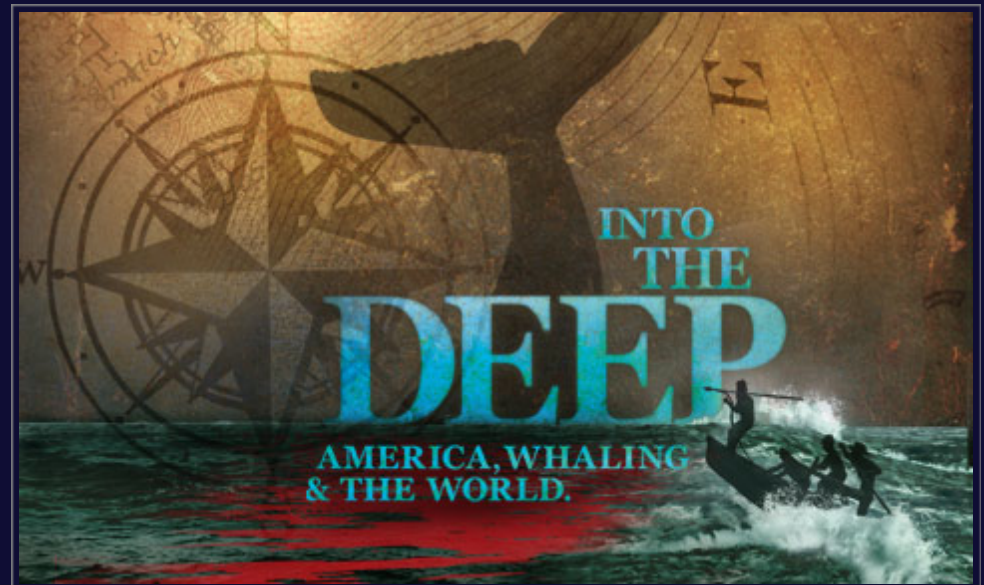


Herman Melville

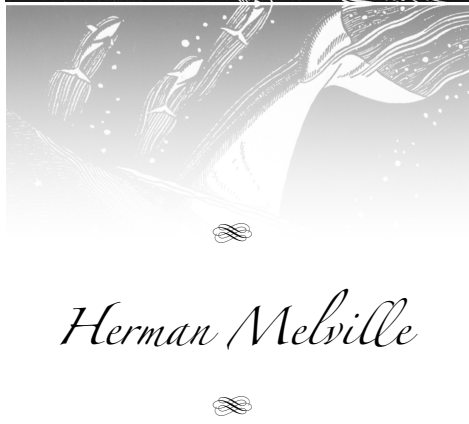


- ★ Literary sex symbol: Melville before *Moby Dick*
- ★ The “power of blackness”: Hawthorne’s influence
- ★ Surviving to tell the tale: “Etymologies & Extracts”
- ★ Modern Epic: Form and Structure
- ★ A big book for a big theme: A Parable of America?

The PBS “American Experience” documentary on whaling in the 19th century provides an excellent background for *Moby Dick*.



Introduction



Herman Melville

In Section 1 (Chapters 1-23), we learn about Ishmael's mission, the biblical themes of the novel, the comic elements of Melville's writing that offset his "blackness," the symbolic nature of the book, and the Romantic ideas that seem to predominate. Make note of these ideas as we look at selected chapters.

In Section 2 (Chapters 24-47), we consider the novel as an epic; we'll consider the different aspects of its "heroes," looking specifically at the difference between how Ahab and Ishmael view the world. What does the whale mean? Why must Ahab kill him?

In Section 3 (Chapters 48-76), we will hunt for recurring ideas and motifs. Who is Fedallah? What happens during the games? What about the lines and ropes, the cutting and eating? And what is the purpose of all this cetology?

In Section 4 (Chapters 77-135), we wonder about the rewards and the hazards of capturing whales, as Ishmael finds himself, Pip loses himself, and Ahab finds what he's been after all along.

Cutting up the Whale: Moby Dick in 5 Big Chunks



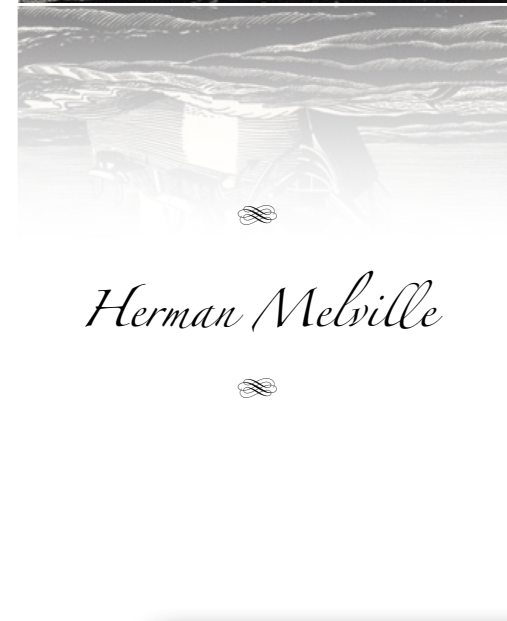
Herman Melville

Final Questions...



we'll save those for the end.

Cutting up the Whale: Moby Dick in 5 Big Chunks



Herman Melville

1. “Loomings”

- Why does Ishmael go to sea? (paragraphs 1-6)
- Why does he go as a common sailor? (7-11)
- Why does he go on a whaler, rather than a merchant ship? (11-14)

3. “The Spouter-Inn”

- What’s the significance of the painting Ishmael considers as he enters the place?
- How might the Inn be symbolic of the journey Ishmael is about to undertake?
- Analyze Queequeg’s character as revealed here, and Ishmael’s reaction to him.

7-9. “The Chapel,” “The Pulpit,” & “The Sermon”

- How does the symbolism in the novel become evident here?
- What are the two lessons of the sermon? Why is this important?

10. “A Bosom Friend”

- In what ways might Queequeg be considered a Transcendentalist?
- How do you view Ishmael’s rationalization about joining in Queequeg’s idolatry?

16-19. “The Ship,” “The Ramadan,” “His Mark,” & “The Prophet”

- How is Melville’s view of fate vs. free will becoming clearer?
- What do you make of the relationship between Peleg and Bildad?
- What point is Melville making in his characterization of Bildad?
- What are the key descriptions of Ahab? Explain their significance.

23. “The Lee Shore”

- What is the paradox associated with the lee shore?
- What about Bulkington?

Ishmael on Land: Preparing for the Voyage, Chapters 1-23

24-31. “The Advocate” to Queen Mab”

- In what ways are whale hunters presented as heroes?
- Identify the particular distinctives of the mates and harpooners; how do each of these characters represent ways of confronting the challenges of life?
- If the Pequod is in fact a microcosm of America, what larger ideas lie behind Melville’s decision to make the ship symbolic?

36. “The Quarter-Deck”

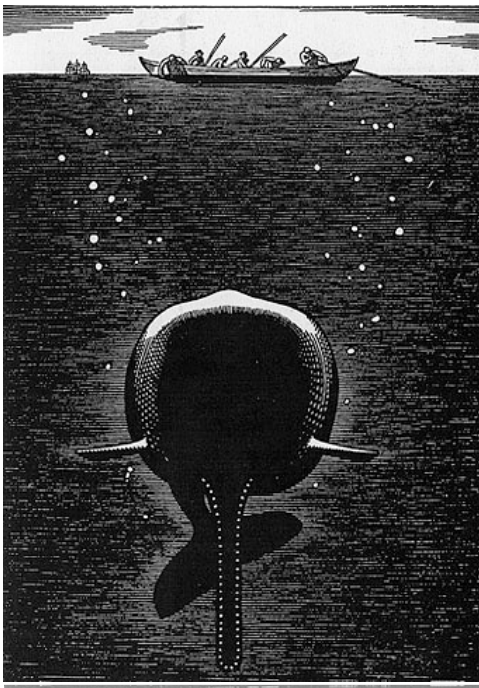
- How does Ishmael’s view of Ahab relate to Aristotle’s concept of tragedy?
- Is this a Satanic mass? Are there implications for the crew and the reader?
- Analyze Ahab’s “mask” speech, and Starbuck’s response.
- What symbols can you find in this chapter, and what might they mean?
- What would Thoreau think of this chapter? Would he like it, or dislike it? Why?
- Is Ahab a Romantic Hero? Why or why not?

41-42. “The Whiteness of the Whale”; 50. Ahab’s Crew / Fedallah

- How does Ishmael view the whale, and how is his view different from that of Ahab?
- Note: Ishmael is suspicious of absolutes (see chapters 68 & 85)
- How do you interpret Fedallah’s character?

The Romantic Hero: has a bold, “larger than life” personality; is sometimes mysterious, often flawed, always interesting; is an individualist with strong personal beliefs who is often “alone against the world”; attempts to do what others think is impossible and often succeeds, but not always; is attracted to nature and the outdoors

Chapters 24-47: Moby Dick as Epic...but where are the heroes?



Herman Melville

53-54; 70; 128. Gams, etc.

- What do we learn from “The Gam” & “The Town-Ho’s Story”?
- What Romantic ideas do you see in “The Sphinx”?
- What does the *Pequod’s* gam with the *Rachel* reveal about Ahab?

89; 93; 96; 99. Signs and Symbols, etc.

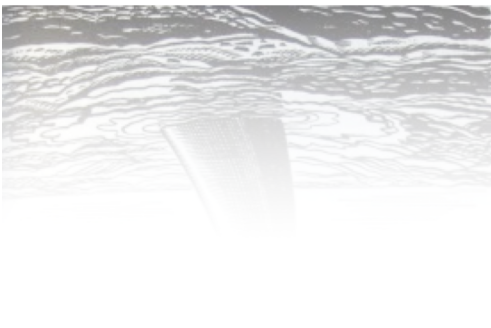
- 89: What is the larger meaning behind Ishmael’s discussion of fast and loose fish?
- 93: What is the lesson Ishmael learns from Pip’s experience?
- 96: What important revelation comes to our narrator here?
- 99: How does Pip’s perspective on the doubloon relate to Melville’s story?

110; 113-14; 119; 123; 132. Bad Omens, etc.

- 110: What is the symbolism behind Quee’s coffin, and why does it frustrate Ahab?
- 113: What comparisons can you make between this chapter and 36?
- 114: How is this chapter like 99?
- 119: Describe the conflict between Starbuck and Ahab in this chapter.
- 123: Does Starbuck make the right decision?
- 132: “Is Ahab, Ahab?” Well, is he?

133-135; “Epilogue.” Outline the events of the chase, noting themes, symbols, motifs, etc.

In Pursuit of the White Whale (Chapters 48-135)



∞
Moby-Dick
∞

1. Why does Ahab die, and Ishmael live?
2. What might Melville be suggesting about Nature and man's relationship to it?
3. What, ultimately, does Ishmael conclude about the question of fate vs. free will? Do you agree, or not?
4. If Moby-Dick is a parable of American experience, do the lessons in it still have applications for modern readers?
5. Is Moby-Dick a novel? What exactly is a novel? Is every novel a work of literature? Why or why not? Why has this book been considered so great for so long? Will your children be reading it in IB? Should they?
6. Which approach (from our "triangle of meaning") to Moby-Dick is best to understand it fully—author, text, or reader?
7. Make a list of five important quotations from Moby-Dick. What makes each one significant?

Final Questions



Herman Melville