is not easily excited. Ishmael describes Stubb as being very calm and collected even in the face of danger. Originally from Cape Cod, Stubb is rarely seen without his pipe. In fact, Ishmael indicates that he believes it is Stubb's habit of constantly smoking that gives him such a positive attitude.

Flask

Nicknamed King-Post, Flask is the short, ruddy third mate who is perhaps the most reckless of the three headsmen. Ishmael indicates Flask seems to have the notion that whales in general have offended him in some way. Therefore, it is his responsibility to rid the world of these animals. Flash goes after whales with the same fearlessness as the common man might track and kill a mouse.

Pip

Pip is a small black boy from Alabama. He plays the tambourine and is generally considered a coward by all those on the ship. Once while filling in on one of the whaling boats, he jumps overboard and is left floating in the ocean for a time. When Pip is finally picked up by the crew of the Pequod, they find he has become insane.

Moby Dick - The White Whale

Moby Dick is a huge white sperm whale who is responsible for the loss of Captain Ahab's leg. Moby Dick is described as having a crooked jaw and wrinkled brow. Many harpoons from past attempts to kill him still stick from his flesh. Although most of the book is about him, Moby Dick only appears in the action of the story in the last three chapters. He is more of a symbol than a character. For instance, for Ahab, Moby Dick symbolizes everything that is wrong in the world.

Objects/Places

The Spouter Inn

The Spouter Whale is an inn in New Bedford where Ishmael chooses to stay during the time he must wait for a ship to take him to Nantucket.

Nantucket

Ishmael wants to sail on a whaling voyage from Nantucket, because it is the original center of the whaling business. It is here the "first dead American whale was stranded."

The Whaleman's Chapel

The Whaleman's Chapel is a small chapel in New Bedford where Ishmael goes to hear a sermon before departing on his whaling mission.

QueeQueg's harpoon

QueeQueg uses this tool of his trade not only for work purposes but also to retrieve food off the table and as a razor. QueeQueg prefers his own harpoon to others, because he has used it often and knows it is dependable.

Yojo

Yojo is a small black idol to which QueeQueg pays homage each night. QueeQueg places great emphasis on the judgments and opinions of this idol.

The Pequod

The Pequod is the whaling ship upon which QueeQueg and Ishmael sign for a three year whaling voyage.

Ahab's Ivory Leg

Ahab's prosthesis is made from the jaw bone of a whale after Moby Dick bit off his leg. The ivory leg is broken during the second day's fight with Moby Dick and replaced with a wooden one.

The Spanish Ounce of Gold

Ahab nails a gold piece to the main mast of the ship as a reward for the first man to sight Moby Dick.

Ahab's Pipe

Ahab throws this pipe overboard the Pequod one evening, symbolizing his inability to enjoy simple pleasures until he has gotten revenge on Moby Dick.

The Rachel

The Rachel is another whaling ship the crew of the Pequod meets during its voyage. The Rachel has lost one of its boats to Moby Dick, and her captain asks Ahab to help them in their search. The Rachel also picks Ishmael up after the Pequod and the rest of the crew are annihilated by Moby Dick.

QueeQueg's Coffin

A coffin is built for QueeQueg at a point when he was very sick and near death. When he recovers, he uses it for extra storage, and then has it turned into a life buoy. Melville uses the coffin to symbolize death but, at the same time, it is this coffin that saves Ishmael's life.

The Mast Flag

During the last day's fight with Moby Dick, Ahab commands Tashtego to nail a flag to the main mast. Even as the ship sinks, Tashtego still hammers the flag into place. Tashtego catches the wing of a sky-hawk in the last pound of the hammer and the hawk goes down with the ship, caught between the hammer and the mast.

Themes

Free Will

The theme of free will is first addressed in the beginning of the novel where Ishmael indicates that he feels as if he has no choice but to go on the doomed whaling mission. The idea of free will is again addressed at the end of the novel where Ahab is close to finding Moby Dick. Although Ahab seems to understand the dangers associated with chasing the whale to the death, Ahab voices the opinion that he has no choice but to continue to follow the path of the whale.

In both places, Melville suggests that the futures of both of these characters are in the hands of someone or something other than themselves. In Ishmael's case, Ishmael credits his lack of free will to fate. He believes that sometime long ago it was predestined for him to be aboard the Pequod when the ship set out on its doomed voyage. Ishmael believes that if it is his fate to do something, such as sail on the Pequod. He must do it and has no other choice.

Ahab, on the other hand, seems to be controlled by something other than fate. It appears he allows his need for revenge to overcome his own good judgment. In this way, Ahab, much like Ishmael, feels he is compelled to act a certain way. The difference is that Ishmael feels he has no choice whatsoever over his fate while Ahab made the choice to allow his free will to be dominated by his desire for revenge.

Differences in Peoples/Cultures

This theme is first seen in the relationship between Queequeg and Ishmael. Ishmael takes great interest in the detailing the differences in his way of life and Queequeg's. As the two become friends, they discuss their backgrounds and cultures giving an even deeper glimpse into the differences between the pair. At first, Ishmael interprets Queequeg's actions based on Ishmael's American culture. For instance, he describes Queequeg's insistence upon dressing first as some "innate delicacy" that even savages have. Ishmael also describes Queequeg's actions in terms of education saying Queequeg has the intelligence of an "undergraduate."

As the story progresses the theme is expanded to include the crew on the Pequod. Those on the ship have a rigid class system consisting of Americans and non-Americans. The Americans only are allowed to fill the spots of officers and headsmen while the non-Americans are generally on board the ship only to provide the muscle power needed to get the work done. Another important issue to note is Pip's prayer to the "big white God." It appears that all people who hold a position of authority, even God, are viewed as American.

Revenge

The theme of revenge and the futility of seeking revenge are seen in Ahab's single-minded, almost manic pursuit of Moby Dick. Ahab lost his leg to the whale in a past encounter with him. Since that time, he's plotted his course of revenge. It is this need for revenge that causes Ahab to leave his wife and child to go to sea again. Revenge also turns him into an insomniac as Ishmael notes the man is rarely even known to sleep. When the crew of a fellow ship seeks help from Ahab to find lost crewmembers, Ahab is so set on revenge that he refuses to help. This same revenge also causes Ahab to be unconcerned about the welfare and safety of his own crew as he puts them in harms way three times in his attempts to gain his revenge. The result of this revenge is that everything, all crewmembers except Ishmael and the ship included, is lost.

Ahab's need for revenge is futile because even if he were, by chance, to kill Moby Dick, it would not undo that damage that had already been done. Although there are phrases in the book that indicate whales are animals capable of thought and planning, it is most likely Moby Dick was simply acting out of instinct when he bit off Ahab's leg. For Ahab to go to the lengths he does to get revenge on this animal marks him as a maniac.

An interesting side bar to the theme of revenge is presented in the Town-Ho's story. This story suggests that given time, God will act out revenge upon those who spitefully or maliciously treat other people. In this story, Radney torments and taunts another crewmember by the name of Steelkilt until Steelkilt threatens to fight Radney. At this point, the captain enters the scene and thinking murder is abroad has Steelkilt and his supporters thrown into the forecastle of the ship where they are locked up several days. Meanwhile, the ship encounters Moby Dick. During the chase of the whale and the ensuing fight, Radney is eaten alive by the whale. The story can be translated as Moby Dick acting to fulfill the revenge of God upon the unjust.

Biblical Imagery

Another theme that winds itself through the novel is one of Biblical imagery. The first use of this imagery one notices is the use of Biblical names. Many of the major characters of the novel, including Ishmael, Ahab and Elijah, are given names from the Bible. Often the personalities of the characters in the novel somewhat mirror the personalities of their namesakes from the Bible. For instance, the Elijah in the Bible was a prophet who pronounced the wickedness of Ahab. It is much the same with the Elijah in Moby Dick. This Elijah attempts to warn Ishmael and Queequeg of Ahab's evil intentions.

The story of Jonah and the whale is another Biblical story that is used several times in Moby Dick. This story is first seen in Father Mapple's sermon, and then it again surfaces when Ishmael attempts to defend the historical accuracy of the tale. Other Biblical imagery used includes the scene in the Town Ho's story where Steelkit and the two traitors are hung in the riggings. This scene is likened unto the crucifixion of Christ with the two thieves hanging by his sides.

Individual vs. Nature

The voyage of the *Pequod* is no straightforward, commercially inspired whaling voyage. The reader knows this as soon as Ishmael registers as a member of the crew and receives, at secondhand, warnings of the captain's state of mind. Ahab, intent on seeking revenge on the whale who has maimed him, is presented as a daring and creative individual, pitted against the full forces of nature. In developing the theme of the individual (Ahab) versus Nature (symbolized by Moby-Dick), Melville explores the attributes of natural forces. Are they ruled by chance, neutral occurrences that affect human characters arbitrarily? Or do they possess some form of elementary will that makes them capable of using whatever power is at their disposal?

God and Religion

The conflict between the individual and nature brings into play the theme of religion and God's role in the natural world. The critic Harold Bloom has named Ahab "one of the fictive founders of what should be called the American Religion," and although Melville wrote his novel while living in the civilized Berkshires, near the eastern U.S. seaboard, and set it on the open seas, the reader must not forget that America at that time had moved westward. To Ahab it does not matter if the white whale is "agent" or "principle." He will fight against fate, rather than resign himself to a divine providence. Father Mapple, who gives a sermon near the beginning of the novel, and, to a lesser extent, Starbuck both symbolize the conventional and contemporary religious attitudes of nineteenthcentury Protestantism. Ahab's defiance of these is neither romantic nor atheistic but founded on a tragic sense of heroic and unavoidable duty.

Good and Evil, Female and Masculine

Ahab picks his fight with evil on its own terms, striking back aggressively. The good things in the book□the loyalty of members of the crew, such as young Pip; Ahab's domestic memories of his wife and child□remain peripheral and ineffective, a part of life that is never permitted to take center stage. Other dualities abound. The sky and air, home for the birds, is described as feminine, while the sea is masculine, a deep dungeon for murderous brutes. Also contrasted with the sea is the land, seen as green and mild, a tranquil haven. In Chapter 58 Melville writes: "As the appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half known life.

God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, for thou canst never return!" Although Melville's exact point of view is debatable, and the symbolism in the book is too rich to allow for neat comparisons, it can be said that qualities of goodness tend to be equated with the land, the feminine, and with mildness of temper. Viewing the *Pequod*'s voyage as a metaphor for life, the book seems to be saying that in following ambition or any far-off goal, an individual risks missing out on many of the good things in life, including home and domestic happiness.

The fact that there are no female participants in the novel has encouraged some critics to consider that this is a commentary on the masculine character—thrusting, combative, and vengeful. But it is because the other characters are all male, and they are not all like Ahab, that interpretations cannot be so straightforward. The very masculinity of Ahab is complicated somewhat by the possibility that he has been castrated, not by the initial encounter with the whale, but by the subsequent accidental piercing of his groin by his ivory leg. Critics as diverse as W. H. Auden and Camille Paglia have written about the sexual symbolism in the novel. It is a matter which invites debate, although any discussion on the subject needs to take into account that in the nineteenth century, it was an accepted convention to give certain characteristics a gender bias. Melville, like his contemporaries, was sophisticated enough to know that men and women could embrace a combination of traits deemed to be masculine and feminine.

Choices and Consequences

Ahab is both a hero and a villain. In making a choice and sticking by it, he can be seen as valiantly exercising free will. But the consequences of his decision transform him into a villain, responsible for the death of such innocents as Pip and good men like Starbuck. His monomania or obsession chains him to a fate worse than that which might have prevailed had he not so stubbornly pursued his goal. Contrasting readings of the novel are possible, and most turn upon the interpretation of the character of Ahab and the choices he makes—or, rather, towards the end of the book, the choices he refuses to make. "Not too late is it, even now," Starbuck cries out to him on the third day of the climactic chase. The question is, in depicting a number of situations in which Ahab is given the possibility of drawing back, is Melville establishing a flaw in the individual character, or is he emphasizing the predestined and inescapable quality of the novel's conclusion?

For much of the final encounter, the white whale behaves as any ordinary whale caught up in the chase, but in its last rush at the boat, "Retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect—." These are exactly the qualities which Ahab himself has exhibited during the voyage. Ahab is finally seen as both defined and consumed by fate. When, at the end of the novel, Ishmael, the lone survivor, is finally picked up and rescued by the *Rachel,* we are reminded that he had become a member of the crew as the result of an act of free will rather than necessity, as a means of escaping thoughts of death.

Underscoring all of these themes is an ongoing consideration of the meaning of appearances. A key chapter in this regard is "The Whiteness of the Whale," a meditation in Ishmael's voice on the mask-like ambiguities which affect our interpretation of the visible world. There are ambiguities in the chapter itself, for in one of two footnotes Melville gives a firsthand account of his first sighting of an albatross. "Through its inexpressible, strange eyes, methought I peeped to secrets which took hold of God." Is the reader supposed to think this is Ishmael or Melville speaking? (Ambiguity becomes a major theme in Melville's next novel, *Pierre.*) In this particular chapter, Ishmael meditates on the strange phenomenon of whiteness, which sometimes speaks of godly

purity and at other times repels or terrorizes with its ghostly pallor. The meditation leaves color references behind to become a general meditation on the nature of fear and the existence of unseen evil: "Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright."

Style

Point of View

The story of Moby Dick is told from the first person point of view. Ishmael, a newcomer to the whaling business, is the narrator of the novel. Ishmael tells the story after it has already happened. In the first part of the novel, before he has boarded the whaling ship, Ishmael is fully involved in the action of the story. After he boards the ship and it leaves on its journey, Ishmael becomes a minor character, telling about the action that is going on around him, but not having a very big role in this action.

Much of the novel is taken up with long descriptive passages where Ishmael talks about what is going on around him. Ishmael's studious, schoolmaster's personality with its innate desire to teach prompts him to talk in detail about the whales and the inner workings of the whaling industry. Where there are passages of dialogue, these passages generally work to give the reader an idea what is going on in the heads of the other characters. This dialogue most frequently occurs in areas of action in the book. In a few places in the book, chapters are laid out as if they were occurring in a play with stage directions and extended soliloquies. For an example of this play-like quality, see Chapters 36 through 40.

Setting

There are three main places where the action of Moby Dick is set. These are New Bedford, Nantucket, and the deck of the Pequod. New Bedford and Nantucket are American cities known for their prominence in the whaling industry. Ishmael is forced to stop for a while in New Bedford while he waits for a ship to take him to Nantucket. It is in New Bedford that Ishmael stays at the Spouter Inn, meets Queequeg and attends the worship service lead by Father Mapple.

Nantucket is the city that was the original leader of the whaling industry. Ishmael wishes to join a whaling crew from this town because of its rich whaling history. Although Nantucket has been surpassed by New Bedford in the whaling industry, Ishmael believes Nantucket is still the ideal place to learn about whales and whaling.

More than three-quarters of the novel is set on the deck of the whaling ship the Pequod. The action of the book follows the ship as it sails from Nantucket east to Azores, then south to the Rio de la Plata in South America. The ship then sails northeast to St. Helena then east around the Cape of Good Hope and on to the Japanese cruising grounds where the ship encounters Moby Dick and is destroyed.

Language and Meaning

Ishmael narrates the story in almost a stream of consciousness type of dialogue. He takes the reader through his thought processes as he describes the things he sees and people he meets during the story. Because of this, the language of the novel has an informal, almost conversational feel, as if Ishmael is carrying on a one-sided conversation. Although Ishmael's humor tends to lighten the novel, the overall tone of the story is dark and foreboding. The reader gets the feeling from the very beginning of the novel that the ending will not be a happy one.

Ishmael describes things in a very poetic way. He makes frequent use of imagery and metaphors. In order to make his points, Ishmael also often quotes from learned scholars and borrows examples from Biblical stories, mythology and sea fables to make his points more clear.

Although the story of Moby Dick is an action story, Melville is not as concerned about presenting the action in one continuous sequence as he is about developing his themes and describing the whaling business. These poetic, wordy descriptions can discourage the average reader who wishes only to enjoy the action of the whale chase. Without these descriptive passages, however, the novel would lose much of its depth of meaning.

Structure

This novel is broken down into a multitude of short chapters. The average chapter length is about five pages with some chapters covering less than one full page. Sometimes it seems one chapter could easily be combined with others to make a normal length chapter as many chapters often cover the same topic. Chapters that include action series are often separated by several chapters where Ishmael describes the finer points of whaling or goes into some other long descriptive talk about the anatomy of whales.

The action of the story could probably be easily compressed into a book less than half the size of Moby Dick. Because of Melville's tendency to go off on descriptive tangents, however, the book is swelled to its size of 600 plus pages. For a book of this length, the shorter chapters seem to work well as they give the reader small chunks of information that can be digested slowly.

Historical Context

America in the mid-19th Century

America was in a tumultuous period, establishing its national and international identity at the time *Moby-Dick* was being written. It is noteworthy that the classic American novel of the period is not ostensibly about westward expansion. Instead it *is* about pursuit and capture, about following a dream. The American Dream, as it was envisaged by the Founding Fathers, is now considered by some as a dangerous preoccupation, a consuming national obsession. In a real sense, Melville's book is not about its time, but about ours. A possible reading would have the *Pequod* as modern corporate America, intent on control and subjection, and Ahab as a power-crazed executive, quick to seek vengeance for any received aggression.

Self-reliance

When the novel was being written, Transcendentalism was becoming the predominant philosophical and religious viewpoint. This view□ propounded most cogently by Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essay *Self-Reliance*-held that God was present in the world, as well as in every individual soul. In this way, the soul's intuitions were divine and should be followed regardless of authority, tradition, or public opinion. "Trust thyself," was the basic tenet, and hence the term "Self-Reliance." This view (it never developed into a rigorous system of thought) was essentially a reaction against New England Puritanism. Like English Romanticism, it was heavily influenced by German philosophers, principally Immanuel Kant. As propounded by Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller, Jones Very, George Ripley, and a host of other New England poets, essayists, divines, and public speakers, Transcendentalism was idealistic, skirting around such basic religious notions as sin and evil.

Although Melville fits the descriptions of the self-reliant individual in Emerson's essay□"to be great is to be misunderstood," "who so would be a man must be a nonconformist"□he, like Hawthorne, remained acutely aware that by taking selfreliance to extremes, as in the case of the monomaniacal Ahab, virtue could quickly turn to vice.

The Calvinist heritage could not so easily be shrugged off. (Calvinists followed John Calvin's theological system that included the doctrine of predestination and the belief that mankind was depraved by nature.) And in his essay "Hawthorne and His Mosses," Melville, approving Hawthorne's "power of blackness," explained that it "derives its force from its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free." It is this recognition of and sense of sin which separates Melville from Transcendentalism, the predominant movement of his period.

The American Whaling Industry

The United States had been a whaling nation since the seventeenth century, when the early colonists launched expeditions from the island of Nantucket and from ports along the Massachusetts coast. The early whalers hunted whales in the seas fairly close to shore. In 1712 a chance storm blew a whale ship off course and into much deeper waters. This resulted in an encounter with a pod of sperm whales, one of which was captured. The superior quality of sperm oil was thus discovered and from that point on American whalers extended voyage distances and times in their hunt for the sperm whale. They traveled the whole world, often venturing into uncharted waters, and their journeys contributed to the development of maritime cartography. *Moby-Dick* was written at a time when the American whaling industry, propelled by home demand, was at its peak. The United States owned three-quarters of the world's whaling ships.

Historical Coincidence

In the year of *Moby-Dick*'s publication, a whaler was sunk by a sperm whale in circumstances which appeared to replicate the climax to Melville's novel. The *Ann Alexander* had two of its whaling boats destroyed by the whale they were pursuing. The whale then deliberately rammed the main ship, causing it to sink.

Critical Overview

The first edition of *Moby-Dick* received a mixed reception. It was condemned for its unusual narrative style and for its irreverent tone. The proportion of positive to negative reviews was highest in England, where the book had been published in three volumes under the title *The Whale.* There were other differences between the American and English editions. The English publisher, Bentley, positioned the Extracts section at the end of the book and did not include the Epilogue at all. The main body of the text had also been abridged to cut out much of the overt blasphemy and sexual suggestiveness.

One of the earliest and most expansive reviews appeared in the *London Morning Advertiser,* on October 24, 1851. In that review the rich, multi-faceted texture of the book was considered a strength. The novel was praised for its "High philosophy, liberal feeling, abstruse metaphysics popularly phrased, soaring speculation, a style as many-coloured as the theme."

On the other hand, in America the book was enjoyed only in regard to those aspects in which it resembled Melville's earlier sailing narrative, *Typee.* Readers liked its graphic accounts of whaling and ignored its soaring religious and philosophical ruminations. Where the speculation and abstruse metaphysics were taken note of, they were roundly deplored, especially in religious journals. A critic for the *Methodist Quarterly Review* wrote in January, 1952: "We are bound to say that the book contains a number of flings at religion, and even of vulgar immoralities that render it unfit for general circulation." The most scathing review appeared in the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* in January, 1952. It attacked Melville's vanity and assumed hunger for fame. "From this morbid self-esteem, coupled with a most unbounded love of notoriety," commented the reviewer, "spring all Mr. Melville's efforts, all his rhetorical contortions, all his declamatory abuse of society, all his inflated sentiment, and all his insinuating licentiousness."

Harper and Brothers, Melville's publisher and a Methodist firm, were affected by this response, and when the critical reception was matched by disappointing sales, they offered Melville unsatisfactory terms in his next contract. He was never to recover from this setback and although his position as one of the major writers of his time is now unassailable, it was never so in his lifetime. When Van Wyck Brooks set about a reassessment of the nineteenth century in his essay "America's Coming of Age," published in 1915, Melville's name was not considered worthy of mention. In Vernon Parrington's influential three-volume *Main Currents in American Thought,* published in the late 1920s, Melville is portrayed as an irrelevant eccentric. However, this decade was also the point at which several key voices were heard in support of Melville's reputation. D. H. Lawrence wrote an essay in 1923 which praised Melville as a great poet of the sea.

But of more profound critical importance was the publication, two years earlier, of *Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic* by Raymond Weaver, one of the first books to treat seriously the religious and philosophical themes in *Moby-Dick* and Melville's other

books. Weaver's influence on students who later became academics, particularly while he was at Columbia University in the 1940s, was immense. The 1950s saw an enormous increase in the volume of critical comment about *Moby- Dick,* good examples of which include a long introductory essay to the novel by Alfred Kazin, for whom it "conveys a sense of abundance, of high creative power, that exhilarates and enlarges the imagination," and an essay by Richard Chase, "Melville and Moby-Dick," which enthused, "The symbols are manifold and suggestive; the epic scope is opulent; the rhetoric is full and various; the incidental actions and metaphors are richly absorbing." However, there was still a reluctance to shower *Moby-Dick* with the highest accolades. Chase, in his essay, tempered his praise with a carping reservation about the novel's narrowness of meaning and simplification of issues when compared with great works such as Shakespeare's *King Lear* or Dante's *The Divine Comedy.* Another critic of the period, R. P. Blackmur, criticized Melville for not making use of the conventional dramatic strategies of novelistic characterization and for allowing his allegorical agenda to take precedence over narrative technique.

The criticism of recent decades has been inclined to explore the idiosyncratic structure of *Moby-Dick* in terms of potential, rather than weaknesses and deficiencies, and to treat the whale as the novel's central character. A. Robert Lee interpreted the book in anatomical terms, searching for layers of meaning under the skin, and Eric Mottram is one of several critics who have discussed the novel's erotic and sexual connotations in Freudian terms. Certainly there now seems to be some agreement that it is no use approaching the book as if it were written by Henry James. As John McWilliams put it in his essay "The Epic in the Nineteenth Century," published in *The Columbia History of American Poetry,* "The armada of scholars and critics who have felt compelled to reach a judgment upon Ahab are by now revealed to have been collectively gazing into Melville's doubloon." Inevitably, not all of the latest criticism is helpful or perceptive, and readers approaching the novel for the first time are advised to consider it both as a work that realistically portrays life on a whaling vessel and as a literary investigation of the conflict between humanity and fate.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

In the following essay, Davis, an associate professor of English at Northeast Louisiana University, describes how Moby-Dick *reflects its author's philosophical, religious, and social ideals.*

Since the revival of interest in Herman Melville in the early 1920s, *Moby-Dick,* the author's sixth novel, has come to be considered his masterpiece. Part romantic sea tale, part philosophical drama, the story of Ishmael, Ahab, and the white whale combines Melville's experiences aboard the whaler *Acushnet* with his later immersion in such classic authors as William Shakespeare, John Milton, François Rabelais, and Laurence Sterne. After several years as a sailor, both in the whale fleet and in the United States navy, Melville returned to his native New York in 1844 and soon began writing about his experiences. His earliest works, such as *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847), were loosely based upon his time in the Marquesas Islands and Tahiti. Melville's third novel, *Mardi* (1849), though a failure, showed evidence of a greater ambition to write enduring works of literature. Just two years later, that ambition would find its fullest expression in the pages of *Moby-Dick,* a symbolic tale that dramatizes the struggle to find meaning in a complex and hostile world.

Moby-Dick is narrated□or, more accurately, "written"□by a sailor who calls himself Ishmael, after the biblical outcast and son of Abraham. As a young man not fully initiated into the mysteries of life, he undergoes a type of spiritual and philosophical education during the course of the novel.

Initially hostile and potentially suicidal, he heads for the whaling fleet, hoping to exorcise some of his anger at the world. Before he can find a ship, however, his poverty forces him to share a bed in a seedy inn with a bizarre and frightening "cannibal" named Queequeg. Carrying a shrunken head and a tomahawk that doubles as a peace pipe, Queequeg suggests both death and life. Indeed, after sharing a bed with this harpooner, Ishmael is a changed man. He has experienced the first of a series of encounters with the mysterious "otherness" or strangeness of nature. In symbolic terms, he has embraced death in the form of Queequeg, and when he wakes the following morning he sees the world from a different perspective. Ishmael understands the mixture of life and death that Queequeg's tomahawk/ pipe suggests and realizes, at least at that moment, that experience can lead to renewal.

The other major influence on Ishmael's growth is certainly the captain of the *Pequod,* Ahab. Named for an evil king in the Old Testament, Ahab demonstrates the dangers of an excessive focus on ideas. The object of his obsession is of course the white whale, nicknamed Moby-Dick by the sailors. On the voyage previous to the one described in the novel, Ahab lost one of his legs to Moby-Dick, and by the time Ishmael's story begins, he has sworn to take his vengeance by hunting down and killing the great whale. It soon becomes clear, however, that Ahab's fixation has more to do with what the white whale represents than with Moby-Dick himself. As Ahab explains in a notable speech to the crew, for him "all visible objects" are like "pasteboard masks" that hide

"some unknown but still reasoning thing." Ahab hates "that inscrutable thing" that hides behind the mask of appearance. The only way to fight against it, he explains, is to "strike through the mask!" Moby-Dick, as a mysterious force of nature, represents the most outrageous, malevolent aspect of nature's mask. To kill it, in Ahab's mind, is to reach for and seize the unknowable truth that is hidden from all people.

Ahab's attitude toward nature is often referred to as a "monomania," a tendency to see everything in terms of himself. This vision of the world contrasts markedly with that of Ishmael after his first encounter with Queequeg. Under the influence of the more naturalistic "savage," Ishmael learns to understand what he sees from more than one perspective. He also begins to realize that objects in the world can have more than one meaning because meaning originates with the observer rather than the object. In chapter 99, for instance, Ishmael describes how Ahab and several members of the crew interpret a gold doubloon that Ahab has nailed to one of the masts as a reward for the first person to spot Moby-Dick. Though the marks on the coin never change, each man's description is different, revealing more about his own thoughts and ideas than about the coin. Ahab, in the grip of his monomania, declares that each symbol on the coin "means Ahab" and that the whole coin is a reflection of the world as he sees it. Ishmael, by contrast, refuses to insist upon a single meaning for the objects he encounters. He gathers as much information and as many opinions as he can, suggesting that all readings are both partially valid and yet always incomplete.

The central dramatic event of the novel, Ahab's hunt for the whale, thus describes the consequences of conceiving of the world as a mask that hides unknowable truth. Ahab's frustration with the limits of human knowledge leads him to reject both science and logic and embrace instead violence and the dark magic of Fedallah, his demonic advisor. Like Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, he has made a pact with the devil, selling his soul for the secrets of the universe, only to find himself caught in the snares of his prophet's deception. Thinking himself immortal, Ahab attacks Moby-Dick, striking at the mask of appearance that supposedly hides ultimate truth. What he fails to realize, however, is that such truth exists only beyond the limits of the physical world; only in death will Ahab be able to reach the "unknown but still reasoning thing" and learn what cannot be known in this world. Accordingly, his attempt to kill Moby-Dick brings about his own death. His devotion to the idea that truth exists behind or beyond the physical world forces him to destroy himself in the attempt to reach it.

Ishmael, on the other hand, escapes destruction in large part because of his different attitude toward the physical world. While Ahab sees nature as deceptive, Ishmael learns to concentrate on the complexities and beauties of what he sees. Rather than imagine a truer world beyond that of the senses, Ishmael revels in the details of the world around him, compiling information and observations on the business of whaling, on the *Pequod*'s crew, and on the inexhaustible wonders of the whale itself. Indeed, for Ishmael the whale becomes the overwhelming symbol of life itself and of the search for knowledge represented by the book that bears its name. The book's encyclopedic breadth is meant to suggest the vastness of his subject and the wealth of all sensual life. "Since I have undertaken to manhandle this Leviathan," Ishmael tells us, "it behooves me to approve myself omnisciently exhaustive in the enterprise; not

overlooking the minutest seminal germs of his blood, and spinning him out to the uttermost coil of his bowels."

Because of its tremendous scope, *Moby-Dick* offers information and comment on a wide variety of topics related to nineteenth-century life. For instance, critics have often described the *Pequod* as a microcosm, or "little world," that represents social and political life in pre-Civil War America. Understood this way, Ahab and Ishmael stand for opposing political and social theories. Autocratic Ahab, with his Shakespearean speeches and dependence on magic, suggests an aristocratic ruler who maintains power through threat and superstition. Ishmael, on the other hand, appears to represent the radical democracy of America itself. His concern for others, his tolerance of different religions and cultures, and his resilience in the face of social collapse all mark him as a distinctly American character who opposes the old-world values of Ahab.

Other readers have commented on Melville's use of eastern religions and mythology, as well as his reliance on the relatively recent discoveries of Egyptian archaeology. In this vein, some have compared Ishmael's vision of the circularity of life and death to similar conceptions in Hinduism and Buddhism. His friendship with Queequeg in particular is often cited as evidence of his adoption of non- Western religious or philosophical views. Likewise, his descriptions of the whale often rely upon references to Egyptian architecture and writing to suggest both the whale's great antiquity and its mysterious power. On the whale's skin Ishmael sees "hieroglyphic" marks that, like Queequeg's tattoos, seem "a mystical treatise on the art of attaining the truth." Moby-Dick's "high, pyramidical white hump" suggests a mixture of geometrical purity and ancient knowledge. And the ocean itself, source of both life and death, becomes in Ishmael's mind a place of miracle, a "live ground" that "swallows up ships and crews."

Moby-Dick also provides an unprecedented view of the whaling industry in mid-nineteenthcentury America. Ishmael's detailed descriptions of the hunting, capture, slaughter, and butchering of sperm whales both celebrates and questions the violent energy of American commerce. In one respect, the whaling industry demonstrated heroic action and astonishing efficiency. American ships, manned by sailors of all nations, circled the globe to gather the oil that fed the lamps of homes throughout the country. Hunting whales in small boats launched from ships demanded enormous courage, skill, and strength. And it seems proper that the democratic Ishmael should praise the traits of character that made such an industry possible. In other respects, however, the tremendous violence of whale hunting suggests a world deeply at odds with nature. Disturbing doubts arise as Ishmael discovers, for instance, that the *Pequod* is owned by pacifist Quakers and that the violence that is necessary to run the whaling industry may very well produce the madness that plagues Captain Ahab.

With the completion of *Moby-Dick* in 1851, Melville knew he had produced an extraordinary book. His friend and neighbor Nathaniel Hawthorne, to whom the work is dedicated, sent him a letter praising the accomplishment. Commercially, however, the book was at first a failure.

Melville's reading public still considered him the author of entertaining sea tales, and people were not prepared to accept his ambition to write a masterpiece. Melville's subsequent work fared even worse, and by 1857 he had given up writing short stories and novels and had turned instead to poetry. Despite this change of format, however, the central concerns of *Moby-Dick* never disappear from Melville's writings. Throughout his poetry and even as late as his last known prose narrative, *Billy Budd,* Melville continues to explore the conflict between acceptance and aggression best represented by Ishmael and Ahab.

Raymond Weaver, one of the critics to rediscover Melville in the early twentieth century, has called *Moby-Dick* "an amazing masterpiece" that reads "like a great opium dream." Despite its difficult passages, complex philosophical content, and unusual and sometimes awkward form, the book has sustained continuous and often extreme attention from readers for the last eighty years. Like the meaningful world it creates and describes, *Moby- Dick* seems inexhaustible, reflecting that "image of the ungraspable phantom of life" that, according to Ishmael, "is the key to it all."

Source: Clark Davis, in an essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

Dillingham, in the following excerpt, sees the novel's narrator, Ishmael, as a character who represents Melville's theme of the isolation of individuals from the rest of humanity.

Throughout *Moby-Dick*, the theme of human isolation is prevalent. Each character exists as an island. While they influence each others' lives, they can never fully understand each other or experience a merger of souls. This is one reason Ishmael admits to a "strange sort of insanity" when he tells how he felt when squeezing the sperm in Chapter 94. He wanted then to say to his companions:

"Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves . . . universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness." His was, indeed, a "strange sort of insanity", as he looks back on it, for Ishmael has come to realize the truth of man's unalterable isolation. This is a central theme not only in *Moby-Dick* but also in Melville's other work, both his fiction and poetry. He saw man living utterly alone in a world where overwhelming questions have no positive answers. [In *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1964)] D. H. Lawrence saw to the heart of Melville's concern with human isolation when he wrote that Melville "pined for □ a perfect relationship; perfect mating; perfect mutual understanding. A perfect friend," but knew in his heart that such communion cannot be because "each soul is alone, and the aloneness of each soul is a double barrier to perfect relationship between two beings."

The theme of loneliness is dominant in the reasons for Ishmael's survival. A great deal has been written on why only Ishmael is allowed to escape death. [Writing in his *The Trying-out of Moby-Dick* (1949)] Howard Vincent believes that Ishmael undergoes a "spiritual rebirth", symbolically portrayed in his being saved. Only Ishmael is saved, argues Vincent, because only he has "obtained the inner harmony unrealized by Ahab". James Dean Young [writing in *American Literature,* January, 1954] feels that it is Ishmael's "humanity" that saves him. And C. Hugh Holman argues [in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1964)] that Ishmael survives because he alone "of those on the *Pequod* has faced with the courage of humility the facts of his universe."

These interpretations, which see Ishmael's survival as his reward for a lesson well learned, are not entirely satisfying. It may be possible to make a list of the characters in *Moby-Dick* and then find some flaw in each□except Ishmael□but such an approach surely does violence to the novel. By almost any standard Queequeg is noble, courageous, and humane to the last. Starbuck is characterized as sensitive, tender, and mature. They are both at least as worthy of being saved as Ishmael.

But the point is that it is not at all clear that physical survival is Melville's symbol for spiritual salvation or even for moral superiority. Ishmael is not saved because he is a deeper thinker, or because he is more humane, or because he is stoical. The others of the crew do not die because they are being punished for following Ahab or for other assorted shortcomings. They are simply victims of Ahab's destructive design. Man has, as Ishmael puts it in the "Monkey-Rope" chapter, a "Siamese connection with a plurality

of other mortals. If your banker breaks, you snap; if your apothecary by mistake sends you poison in your pills, you die." Ahab is their banker and their apothecary.

Melville chose to save Ishmael for at least three reasons, all of which are closely related to the meaning of the book. The first is that Melville wished to objectify the idea of man's loneliness through Ishmael. In spite of the "Siamese connection", which men have, they are, paradoxically, incapable of sharing each others' deepest and most meaningful thoughts and intuitions. Having Ishmael die with the rest of the characters would have, in a sense, made him a part of the group. But he is Melville's representative of man, alone in the universe, and saving him□only him□projects this image brilliantly. Perhaps the book's most unforgettable image is of Ishmael, after the sinking of the *Pequod,* alone in the eternal sea, in "the great shroud of the sea [which] rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago." Although "the Fates ordained" as Ishmael puts it, that he should be rescued, he feels merely like "another orphan".

Ishmael's feeling about the Fates pervades the book and offers a second explanation for his survival. From the early pages, one senses the inevitability of the events, what Ronald Mason calls [in *The Spirit Above the Dust* (1951)] "fatal compulsion". But precisely how to account for the strange workings of "the Fates"□this is the unanswerable question which haunted Melville throughout his life. He resented dogma of all sorts which claimed to solve the riddle of the universe. In *Moby-Dick* doctrines of many kinds abound. Father Mapple's sermon on Jonah has been offered by some as the key to the book, but this interpretation, I suggest, goes contrary to all Melville believed. While there may be partial truth in what Father Mapple says, it scarcely accounts for the existence of a man like Ahab or for what he has to do, drawn on by the necessity of his innermost being. The sermon which the cook Fleece preaches to the sharks is as relevant to Ahab as are Father Mapple's words. For Ahab is like the sharks; he can no more turn back from his search than they can become "civilized". From Father Mapple's Christianity to Queequeg's pagan idol worship, the doctrines so frequently mentioned in the book simply underscore the fact that life's deepest truths are unfathomable. By what appears to be sheer chance, Ishmael is thrown from his whale boat at a crucial moment and is thus saved from the fatal encounter with Moby Dick. Ishmael survives to illustrate the inexplicability of life, another of the book's important themes. He is not, to restate an earlier point, allowed to live because he is morally better than anyone else aboard the *Pequod.*

The third reason for Ishmael's survival is in one sense the most obvious. He must live because he, after all, is the teller of the story. A great deal more is involved here than the obvious technical necessity of keeping the first-person narrator alive. And here we return to a consideration of the book's strange, wild tone. Melville kept Ishmael alive to show the later effect of the *Pequod* experience upon his mind. Why does Ishmael tell his story? Because he has to. Since shipping on the *Pequod,* he has wandered the earth, but it is what happened on that first whaling voyage that preoccupies him. Everywhere he goes, he feels the necessity to tell of Ahab and Moby Dick, just as the seemingly mad Elijah does in an early chapter of the novel. For example, in Chapter 54, Ishmael relates how he told part of the narrative□the "Town-Ho's Story"□in Lima, "one Saint's eve". In a good many ways, Ishmael is similar to the Ancient Mariner of

Coleridge. In Chapter 42, "The Whiteness of the Whale", Ishmael refers to Coleridge's poem and tells of the "clouds of spiritual wonderment and pale dread" suggested by the albatross.

The references in *Moby-Dick* to Coleridge's poem suggest an influence which is borne out by a comparison of the book with "the Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Although critics have referred in passing to certain similarities in *Moby-Dick* and Coleridge's poem, the subject has not received extensive treatment nor has one of the most important similarities□the states of mind of the two narrators □been clearly shown. W. Clark Russell made a provocative statement when he wrote in 1884 [a remark quoted in Jay Leyda's *The Melville Log* (1951)] that *Moby-Dick* "is of the 'Ancient Mariner' pattern, madly fantastic in places, full of extraordinary thoughts, yet gloriously coherent." To give a brief synopsis, the poem is the narrative of a sailor, who begins upon a promising voyage only to fall under a curse because he wantonly kills an albatross. After days of thirst, the Mariner sees a strange ship, which comes alongside. On it are two spectres, Death and Life-in-Death. They gamble with dice for the Mariner and the crew, Life-in-Death winning the Mariner and Death the rest of the men. Soon all members of the crew perish, leaving only the Mariner. The loneliness overcomes him, and he suffers profoundly. Later he experiences a sense of love for the creatures he sees in the ocean and is partially redeemed for his earlier sin of killing the bird. But□and this is an extremely important point in the poem□he has seen and felt too much to remain completely sane. His ship is manned by spirits that use the bodies of the dead crew, and finally it arrives in the Mariner's home port, where it sinks, leaving the Mariner as the sole survivor. He is picked up from the sea by a pilot, the pilot's son, and an old hermit. They think him mad, and he does seem to be partially insane.

This entire story he tells to a wedding guest, who is anxious to get to the ceremony but is retained in fascination by the wild eyes and manner of the narrator. The Mariner must tell his tale because it is the only way he can relieve himself of the terrible burden with which the experience has left him. Since he was picked up by the pilot, to whom he immediately related the incidents of the voyage, he has wandered the earth, frequently feeling the deep need to tell other human beings what he has been through.

This summary may suggest some ways in which the poem is different from Melville's novel, but many ways in which the two are fundamentally similar. The Mariner's sin is a wanton act of cruelty. Ishmael commits no such act. He does, to be sure, take a vow with the rest of the crew to join Ahab in his frantic search for revenge, but this vow is by no means the primary cause of a curse. Ahab, and not Ishmael, brings on the destruction of the *Pequod.* Other, but less essential differences are also apparent. But the similarities are, nevertheless, striking. While Ishmael's vow to follow Ahab is not of the magnitude of the Mariner's sin, he is sorry for it. He takes the oath in a frenzy born of Ahab, whose "quenchless feud" seemed his. Later when he sits with other members of the crew squeezing whale sperm in the tubs before them, he negates his earlier vow: 'I forgot all about our horrible oath; in that inexpressible sperm, I washed my hands and my heart of it."

In just such a moment the Ancient Mariner feels the weight of guilt leave him as he contemplates the colorful water snakes before him:

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware:
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.
The self-same moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.

Ishmael's survival is a result of the same kind of interplay of fate and chance represented in Coleridge's poem. But the most important similarity in the two works is the profound loneliness which both narrators feel, a loneliness which penetrates to their very souls and produces the wildness, the half-madness which is evident in their narratives. The effect of the Mariner's loneliness is apparent in the following passage, which comes after he explains how he was the sole survivor:

Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on My soul in agony.
Then toward the end of the poem, he tells his listener:
O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been
Alone on a wide wide sea:
So lonely 'twas, that God himself
Scarce seemed there to be.

The ordeal of the Ancient Mariner, his facing of almost unendurable loneliness, is basically the ordeal of Ishmael. In both works, the experience leaves the character with a burden, which at times makes him all but unstable. That Ishmael has been left this way by his having witnessed the events he retells and by his experiencing the most intense loneliness is indicated in Chapter 93, "The Castaway." This chapter ostensibly deals with the cabin boy Pip, but it clearly is concerned with Ishmael's fate, too. Both are castaways. Pip was taken into one of the whale boats because of the illness of one of the sailors. But he could not contain himself during the dangerous whale chases. Consequently, he jumped overboard. Stubb, master of that particular boat, warned him that if he jumped again, he would be left behind. Ishmael fully realizes what it means to be abandoned in the sea:

Now, in calm weather, to swim in the open ocean is as easy to the practised swimmer as to ride in a spring-carriage ashore. But the awful lonesomeness is intolerable. The intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity, my God! who can tell it? Mark, how when sailors in a dead calm bathe in the open sea□mark how closely they hug their ship and only coast along her sides.

By "the merest chance", as Ishmael puts it, Pip is rescued, but he is maddened by the experience:

The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul. Not drowned entirely, though. Rather carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes; and the miser-merman, Wisdom, revealed his hoarded heaps; and among the joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities, Pip saw the multitudinous, Godomnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters heaved the colossal orbs. He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad.

The words that end that chapter are highly significant, because they link Ishmael, who is also thrown into the sea and left behind, only to be rescued by merest chance, with the maddened Pip: "For the rest, blame not Stubb too hardly. The thing is common in that fishery; and in the sequel of the narrative, it will then be seen what like abandonment befell myself."

What I should like to suggest by this reading of *Moby-Dick* is that the narrator, a man highly sensitive by nature, has himself been "carried down alive to wondrous depths" of truth and that this collective experience, terminating with his isolation in the sea, a symbolic projection of man's frightening plight in life, has left him in the state of mind which characterizes the tone of the narrative. If there is a certain wildness about *Moby-Dick,* as the early reviewers felt, it is Ishmael's. Such a reading accounts for the so-called inconsistencies of point of view and gives Ishmael the stature and importance which a first-person narrator should have. But more importantly, to see the effect of the events on Ishmael's mind is to feel the impact of the book's theme with profound and dramatic force.

Source: William B. Dillingham, "The Narrator of *Moby- Dick*," in *English Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 1, February, 1968, pp. 20-29.

Critical Essay #3

In this excerpt, Parke discusses the novel as being Melville's examination of the nature of evil.

Moby-Dick ... is ultimately a study of evil. But what sort of evil? What is Melville's notion of evil? Evil's first apparent manifestation (or so it is interpreted by Ahab) is the White Whale's mutilation of his leg. But the *Pequod* meets an English whaler whose captain has had his arm torn off by the same whale; this man is not maddened, nor does he regard the event as more than a perfectly natural, though fearful, accident incurred in the routine business of whaling. His sensible conclusion is that, as far as he and his men are concerned, this particular whale is best let alone. Now, Ahab, a deeper man by far, is obsessed not only with what seems the injustice of the excruciating treatment accorded him (he was delirious for days after the accident, and convalescent for months); he is obsessed too, as we have seen, with the notion of hidden forces in the universe. More than this, he is a sinisterly marked man, with a long, livid, probably congenital scar (an emblem, surely, of original sin); with a record of blasphemy and certain peculiar, darkly violent deeds; with a series of evil prophecies hanging over him; and with the given name of an idolatrous and savage king.

All this is fittingly suggestive preparation for the complete deliverance of Ahab's soul to evil through obsession and revenge. But his motive for revenge is not simple, not merely wicked. His quest for Moby Dick is in part a metaphysical one, for he is *in revolt against the existence of evil itself.* His vindictiveness, blind as it is, and motivated by personal hurt, is nevertheless against the eternal fact of evil. He thinks "the invisible spheres were formed in fright," feels his burden is that of all mankind ("□ as though I were Adam, staggering beneath the piled centuries since Paradise"), thinks the White Whale either the "principal" or the agent of all evil. He, Ahab, is evil, Melville seems to say (through Starbuck and Ahab both), because he seeks to overthrow the established order of dualistic human creation; and yet he is admirable, for he has gone over to evil not merely, like Faustus, for purposes of self-gratification, but in angry and misguided protest against its existence and its ravages in him.

What inevitably happens is that, in casting himself as the race-hero opposing the existence of the principle of evil, he but projects his own evil outward ("deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale") and so becomes all the more its avatar and its prey. He would "strike through the mask" of the visible object (the agent of evil), hoping there to find the key to the riddle. His occasional suspicion ("Sometimes I think there's naught beyond") that this will not result in any discovery whatsoever, and so not in an effective revenge, deters him not at all, though it drives him ever in upon himself as his fatal hour approaches, till, near the end, he does see the working of evil in himself□and yet dies its avowed agent. For he is mad; he is "madness maddened," quite conscious of his own derangement, and obsessed with it. The final, terrifying chaos, then, is that which he discovers within himself as his vestigial sanity contemplates his madness and its futility, as he admits his incomprehension of the thing

that has driven him to irreparable folly and has lost him his very identity ("Is Ahab, Ahab?"):

"What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it [the very language used earlier to describe evil]; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time?□"

Here is raised even the question of whether man, this proud and splendid aristocrat of the spirit, is indeed a free agent; Ahab, having at other times defied all the gods and called them cricket players, having assumed and never doubted that he could have made himself lord of creation, now turns (in "The Symphony") from Edmund's flouting, freewill cynicism to Gloucester's craven determinism:

"By heaven, man, we are turned round and round in this world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike." He is not captain of his soul after all. Ahab knows, then, everything about his predicament except its cause in himself□and so its solution. He feels the cause to be an immemorial curse visited upon all men. An exile from Christendom, he yet perceives and abhors the existence of evil. Worse still, he resists it; he will not come to terms with it. He wishes it could simply be swept away, or covered over: "Man, in the ideal, is so noble and so sparkling, such a grand and glowing creature, that over any ignominious blemish in him all his fellows should run to throw their costliest robes." But the dark side (which cannot be concealed) cannot be explained or avoided, either. And the most maddening thing of all about it□this is a constant refrain throughout the book□is the deceptive way it lurks beneath a smiling and lovely exterior. ("These temporary apprehensions, so vague but so awful, derived a wondrous potency from the contrasting serenity of the weather.□" "□ Fate is the handspike. And all the time, lo! that smiling sky, and this unsounded sea!" And on the very morning of the last terrible day of The Chase□

"What a lovely day again! were it a new-made world, and made for a summer-house to the angels, and this morning the first of its throwing open to them, a fairer day could not dawn upon that world.")

Ahab's tragedy (and, on this final level, the book's theme) is, then, his inability to locate and objectify evil in himself, or to accept it and deal with it prudently as part of the entire created world, and so to *grow* despite it and because of it; it is his own fated indenture to evil while he seeks to destroy it, and his more and more precise knowledge of what is happening to him. It is the magnificence and yet the futility of his attempt. "I know that of me, which thou knowest not of thyself, oh, thou omnipotent," he cries to the great impersonal spirit of fire which he acknowledges as his maker and which, as its individualized creation, he defies. He defies his paternal maker, light, because, discovering his own dual nature (he says he never knew his mother), he has revolted and leagued himself now with darkness (the unrecognized mother-symbol, standing here for a regressive identification, which is of course what supplies the destructive energy). Then, "I am darkness leaping out of light," and "cursed be all the things that cast man's eyes aloft to that heaven, whose live vividness but scorches him.□" "So far

gone am I in the dark side of earth, that its other side, the theoretic bright one, seems but uncertain twilight to me." And at his death, the magnificent line□as great and moving in its utter verbal simplicity, and yet as fraught with complex resignation as Edgar's "Ripeness is all": "I turn my body from the sun"□a line whose full and exact significance has been specifically constellated in advance by his own apostrophe to the dying whale in Chapter CXVI.

Ahab is no Faustus. He always has a choice. Many are the times he backslides; the tension between humanity and will is constantly active. Pip, the piteous embodiment of warmly instinctive human nature, of all that Ahab must tread on in himself, acts several times as the unwitting touchstone of that humanity. "Hands off from that holiness!" But, "There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady □ and for this hunt, my malady becomes my most desired health." Starbuck too again and again is the foil and the polar opposite; and once Ahab even finds it good to feel dependence on human aid, for when the White Whale has crushed his ivory leg in the "Second Day," he exclaims while half hanging on the shoulder of his chief mate, "Aye aye, Starbuck, 'tis sweet to lean sometimes □ and would old Ahab had leaned oftener than he has." And just once, in "The Symphony," "Ahab dropped a tear into the sea; nor did all the Pacific contain such wealth as that one wee drop."

He must remain, for the brooding Melville apparently and for us, a symbol of that independent spirit and will which, scorning all "lovely leewardings," pushes off from the haven of all creeds to confront an ultimate chaos in the human soul; admirable, perhaps, beyond all flawed heroes (Bulkington was too simple an embodiment□pure essence, he was fit only for deification) in his energy and his courage, but condemned to split at last on the rock of evil, the very thing he willed out of existence; fated□and magnificently, agonizingly willing□to become the pawn (no, the prince, the king) of evil in consequence of his misguided revolt, to lose his identity in the end because he sought to exalt it against the immutable principles of its creation.

Source: John Parke, "Seven Moby-Dicks," in *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 3, September, 1955, pp. 319-38.

Quotes

"But wherefore it was that after having repeatedly smelt the sea as a merchant sailor, I should now take it into my head to go on a whaling voyage; this the invisible police officer of the Fates, who has the constant surveillance of me, and secretly dogs me, and influences me in some unaccountable way - he can better answer than any one else." Chapter 1, pg. 7

"In this world, shipmates, sin that pays its way can travel freely, and without a passport; whereas Virture, if a pauper, is stopped at all frontiers." Chapter 9, pg. 49.

"She was a ship of old school, rather small if anything; with an old fashioned claw-footed look about her." Chapter 16, pg. 77

"He's a grand, ungodly, god-like man, Captain Ahab; doesn't speak much; but when he does speak, then you may well listen. Chapter 16, pg. 88

"I know, too, that ever since he lost his leg last voyage by that accursed whale, he's been a kind of moody - desperate moody, and savage sometimes; but that will all pass off." Chapter 16, pg. 89.

"'I will have no man in my boat,' said Starbuck, 'Who is not afraid of a whale.' By this, he seemed to mean, not only that the most reliable and useful courage was that which arises from the fair estimation of the encountered peril, but that an utterly fearless man is a far more dangerous comrade than a coward." Chapter 26, pg. 125.

"There seemed no sign of common bodily illness about him, nor of the recovery from any. He looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them, or taking away one particle from their compacted, aged robustness. His whole high, broad form, seemed made of solid bronze, and shaped in an unalterable mould, like Cellini's cast Perseus." Chapter 28, pg. 134.

"I am game for the cooked jaw, and for the jaws of Death too, Captain Ahab, if it fairly comes in the way of the business we follow; but I came here to hunt whales, not my commander's vengeance." Chapter 36, pg. 177.

"I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted, and more I did hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul." Chapter 41, pg. 194.

"For, it was no so much his uncommon bulk that so much distinguished him from other sperm whales, but, as was elsewhere thrown out - a peculiar snow-white wrinkled forehead, and a high, pyramidical white hump." Chapter 41, pg. 198.

"Here, then, was this grey-headed, ungodly old man, chasing with curses a Job's whale round the world, at the head of a crew, too, chiefly made up of mongrel renegades, and

castaways, and cannibals - morally enfeebled also, by the impotence of mere unaided virtue or rightmindedness in Starbuck, the invulnerable jollity of indifference and recklessness in Stubb, and the pervading mediocrity in Flask. Such as crew, so officered, seemed specially picked and packed by some infernal fatality to help him to his monomanic revenge." Chapter 41, pg. 203.

"The figure that now stood by its bows was tall and swart, with one white tooth evilly protruding from its steel-like lips." Chapter 48, pg. 236.

"There, then, he sat, the sign and symbol of a man without faith, hopelessly holding up hope in the midst of despair." Chapter 48, pg. 245.

"All men live enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halters round their necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever-present perils of life. And if you be a philosopher, though seated in a whale-boat, you would not feel one whit more of terror, than though seated before your evening fire with a poker, and not a harpoon, by your side." Chapter 60, pg. 306.

"Out of the truck, the branches grow; out of them, the twigs. So, in productive subjects, grow the chapters." Chapter 63, pg. 315.

"As in general shape the noble Sperm Whale's head may be compared to a Roman war-chariot (especially in front, where it is so broadly rounded); so at a broad view, the Right Whale's head bears a rather inelegant resemblance to a gigantic galliot-toed shoe." Chapter 75, pg. 364.

"Seldom have I known any profound being that had anything to say to this world, unless forced to stammer out something by way of getting a living." Chapter 85, pg. 407.

"But by her still halting course and winding, woful way, you plainly saw that this ship that so wept with spray, still remained without comfort. She was Rachel, weeping for her children, because they were not." Chapter 128, pg. 579.

"Ha! Yonder! Look yonder, men!" cried a foreboding voice in her wake. "In vain, oh, ye strangers, ye fly our sad burial; ye but turn us your taffrail to show us your coffin." Chapter 131, pg. 588.

"That glad, happy air, that winsome sky, did at last stroke and caress him; the step-mother world, so long cruel-forbidding-now threw affectionate arms around his stubborn neck, and did seem to joyously sob over him, as if over one, that however willful and erring, she could yet find it in her heart to save and to bless. From beneath his slouched hat, Ahab dropped a tear into the sea; not did all the Pacific contain such wealth as that one wee drop." Chapter 132, pg. 590.

"'The ship! The hearse!-The second hearse!' cried Ahab from the boat; 'its wood could only be American!'" Chapter 135, pg. 622.

"It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan." Epilogue, pg. 625.

Adaptations

The first film of *Moby-Dick* was a silent movie, released under the title *The Sea Beast* in 1926, and starring John Barrymore as Ahab, and distributed by Warner.

Warner produced a sound version of the novel in 1930; it was directed by Lloyd Bacon and again starred John Barrymore as Ahab.

The best-known movie version is the John Huston- directed 1956 color production with Gregory Peck as Ahab. This is a powerful and faithful rendering of the novel, though opinions have been divided concerning the central casting. Other actors in the cast were Orson Welles, Richard Basehart, Leo Genn, and Harry Andrews. The screenplay was written by Huston and Ray Bradbury.

An educational film, *Moby Dick: The Great American Novel,* was shot by CBS news in 1969.

An animated version, entitled *Moby Dick* and produced by API Television Productions in 1977, is available on video.

A reading by George Kennedy released by "Listen for Pleasure Books on Cassette" dates from 1981.

A radio dramatization presented on NBC Theater is available on one fifty-minute cassette in the Audio Library Classics series, distributed by Metacom, 1991.

A sound recording of the novel, read by Norman Dietz on thirteen audiocassettes, was produced by Blackstone Audio Books in 1992.

A musical titled *Moby Dick: A Whale of a Tale* was staged in 1993 by Cameron Mackenzie in London's West End; it was an unsuccessful adaptation and only ran for a few weeks.

Topics for Further Study

By investigating various movie adaptations and juvenile editions of *Moby-Dick* (including comic books), attempt to analyze the qualities of Melville's novel which do not transfer to other mediums.

Basing your work on Chapter 32 of the novel, "Cetology," check Melville's facts about whales with what is known about them today. How much, if any, of this chapter would need revising?

Explore the issues of physical disability and revenge from the perspective of modern psychology; apply what you learn to the character of Ahab to try to understand his motivations.

Imagine a reader of *Moby-Dick* who is given a copy in which Chapter 9 (Father Mapple's sermon) has been torn out. The reader claims it made no difference to his or her appreciation of the book. Present an argument in favor of the chapter.

Compare and contrast practices of the whaling industry in the 1850s with current practices followed by whaling ships from Japan and Norway; what were the different tools used to hunt and process whales compared to those used now, and how are the different parts of the whale used in commercial products today?

Compare and Contrast

1850s: Whaling is a largely unregulated business. American whalers are free to sail the open seas, and to hunt for whales in any waters.

Today: In 1986 member nations of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) vote to ban commercial whaling. Some nations, including Norway and Japan, continue to slaughter whales.

1850s: Americans continue to move west. The population of the northern states exceeds the population of the south by one million. Slaveholding states seek to expand their influence in the new territories, such as California and Utah. A compromise reached in 1850 holds the peace for a decade, but slavery becomes a major and confrontational domestic issue dividing North and South.

Today: Differences between northern and southern states remain, but not at constitutional levels. Slavery has long been abolished but many blacks suffer from racism. Foreign policy issues lead the political agenda as America seeks to maintain and extend its international influence.

1850s: As a rejection of Calvinistic sobriety, many middle-class people dabble in hydropathy, hypnotism, and phrenology, but these are still seen as alternatives to mainstream religious belief and medical therapies.

Today: Proponents of alternative medicines such as reflexology and aromatherapy present them as whole belief systems and substitutes for orthodox religion.

1850s: Body painting or tattooing is suggestive of paganism. Queequeg's tattoos convince Ishmael "that he must be some abominable savage or other shipped aboard of a whaler in the South Seas, and so landed in this Christian country."

Today: Tattoos and body piercing as a fashion have become widely accepted alongside traditional jewelry.

What Do I Read Next?

Pierre; or, The Ambiguities (1852), the novel which followed *Moby-Dick,* is an interesting and bitter novel. Many of the character Pierre's own speculations, and Melville's narrative comments, illuminate the themes in the whaling book.

Billy Budd, the novella completed at the end of Melville's life but not published until 1924, presents an interesting contrast in tone, compared with the earlier novel.

The House of the Seven Gables (1851) by Nathaniel Hawthorne was published at a time when he and Melville were friends. It is the story of a curse on the Pyncheon family and how the curse is eventually broken.

Two Years before the Mast, Richard Dana's 1840 account of life on the waves, was read by Melville while he was a young man.

V by Thomas Pynchon, published in 1963, is a novel of pursuit, dealing in large themes, including romantic delusion.

Elephant Gold by Eric Campbell, 1997, a young adult novel set in Africa, is about a monomaniacal elephant hunter clearly based on Ahab.

Topics for Discussion

The name of Ishmael is one often associated with orphans and outcasts. Why is it significant that Melville chooses this name for his main character and narrator?

Discuss the idea of fate. Was it Ishmael's fate to be aboard the Pequod or was his choice one of free will?

Throughout his novel, Melville uses numerous references to Biblical events and people such as the story of Jonah and the whale. What is the significance of these references?

Compare and contrast Ishmael and QueeQueg's cultures and their opinions of one another. For instance, while Ishmael sees QueeQueg as a cannibal and a savage, he is in reality a member of his country's royal family.

Consider the idea of standards. For instance, Captain Peleg insists QueeQueg be a Christian and show his papers until Peleg sees QueeQueg's skill with the harpoon. Is this "double standard" an accepted practice in American culture?

Discuss the idea of Ahab's illness that keeps him secluded in his quarters at the beginning of the voyage. Was the illness real or imagined? Mental or physical?

Discuss the varying feelings of the different crewmembers toward Ahab's announcement that they would be chasing Moby Dick. Are you surprised by how easily the crew is drawn into his plan? What about Starbuck? Why is he the only one willing to voice his misgivings?

Consider the Town-Ho's story. Why does Melville break the action at this particular time to present this story? Why is it significant?

As you read, make notes of the number of times Melville foreshadows the coming disaster in the text. Although many of the men do not have a good feeling about Captain Ahab's single-minded chase of Moby Dick, why do the men not overthrow the captain and take charge of the boat themselves? What makes them continue to follow Ahab's command despite the number of bad omens they experience?

Discuss the idea of futility as it relates to Ahab's quest for revenge. At what point should Ahab have given up his hunt for the whale? Should it have been when the Rachel needed help in finding her missing crewmembers? What about after the second day's hunt when Ahab's ivory leg is broken and Fedallah is lost?

Consider the role of QueeQueg's coffin in the story, particularly the ending. Discuss the symbolism behind each instance of its use.

Consider Ishmael and QueeQueg's meetings with Elijah. What is the significance of these encounters?

Further Study

Gay Wilson Allen, *Melville and His World,* Thames & Hudson, 1971.

An introduction to Melville's life and times.

Newton Arvin, *Herman Melville,* Methuen, 1950.

A psychological, Freudian study of Melville that makes much of his relationship with his mother.

James Barbour, "The Composition of *Moby-Dick,*" in *On Melville: The Best from American Literature,* edited by Louis J. Budd and Edwin Cady, Duke University Press, 1988, pp. 203-20.

An up-to-date critical approach to Melville's technique as a novelist.

Harold Bloom, introduction to *Herman Melville's Moby- Dick,* Chelsea House, 1986.

An overview of the novel and introduction to excerpts from important critical essays.

Harold Bloom, editor, *Ahab,* Chelsea House, 1991.

A collection of essays and critical extracts.

Paul Brodtkorb Jr., "Ishmael: The Nature and Forms of Deception," in *Herman Melville,* edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House, 1986, pp. 91-103.

Brodtkorb discusses the complexity of Ishmael's voice and position as narrator.

Albert Camus, "Melville: Un Createur de mythes," in *Moby- Dick as Doubloon: Essays and Extracts (1851-1970),* edited by Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford, Norton, 1970.

Melville has appealed more than any other nineteenth- century American novelist to French writers and critics, including Camus.

Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Moby-Dick, edited by Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker, G. K. Hall, 1992.

An updated collection of valuable critical essays from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

Leslie A. Fiedler, "*Moby-Dick:* The Baptism of Fire and the Baptism of Sperm," in *Love and Death in the American Novel,* Meridian, 1962, pp. 520-52.

Fiedler reads the novel as a "love story" of "innocent homosexuality."

Andrew Fieldsend, "The Sweet Tongues of Cannibals: The Grotesque Pacific in *Moby-Dick,*" in *Deep South,* Vol. 1, No. 3, Spring, 1995.

An article which explores the development of Ishmael's character and the significance of the Pacific.

John Freeman, *Herman Melville,* Macmillan, 1926.

Freeman's book contributed to the reinstatement of Melville's reputation during the 1920s.

Robert L. Gale, *A Herman Melville Encyclopedia,* Greenwood Press, 1995.

A comprehensive guide to characters, plots, and biographical and historical facts related to Melville and his works.

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Lewis considers Melville's role as "myth-maker" in the history of American ideas of innocence.

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McSweeney uses his focus on Ishmael to explore Melville's interest in psychology and metaphysics.

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An introduction to and breakdown of the novel's major themes.

Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael,* City Lights, 1947.

In a fascinatingly energetic and poetic study, Olson interprets *Moby-Dick* as "mythic odyssey."

Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford, editors, *Moby-Dick as Doubloon: Essays and Extracts (1851-1970),* Norton, 1970.

A broad collection of reviews and reactions to the novel from its publication to 1970.

Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville: A Biography, Vol. 1: 1819-1851,* John Hopkins University Press, 1996.

A detailed biographical study, this is the first volume of a planned two-volume set that provides exhaustive information on Melville's early life up to the publication of *Moby-Dick.*

Merton Sealts Jr., *Pursuing Melville,* Wisconsin University Press, 1982.

Contains illuminating correspondence between Sealts and Charles Olson in which they discuss Melville's philosophy.

William Ellery Sedgwick, *Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind,* Harvard University Press, 1945.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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