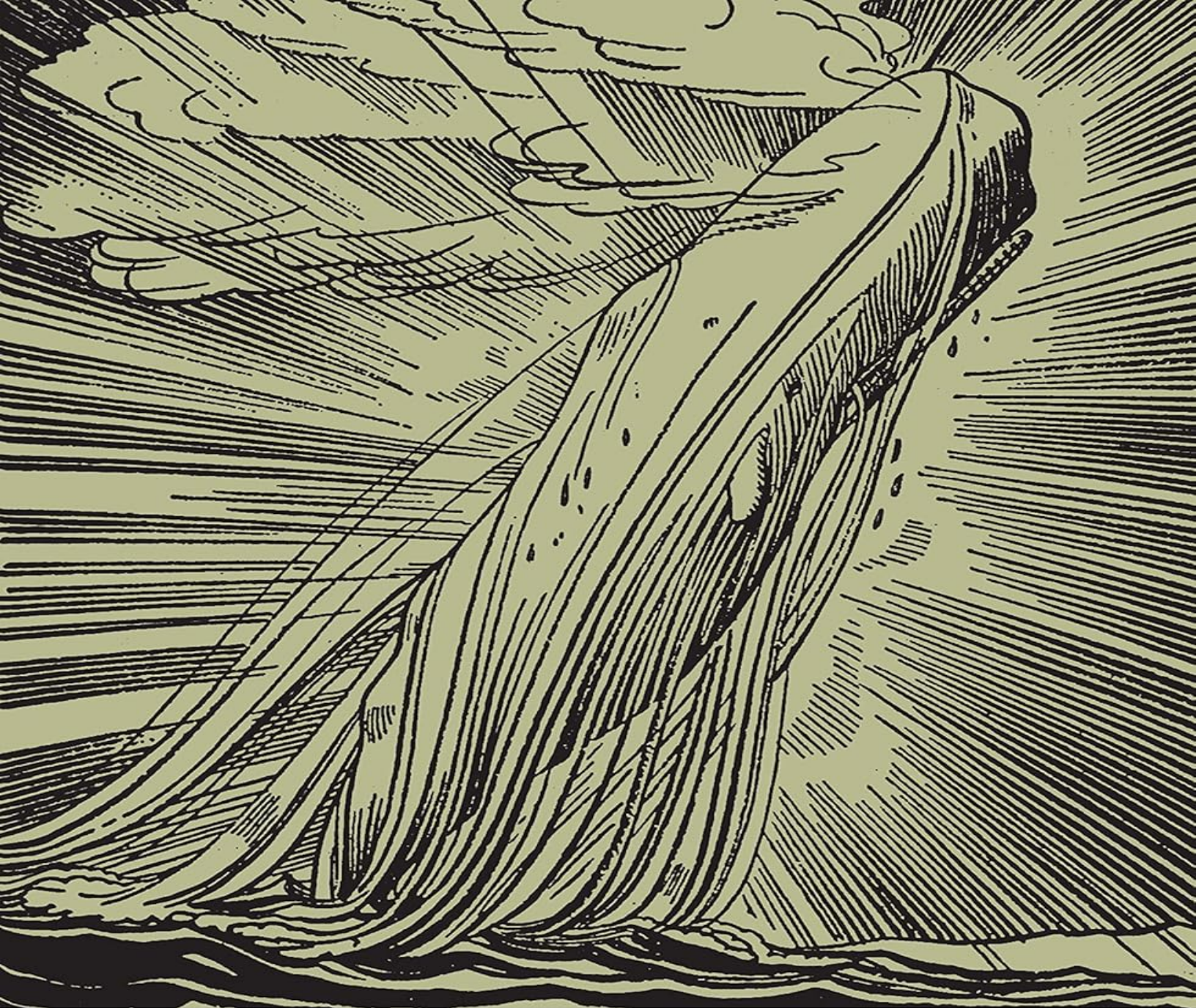




P E N G U I N



C L A S S I C S

HERMAN MELVILLE

MOBY-DICK
OR, THE WHALE



MOBY-DICK

HERMAN MELVILLE was born on August 1, 1819, in New York City, the son of a merchant. His father died when he was only twelve, and Herman worked as a bank clerk and later an elementary school teacher before shipping off on a whaling ship bound for the Pacific. Upon his return, he published a number of books based on his experiences at sea, which won him immediate success. By 1850, he was married and had acquired a farm near Pittsfield, Massachusetts, where he wrote *Moby-Dick*. His later works, including *Moby-Dick*, became increasingly complex and alienated many of his readers. In 1863, during the Civil War, he moved back to New York City, where he died in 1891.

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HERMAN MELVILLE

Moby-Dick
OR, THE WHALE

A Penguin Enriched eBook Classic

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PENGUIN BOOKS

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Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014,
U.S.A.

Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto,
Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3 (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)

Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of
Penguin Books Ltd)

Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria
3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)

Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New
Delhi – 110 017, India

Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New
Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank,
Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices:

80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

First published in the United States of America by Harper & Brothers 1851

Published by Northwestern University Press as Volume Six of *The Writings of Herman Melville*, edited by Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and B. Thomas Tanselle 1988

Published by arrangement with Northwestern University Press

Edition with an introduction by Andrew Delbanco and notes and glossary by Tom Quirk published in Penguin Books 1992

Edition with a foreword by Nathaniel Philbrick published 2001

This edition with Penguin Enriched eBook Classic features by Mary K. Bercaw Edwards published 2009

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ISBN: 978-1-101-10042-4

(CIP data available)

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FOREWORD

Even though I hadn't read a word of it, I grew up hating *Moby-Dick*. My father was an English professor at the University of Pittsburgh with a specialty in American maritime literature, and that big, battle-scarred book came to represent everything I resented about his job: all the hours he spent in his attic study, relentlessly reading and writing, more often than not with *Moby-Dick* spread out before him.

Sometimes at dinner he even dared talk about the novel, inevitably in an excited, reverential tone that only exasperated me all the more. And yet, despite my best efforts to look as bored as possible, I found myself hanging on every word. For you see, when my brother and I were very young, my father had told us a bed-time story.

The story was about a whale, a real whale that had rammed and sunk a ship in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. The men had taken to their little whaleboats, and instead of sailing for the nearby islands, they headed for South America, thousands of miles away. When a rescue ship found them three months later, only a few of the men were left alive, and in their hands were the bones of their dead shipmates. (That my brother and I grew up without permanent psychological damage is a testament to our mother's remarkable parenting skills.) I was a little hazy on the details, but I understood that *Moby-Dick* had something to do with that ship-ramming whale. But, of course, there was no way I was going to crack open the novel and find out for myself.

I resisted until my senior year in high school when my English teacher made it clear that I had no choice but to read *Moby-Dick* if I was going to

graduate in the spring. By that point I had developed an insatiable love of sailing—not your normal recreational activity for a teenager from the Steel City. For reasons too improbable and complex to go into here, I had dedicated myself to racing a Sunfish sail-boat, practicing every weekend on a little manmade lake about an hour outside the city. The previous year I’d qualified for the Sunfish World Championship in Martinique. I finished near the bottom of the fleet, but I was hooked. The exotic tang of saltwater had intoxicated me; I found myself dreaming about the tide-heave of the sea. For me, a shy kid in a big urban high school, sailing seemed my only hope of escape. Then, in February of 1974, I discovered Herman Melville.

The voice of Ishmael, the novel’s narrator, caught me completely by surprise. I had expected to be bored to death, but Ishmael sounded like the best friend I had always hoped to find. In the first paragraph he admits to a state of almost clinical depression—“a damp, drizzly November in my soul”—to which any adolescent can relate. But not to worry, Ishmael reassures us, he has found a solution to this condition. Instead of doing damage to himself or to others, he seeks solace in the sea. What’s more, he insists, he is not alone: “If they but knew it, almost all men in their degree, some time or other, cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me.” As proof, he describes the city of New York on a Sunday afternoon, its cooped-up inhabitants lingering on the waterfront, looking out longingly toward the sea in search of “the ungraspable phantom of life.”

Needless to say, this was a scene that spoke to me with a direct, almost overwhelming power. “I am tormented,” Ishmael confesses, “with an everlasting itch for things remote.” I found myself nodding in agreement. Then, six hundred pages later, came the final pay off when the white whale smashes into the *Pequod*. Here was the event that had been a part of my consciousness for as long as I could remember. And as Melville makes clear early on in *Moby-Dick*, a whale did, in fact, ram into a whaleship from Nantucket back in 1820. So this was the story my father had told us in our

bedroom all those years ago. As Ishmael says in the very first chapter, “the great flood-gates of the wonder-world swung open.” It was more than I could comfortably comprehend. But as I’ve since discovered, that is a common reaction to *Moby-Dick*.

Twelve years later, in 1986, I moved with my wife and our two young children to Nantucket Island. Melissa had always dreamed of practicing law in a small town like the one she had grown up in on Cape Cod, and when she saw an ad for a position on Nantucket, she immediately sent in her resume. At the time, I was a freelance sailing journalist and could live just about anywhere. And besides, even though we didn’t know a soul on the island, I figured I was already pretty familiar with the place. I’d read about it in Chapter 14 of *Moby-Dick*.

It was, and remains to this day, my favorite chapter of the novel: a five-paragraph *tour de force* that creates a mesmerizing sense of bustling enchantment. At this early stage in the book, what will become a dark and disturbing portrayal of Captain Ahab’s mono-maniacal quest for the white whale is more like the literary equivalent of a buddy movie as Ishmael and Queequeg make their uncertain, sometimes hilarious way to the island that was once the whaling capital of the world.

Nantucket is, in Ishmael’s words, an “elbow of sand; all beach without a background.” The island’s greatness has nothing to do with its beauty or its natural resources; it is a mere setting-off point—a place wholly dedicated to an activity that occurs on the other side of the world. In fact, the island is, to Ishmael’s way of thinking, a kind of joke, and the second paragraph of the chapter becomes a running gag about the island’s lack of vegetation. Ishmael claims that weeds have to be planted on the island since they don’t grow there naturally; that wood is so rare that tiny splinters are coveted like pieces of the “true cross in Rome”; that Nantucketers are reduced to planting

toadstools in an attempt to create some shade; and that the sand is so deep that the islanders clamber around in their own sand-adapted version of snow-shoes.

Once he's gotten the jokes out of his system, Ishmael plunges into an account of the Native American origins of the island. He tells of the myth of the giant bird that swooped down over a native village on Cape Cod and carried an Indian boy out across the water. The child's parents set off in frantic pursuit in a canoe. Many miles later they discover an island that would become known as Nantucket, and beneath a tree they find their son's whitened skeleton. Ishmael then recounts the amazing achievements of an island nation whose dominion is nothing less than all the oceans of the world: "Let America add Mexico to Texas, and pile Cuba upon Canada; let the English overswarm all India, and hang out their blazing banner from the sun; two thirds of this terraqueous globe are the Nantucketer's. For the sea is his; he owns it, as Emperors own empires."

If I had stopped to think about, instead of becoming totally captivated by Ishmael's miraculous prose, I would have realized that he is not describing a real-life place as much as he is evoking a phenomenon, what he calls elsewhere "a fine, boisterous something." The Nantucket of *Moby-Dick* is an idea, not a town, and yet I had fallen for it hook, line, and sinker. I thought that nothing could be better than to live on this wondrous "ant-hill in the sea."

Not long after relocating to Nantucket I discovered that Melville had never set foot on the place prior to writing *Moby-Dick*. I had been hoodwinked, seduced by an author's enticing but purely imaginary construct. But the more I learned about the island's history, the more I realized that this was not really the case. Even if Melville had never visited the island prior to writing his masterpiece, he was exceedingly familiar with its inhabitants, having spent several years of his youth as a whaler in the South Pacific.

At the core of the dazzling rhetorical display of *Moby-Dick's* Nantucket is an imperishable historical truth. What I didn't realize then was how long it was going to take to discover just what that truth meant to me.

I would write two books of Nantucket history before I turned my undivided attention to the story I had first heard as a child. By that point I'd begun to appreciate the ballast of reality hidden in the *Pequod's* hold. For us, distanced by more than a century from the time when whale oil was the petroleum of its day, it is difficult to believe that a process as ghastly and strange as whaling was an integral part of the American economy and culture. Having grown up in Pittsburgh at a time when the city was dominated by smog-belching steel mills, I had been unexpectedly prepared to appreciate the dirty, often brutal conditions aboard a whaleship: floating factories dedicated to ripping blubber from the whale's corpse, chopping the blubber up, then boiling it into oil amid a stinking pall of sooty smoke. *Moby-Dick* may be, on occasion, mythic and metaphysical, but it is also an extraordinarily detailed and accurate account of American whaling in the nineteenth century. As Ishmael insists, again and again, he is not making this up.

But the novel is much more than a historical document. As I've already indicated, it can be quite funny; in its flights of language *Moby-Dick* can be more than a little intimidating, as if Shakespeare and the translators of the King James Bible teamed up to write a very weird book about whaling. Once the tale of Ahab's pursuit of Moby Dick clicks into high gear, the novel becomes an adventure story. Then there are the fascinating sidebars that begin to take up more and more of the novel as Ishmael openly discusses his attempts to write a book as ungovernable as the white whale itself.

But it wasn't until the writing of *In the Heart of the Sea* that I came to understand that Melville had gotten much more than a dramatic conclusion

from the story of the *Essex*. He had gotten a point of view. If nothing else, *Moby-Dick* is the tale of a survivor. And just as I'd analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the men who'd survived the *Essex*, I found myself trying to figure out who was this Ishmael and why fate, or at least Melville, had chosen him alone to tell the *Pequod's* story.

At the beginning of the novel, Ishmael informs us that all this happened "[s]ome years ago—never mind how long precisely." We subsequently learn that he has been living with the story for a very long time, shipping out on a string of whaling voyages in the years since the sinking of the *Pequod*. All this time he has been preparing the book we are now holding in our hands. Taking a writer's fact-gathering to an unheard-of extreme, he has even had the dimensions of a gigantic sperm whale skeleton tattooed to his arm.

But if Ishmael has thrown his lot with the sea, he has done so with more than a little regret. As he knows better than anyone, the sea is a most unforgiving task-master. "No mercy, no power but its own, controls it," he says in the chapter titled "Brit," then launches into a simile that ends as an anguished warning: "For 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; thou canst never return!"

To my mind, the novel's masterpiece is the chapter "The Grand Armada," in which Ishmael discovers the vision of domestic bliss that he has denied himself but which is nonetheless crucial to our humanity. After being dragged through the chaotic fringes of a vast school of whales, he and his whaleboat crew come upon a lake-like still center, where whales gently copulate and mother whales suckle their young. Even if this "enchanted calm" is all too quickly destroyed by a whale entangled in the line of a cutting

spade, it remains an enduring example of everything the demonic Ahab is not:

And thus, though surrounded by circle upon circle of consternations and affrights, did these inscrutable creatures at the center freely and fearlessly indulge in all peaceful concernments; yea, serenely reveled in dalliance and delight. But even so, amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still for ever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve round me, deep down and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy.

The imagery of this passage anticipates the novel's final scene, in which the whale-rammed *Pequod* and all the chaotic plentitude of the book are sucked down into the swirling vortex of the void. The sole exception is Ishmael. Clinging to a life-buoy fashioned from Queequeg's unused coffin, he seems to have drifted into the welcoming stillness at the maelstrom's center, where he remains miraculously immune to the sea's hazards. "The unharmed sharks," he recounts, "they glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks." Two days later Ishmael is rescued, and as is the blessing and curse of all survivors, he must begin to live the rest of his life.

The publication of *Moby-Dick* marked the beginning of a difficult time for its author. What is generally considered the greatest American novel ever written proved to be a critical and popular disappointment in the fall of 1851. Even Melville's friend and literary confidante Evert Duyckinck panned it in what must have been a humiliating review for Melville. The novel's poor sales put him under increasing pressure to support his large and growing family. Then, the following summer, Melville visited Nantucket for the first time.

Like the author of *Moby-Dick*, the island had fallen on hard times. In just a few years, Nantucket had lost more than a quarter of its voting population to the gold fields in California. Where he had once imagined Ishmael walking the streets with his cannibal cohort Queequeg, Melville found a ghost town.

He made a point of meeting George Pollard, the captain of the ill-fated *Essex*. Pollard had given up the sea and become the town's nightwatchman. "To the islanders he was a nobody," Melville would later record, "to me, the most impressive man, tho' wholly unassuming even humble—that I ever encountered."

In the years to come, Melville's professional life as a novelist would go the way of Pollard's whaling career. Having lost a readership for his books, he would be forced to take a job as a customs inspector on the wharves of New York City. As if mocked by Ishmael's vision of domestic bliss in "The Grand Armada," Melville's family life proved difficult. There are indications that he drank too much, that he may have physically abused his wife; one of his sons would die of a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Finally, in 1885, a small inheritance allowed Melville to retire from the customs office at the age of sixty-six. After years of composing arid, intellectually complex poetry, he wrote what many regard today as one of the greatest novellas ever written, *Billy Budd*, about an incident; aboard a British man-of-war. Pasted to the side of his wooden writing desk was a simple slogan: "Keep true to the dreams of thy youth."

What these words meant to Melville can only be guessed. But what unites his two masterworks, *Moby-Dick* and *Billy Budd*, is the watery wilderness in which Melville came of age: the sea. It is one of the ironies of history that 150 years after *Moby-Dick*'s publication, the frontier that most Americans associate with our national identity, the West, has long since been civilized beyond recognition. The sea, on the other hand, has never been tamed, and

it is the sea that, with Melville's help, we are beginning to rediscover. He is, in the end, one of our greatest literary survivors.

—Nathaniel Philbrick

INTRODUCTION

Not many years ago, at an elite northeastern university, a prominent English literary critic was asked which was the greatest English novel. The room was paneled and lit by a chandelier, the windows heavily draped, the bookshelves lined with leatherbound classics—furnishings all carefully assembled to replicate an Old World atmosphere. There was not a whiff of sea air in that room. With the combination of eagerness and resentment that sometimes greets the proclamation of a standard, the students leaned forward to hear from their eminent guest. “*Middlemarch* would be my candidate,” he said tentatively, “unless by English novel you mean novel *in English*, in which case it would, of course, be *Moby-Dick*.”

That *Moby-Dick*, this sea monster of a book, could be declared self-evidently the greatest work of fiction in the language by an arbiter of literary taste would have amazed Herman Melville—not because he did not believe it to be true, but because he doubted the palatability of his truth. Melville was an artist of the highest ambition, but he thought of himself as a writer whose insolence and candor would never become the currency of genteel common rooms. “A whaleship was my Yale College and my Harvard,” he wrote in *Moby-Dick*, which is a book full of wild and untamable characters—“mongrel renegades, and castaways,” Melville called them—and written in frank contempt for the genteel life:

The port would fain give succor; the port is pitiful; in the port is safety, comfort, hearthstone, supper, warm blankets, friends, all that’s kind to our mortalities. But in that gale, the port, the land, is that ship’s direst jeopardy; she must fly all hospitality;...With all her might she crowds all sail off shore...seeks all the lashed sea’s

landlessness again; for refuge's sake forlornly rushing into peril;
her only friend her bitterest foe!

These lines about the fatality of coziness and comfort bear Melville's unmistakable stylistic signature. No one in America had ever written prose of such compressed intensity ("the lashed sea's landlessness") and taunting contradictions ("for refuge's sake forlornly rushing into peril"). As anyone encountering *Moby-Dick* for the first time will discover, it is a book that struggles to maintain its narrative drive against the impulse to digress and meditate and play. One reason for this is that Melville was indefatigably alert to what might be called the stages of a word's career—as in his use of "pitiful," a word that vibrates between its old meaning (full of pity) and the more modern meaning it was acquiring in Melville's time: pathetic, exhausted, impotent. Melville does not employ words in *Moby-Dick*; he savors them.

A noisy book written in a braggart's voice ("Give me a condor's quill! Give me Vesuvius' crater for an inkstand!"), *Moby-Dick* is also a book of exquisite refinement. With all its sprawl and bluster, it can suddenly subside into the mood of "mowers...sleeping among the new-mown hay" and evoke the "snow-white wings of small, unspeckled birds...the gentle thoughts of the feminine air." Even its most dramatic chapters rarely end in crescendo but tend to resolve themselves into a reflective quiet that chastens like the sound of strings after brass.

Despite its patent beauties, Melville's novel was, like Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, a "language experiment" that struck many of its first readers as overwrought and bewildering. "Not worth the money asked for it, either as a literary work or as a mass of printed paper" was the judgment of the *Boston Post*, and although other reviewers appreciated its "easy, rollicking freedom of language and structure," *Moby-Dick* was regarded at best as a curiosity and at worst a botch. In some moods Melville claimed to be unhurt by the

public rebuke; he was, he wrote to Hawthorne, “content to have our paper allegories ill comprehended.” But in other moods he was devastated that he had failed to touch the nerve of the American public. That Melville was disappointed is hardly surprising, but that he was bitterly shocked is a sign of what was at stake. He wrote *Moby-Dick* in a messianic fervor because he wanted to save his country from itself.

One way to approach Melville’s forbidding text is to regard it as part of his lifelong meditation on America. The country into which Melville was born in 1819 was a nation where the vestiges of aristocracy were fading, and where anyone who defended the idea of inherited privilege ran the risk of being charged with treason. National politics, the conduct of which had once been handed back and forth between New England blue bloods and Virginia gentry, was becoming the scene of feisty combat among populist heroes like Andrew Jackson and political professionals like Martin Van Buren. But even as the disfranchised Melville chafed in this vulgar country, he relished its impatience with pretension and the liberation it promised from the burdens of the past. In *Pierre: or the Ambiguities*, the novel he wrote just after *Moby-Dick*, he remarked that

in countries like America, where there is no distinct hereditary caste of gentlemen, whose order is factitiously perpetuated as race-horses and lords are in kingly lands; and especially, in those agricultural districts, where, of a hundred hands that drop a ballot for the Presidency, ninety-nine shall be of the brownest and the brawniest; in such districts, this daintiness of the fingers, when united with a generally manly aspect, assumes a remarkableness unknown in European nations.

Melville’s early years were spent in an effort to come to terms with his own “remarkableness.” It was a strenuous effort, in which the young man

struggled against an insurgent biliousness that he disliked in himself. Both his grandfathers had been heroes of the Revolutionary War, and when his less distinguished father died—a failure in the haberdashery business—the young Melville was compelled to fight his own resentment at being overtaken by men of lesser heritage. Among the novels that preceded *Moby-Dick*, several were records of this struggle: *Redburn* (1849), in which a young man journeys down the Hudson from his once-glorious family seat and endures the embarrassment of being unable to pay his passage; *White Jacket* (1850), in which another gentle youth enters a mariners' world, where the only measure of status is competence in the rigging. These books were retrospective meditations on Melville's years of wandering—first aboard a merchant vessel that took him to Europe, later as a crewman on a United States frigate in the Pacific.

Through these books Melville began to enlarge his private trials into an allegory of the nation's. In Liverpool, trying in vain to navigate the city with the help of his father's outdated guidebook, *Redburn* comes face to face with the dark underside of England's industrial power. When he encounters the shriveled form of a starving woman, chilled to blueness, and hears her whimper a faint cry from the gutter, he suspects a portent for Americans who were still claiming exemption from such horrors even while moving to challenge Britain for world primacy. In *White Jacket* Melville went on to explore, through the allegorical dilemma of a seaman about to be flogged for an infraction he did not commit, what it means to be stripped like a slave of all legal recourse and to feel in one's hatred of the imperial master the very assertion of self that the law forbids. Preparing to rush headlong against the captain and hurl him into the sea, *White Jacket* reflects that

Nature has not implanted any power in man that was not meant to be exercised at times, though too often our powers have been abused. The privilege, inborn and inalienable, that every man has, of dying himself, and inflicting death upon another, was not given

to us without a purpose. These are the last resources of an insulted and unendurable existence.

It was in *Redburn* and *White Jacket* that Melville began to confront the gathering crisis of his time—the inevitable collision between industrial and slave culture in the United States—but the books through which he had discovered himself as a writer were his earlier South Sea adventures, *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847). Quasi-autobiographical works that recounted (with embellishment) his brief stay in the Marquesan islands and his beachcombing days in Tahiti, these books were full of shameless olive-skinned women and intimately attentive native boys. Received as factual accounts of tribal life in the tropical world, they established (to his lasting regret) Melville's reputation as “the man who lived among cannibals.” In fact, they were sophisticated explorations of the experience of cultural dislocation, written by a prodigious storyteller who negotiated carefully between his audience's prurience and its prudery. Yet as late as the *Cambridge History of American Literature* of 1917, Melville was accorded merely an appreciative paragraph in the chapter on “Travellers and Explorers”—and without *Typee* and *Omoo* there may have been no mention at all.

When Melville began work on *Moby-Dick*, he was, in other words, a young writer (only thirty-one) who had already experienced the flush of literary celebrity and the fickleness of an audience that rejected him when he turned earnest in his huge metaphysical novel of 1849, *Mardi*. He referred to *Redburn* and *White Jacket* as “two jobs, which I have done for money—being forced to it, as other men are to sawing wood,” and although in 1847, with his sailor days behind him, he had married the daughter of a distinguished jurist, he never fully escaped from enervating economic pressure. By 1850 he was settled in substantial domesticity in a Berkshire farmhouse, but “the calm, the coolness,” he wrote to Hawthorne, “the silent grass-growing mood in which a man *ought* always to compose,—that, I fear,

can seldom be mine. Dollars damn me; and the malicious Devil is forever grinning in upon me, holding the door ajar.” Melville was wrong about missing the fertility of tranquillity. In the harried months between the early spring of 1850 and the fall of 1851, he produced the greatest work of imagination in the history of our literature.

Moby-Dick opens conventionally enough. Writing in his old marketable mode, Melville begins with the intention to accommodate his estranged readership. But he soon swerves, away from the adventures of a young man in flight from his own despondency, and he finds himself swept up by a larger tale—about a maimed sea captain and the prodigious white whale that has “dismasted” him. Although scholars still disagree over the evolution of the manuscript, there is general agreement that it went through several radically different versions. Melville’s friend, the influential critic Evert Duyckinck, read and approved an early draft but denigrated the final text as an “intellectual chowder”; and there is other evidence that *Moby-Dick* lurched forward in spasms rather than being built systematically according to some initial plan. Yet despite efforts to match allusions to contemporary events, and otherwise to trace the process of revision, it remains impossible to see exactly how *Moby-Dick* grew from an adventure yarn into the giant work it became. Some of the incendiary events for Melville’s imagination are recoverable—especially his passionate friendship with Hawthorne, whose work and person inspired him beginning in the summer of 1850; and his renewed exposure to Shakespeare, whose blank-verse grandeur stirred him to emulation. But like the painting that Ishmael peers at in the Spouter Inn, *Moby-Dick* will always remain “a boggy, soggy, squitchy picture truly, enough to drive a nervous man distracted,” at least if one is intent on making out its compositional history.

It is clear enough that as he rushed along, Melville had no particular concern to tidy up his book by sweeping it clean of the traces of its

superseded stages. Three chapters into the story, for instance, we meet a figure named Bulkington, “six feet in height, with noble shoulders, and a chest like a coffer-dam,” who seems a likely candidate to play a major part in the ensuing drama because of his ability to command from his crewmates a reverence that is neither worship nor fear. But Bulkington recedes from view until twenty chapters later: after Ishmael has befriended Queequeg and found his way to the *Pequod* and Ahab’s service, Melville buries him in a “six-inch chapter [that] is [his] stoneless grave.” Yet it is an open grave. Melville does not conceal Bulkington; he memorializes him, leaving him visible as a hinted alternative to Ahab. He is not revised out of the manuscript but remains as a tremor in the text—an idea of democratic leadership, whose ripples continue to move within the range of our awareness but who finds no fulfilled place within the world that Melville imagines into being.

More than a crafted fiction, *Moby-Dick* is an outburst of a fluid consciousness in which ideas and persons appear and collide and form new combinations and sometimes drop away. If it begins as a young man’s adventures, by the thirtieth chapter Ishmael has all but vanished, and the narrative voice is no longer subject to laws governing conventional narration. Ishmael describes Ahab, for instance, dining with his officers in his quarters, and later in his cabin “by the stern windows;...sitting alone.” A little later Starbuck, humiliated in his efforts to hold Ahab to the ship’s commercial purpose, delivers a soliloquy by the mainmast where no one can overhear him—and yet Ishmael reports it all with the certainty of a confidant. After these inexplicable witnessings, the narrative, as if breaking under the weight of its improbabilities, gives way to stretches of song from the scattered crew.

Moby-Dick is simply too large a book to be contained within one consistent consciousness subject to the laws of identity and physical plausibility. The narrating mind (called Ishmael at first) hurtles outward,

gorging itself with whale lore and with the private memories of men who barely speak. Sometimes this narrative voice breaks out into choral effusion or splinters into the competitive chatter of the sailors. Yet the compositional principle of *Moby-Dick* is more than whim; it is as if Melville creates Ishmael in the image of his earlier versions of himself and then invites us to share the excitement of his self-destruction.

Moby-Dick is in this sense a lethal book. Hostile to all conventions, it reveals the suffocating airlessness of Ishmael's initial consciousness, which comes to know itself as little more than an anthology of received opinions. Staring at the "boggy, soggy" picture, Ishmael concludes that "the artist's design seemed this: a final theory of my own, partly based upon the aggregated opinions of many aged persons." He is at first a prig and a prude, offended by Queequeg's habit of washing his chest and leaving his face unscrubbed, not to mention the savage's genuflections before his little wooden idol, Yojo, which strikes Ishmael as "the color of a three days' old Congo baby." But Ishmael's saving charm is his capacity for humor at his own expense. He grows amused by his own absurdities, and by the time he sails aboard the *Pequod* in the protective company of his now-beloved Queequeg, he has eliminated almost all his inherited conceptions—religious, social, political, even linguistic—from the categories of the sacred and the prudent and has moved them into the category of the arbitrary. Everything becomes unmoored, vulnerable, dispensable.

This process of divestiture is represented in an extraordinary chapter titled "The Counterpane," in which Melville reviews what in effect was the construction of Ishmael's self. In the bed they share in the Spouter Inn, Queequeg's tattooed arm lies across the quilted counterpane that covers Ishmael's chest, and in the first waking moments, when the line between consciousness and unconsciousness remains indeterminate, Ishmael feels himself dissolve into the flesh and fabric that are touching him. He cannot distinguish between Queequeg's arm and the quilt, or even between his own

body and the coverings that press upon it. Through this liberating confusion he relives a childhood experience (whether dream or reality he cannot say) in which he had waked from an enforced sleep that had been his punishment for trying to climb up the chimney. Dimly making out in the darkness his hand hanging off the bed, he had not known it as his own; it seemed an alien object clasped in the hand of some threatening phantom, and he had not dared try to move it to see if it were free to be withdrawn. He feared breaking the uncertainty as much as submitting to it, and under the spell of fright and fascination, he transformed his stepmother's anger into guilt. This was the moment, he seems now to realize, in which he discovered the proscribed otherness of his body and of the world it craved.

Having relived this discovery, it is through the uninvited intimacy with Queequeg that Ishmael begins to unlearn his guilt. The reversal goes quickly, and he becomes both terrified and exhilarated by his new freedom. In a sexually redolent phrase, Melville has him remark "how elastic our stiff prejudices grow when love once comes to bend them," and from that moment on, Ishmael achieves a certain distance from the *Pequod's* hell-bent quest. The central theme of *Moby-Dick* begins to emerge in this implicit contrast between the transfigured Ishmael, whose consciousness has been diffused into a promiscuous taste for all experience, and the wracked captain of "fiery eyes" who refuses all distraction from his crusade. As the book moves on, Ishmael can hardly be located, while Ahab stands immovable, his pegleg anchored in his "stand-point"—the auger hole bored into the deck to keep him steady in a gale. "There was...a determinate, unsunderable wilfulness, in the fixed and fearless, forward dedication of [Ahab's] glance," while Ishmael's eyes are dreamy and roving. He frees himself from fear and anger and the appetite for retribution that they foster ("No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world"), while Ahab cannot be deterred from conquest and possession and revenge—not by Pip or Starbuck or even by the pleas of the captain of the *Rachel*, who begs for help in searching for his son lost at sea.

It is through the encounter between these two principles—the widening embrace of Ishmael and the “monomania” of Ahab—that *Moby-Dick* takes form. Yet the book never becomes merely a contest between them, because Melville himself incorporates both, and he feels their claims with equal fervor. The expansion and unstiffening of Ishmael’s mind are more and more manifest in Melville’s own ecstatic wordplay, in his generic mischievousness and irreverent associations: the peeled pelt of the whale’s penis (“grandissimus,” the sailors call it) is worn as a “surplice” by the crewman who minces the blubber; and the King of England, Melville reports with glee, unknowingly pomades his hair with sperm-whale oil “in its unmanufactured, unpolluted state.” Yet despite his love of such imaginative frolic, Melville is also enchanted by his inhuman and entirely humorless captain. As Milton does for Satan, he gives many of the best lines to grim Ahab, whose contempt for the trivial greed of the *Pequod*’s owners is immensely attractive, and whose rage, however fatal, is simply magnificent:

Aye, aye! it was that accursed white whale that razeed me; made a poor pegging lubber of me for ever and a day!...Aye, aye! and I’ll chase him round Good Hope, and round the Horn, and round the Norway Maelstrom, and round perdition’s flames before I give him up. And this is what ye have shipped for, men! to chase that white whale on both sides of land, and over all sides of earth, till he spouts black blood and rolls fin out. What say ye, men, will ye splice hands on it, now? I think ye do look brave.

Ahab speaks with what Melville elsewhere calls a “Niagara” roar and is dignified even when he is at his most appalling. He is on a mission, Ishmael is on a cruise—and *Moby-Dick* is the record of their irresolvable confrontation.

Though this conflict played itself out independently within Melville's mind, it also had specific corollaries in the actual scene of American politics. In one of its dimensions, *Moby-Dick* was a prophecy that the American experiment of separate political entities "federated along one keel" was imperiled, that the ship of state (a common metaphor in contemporary oratory) was foundering. When Melville began to work in earnest on *Moby-Dick* in early 1850, the Congressional debates over the provisions of what became known as the Compromise of 1850 were reverberating in all the papers and parlors of the land. In early March a dying John Calhoun sat in silence in the Senate chamber as his speech was read by a fellow Senator—a speech full of foreboding and predictions of catastrophe unless the antislavery agitation ceased. Daniel Webster's reply ("I speak today not as a Massachusetts man, nor as a Northern man, but as an American"), in which he defended the compromise—including the provisions demanding manumission of fugitive slaves—cost him the respect of many Northern intellectuals but saved the situation, at least for a time. Yet the real news out of Washington was that the fissure in the country was becoming unbridgeable, and that the last efforts of the great survivors from the early republic—Clay, Calhoun, and Webster—would ultimately prove unavailing. The nation would go on intact for a few more years, until the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Dred Scott decision set the stage for civil war; but to astute observers it was already clear in 1850 that the dispute could be brokered no more.

Among them was Melville. *Moby-Dick* can be seen as a sustained meditation on the sectional crisis, and as such some readers have tried to assign specific political correspondences to its cast of characters: Ahab as the unrelenting Calhoun; Starbuck as New England prudence; Stubb as the eager Westerner; Flask, whom the "noble negro" Daggoo carries "on his broad back...[like] a snow-flake," as exemplar of the slave South; even Moby Dick itself as the principle of whiteness in whose very pursuit the nation insured its doom.

Imputing such allegorical fixities to Melville's text is a tempting way to distribute and gain control over its inventory of unruly characters, and Melville was certainly alert to national politics. His brother Gansevoort had been active in the Democratic party, and he himself had indulged in long stretches of thinly disguised political commentary in *Mardi*. But *Moby-Dick* is not a medieval morality play with a decipherable iconography. It is a disorderly elegy to democracy, which Melville saw as threatened on many sides: by the spirit of utilitarianism (represented comically by Bildad and Peleg), by the accelerating pace of expansionism (the *Pequod* is named after an Indian tribe obliterated in a seventeenth-century war with the Puritans), and by the drive toward industrial power (in the great "Try-Works" chapter the ship becomes a floating factory), which degrades men into mere instruments of a technological process. "To accomplish his object," we are told, "Ahab must use tools; and of all tools used in the shadow of the moon, men are most apt to get out of order." And yet with all his revulsion for the surging commercialism and land hunger of his time, Melville was equally suspicious of the motives and efficacy of reformers who whined from the sidelines. "With what quill," he asks with Emersonian disdain, "did the Secretary of the Society for the Suppression of Cruelty to Ganders formerly indite his circulars?"

Melville, in short, extracted a human sample from a culture he both loved and abhorred, and he made of the *Pequod* a kind of Noah's ark. Its crew and officers are representatives of a nation for which the "native [white] American...provides the brains, the rest of the world ["tiger-yellow" Fedallah and "gigantic, coal-black" Daggoo] as generously supplying the muscles." Yet it is not exactly coercion that keeps the brawn in thrall; there is no sullenness in the crew's obedience to Ahab once it is pledged. Stubb, for instance, is a kind of petty version of Ahab; he has the scurrying frenzy of a rodent but also an "invulnerable jollity of indifference and recklessness" that Ahab recognizes as a complement to his own immunity to prudence. And not just the officers but the men feel an ungrudging solidarity with their captain—a

solidarity that Ahab seals with the soaring oratory to which he rises when Starbuck challenges him in “The Quarterdeck”:

Hark ye yet again,—the little lower layer. All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there’s naught beyond. But ’tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I’d strike the sun if it insulted me.

These metaphysics are pitched at the first mate (who requires a “little lower layer” to break his resistance), but they are plain enough to the unlettered crew. Even as he manipulates them, Ahab knows their humanity; he knows that no man among them lives unaggrieved (even gentle Queequeg is a dispossessed king) and that all have a reservoir of pain that can be tapped by a leader who elevates common resentment to the uncommon level of heroic virtue. Like Ahab, every man feels maimed and hopes to find relief by assigning blame:

The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them.... All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought;

all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in *Moby Dick*.

Arguably the most brilliant demonstration in modern literature of the power of demagoguery, “The Quarterdeck” is not so much a prophecy of immediately succeeding events in the United States as it is a preview of the mass politics of our own century. *Moby-Dick* is also a study in leadership whose first hopeful hypothesis is Bulkington, but one in which Ahab prevails.

Ahab’s political genius expresses itself with what Melville sometimes regards as an unrepeatable indecency: “what it was that inscrutable Ahab said to that tiger-yellow crew of his—these were words best omitted here; for you live under the blessed light of the evangelical land.” Like all such rhetorical gestures, this diffidence is calculated to excite desire. *Moby-Dick* pulls the reader into Ahab’s magnetic range even as it warns us away; to read *Moby-Dick* is to be enchanted into the kind of self-forgetfulness from which Ishmael wakes after losing himself in the fused consciousness of the crew:

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 did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul. A wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling was in me; Ahab’s quenchless feud seemed mine.

It should be said that there is nothing irreducibly American about this wildness, just as there is nothing local or even finally national about the scope of Melville’s political imagination. In fact, as the Trinidadian writer C. L. R. James suggested long ago, Melville’s political vision of the mirrored fanaticism of ruler and ruled was to be most fully realized in Europe and only fitfully approached in the United States. *Moby-Dick* is a book of universal reach about the neediness of men when they are denied the props

of rank and custom; a book about what can happen to men in conditions of radical exposure. It reports their jauntiness in the murderous business of killing whales, and it is hardly blind to their profligacy and cruelty—but it also honors their courage. It is a time-bound book of distinctively American accent, mainly in the sense that Melville realized, with his great contemporaries Emerson and Whitman and Hawthorne and Thoreau, that the very idea of America entailed an obliteration of the past that placed unprecedented demands on the resources of the self.

This newness was the theme of the literary explosion between 1835 and 1855 that has come to be known as the American renaissance: the movement on behalf of which Thoreau crowed “like chanticleer in the morning” at the discovery of his radical independence; in which Whitman exulted at the dissolution of all boundaries—temporal, sexual, linguistic; and whose chief spokesman, Emerson, chided his countrymen for being slow to break the linked conventions that they confused with the self. “The...terror,” Emerson remarked in “Self-Reliance” (1840), “that scares us from self-trust is our consistency; a reverence for our past act or word because the eyes of others have no other data for computing our orbit than our past acts, and we are loth to disappoint them.”

The writers of the American renaissance were not, however, unanimous on this matter of scuttling the constructed self. Hawthorne, whose temperament was fundamentally conservative, reacted to his peers by becoming obsessed with the ways in which history survives as a constraining force in such an unhistorical country. And more than any of these considerable writers, Melville gave voice to both exhilaration and foreboding at the potentialities of the self unmoored:

But this august dignity I treat of, is not the dignity of kings and robes, but that abounding dignity which has no robed investiture.

Thou shalt see it shining in the arm that wields a pick or drives a spike; that democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God; Himself! The great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality!

Not even in Whitman is there a more ecstatic paeon to democracy. But Melville also discloses in *Moby-Dick* a slackened mood that Whitman concealed—as, for instance, in the great chapter on “The Whiteness of the Whale,” in which he wonders aloud whether the very notion of “centre and circumference” is anything more than a fond delusion:

Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink? And when we consider that other theory of the natural philosophers, that all other earthly hues—every stately or lovely emblazoning—the sweet tinges of sunset skies and woods; yea, and the gilded velvets of butterflies, and the butterfly cheeks of young girls; all these are but subtile deceits, not actually inherent in substances, but only laid on from without; so that all deified Nature absolutely paints like the harlot, whose allurements cover nothing but the charnel-house within; and when we proceed further, and consider that the mystical cosmetic which produces every one of her hues, the great principle of light, for ever remains white or colorless in itself, and if operating without medium upon matter, would touch all objects, even tulips and roses, with its own blank tinge—pondering all this, the palsied

universe lies before us a leper; and like wilful travellers in Lapland, who refuse to wear colored and coloring glasses upon their eyes, so the wretched infidel gazes himself blind at the monumental white shroud that wraps all the prospect around him. And of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?

As this astonishing passage makes manifest, *Moby-Dick* is an angry book softened by a compassion that Melville practiced on himself. He could not muster Ahab's cavalierness at the possibility that "there's naught beyond" the pasteboard mask. Unable to confront this possibility with equanimity, he faced it down in *Moby-Dick* by dramatizing it as Ahab's suspicion and by watching its effects on a psyche not quite his own. By the time of his next novel, *Pierre* (1852), which he began without pause after *Moby-Dick* and completed in the disconsolate aftermath of its reception, Ahab's suspicion assaults Melville himself as a certainty:

By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central room; with joy we espy the sarcophagus; but we lift the lid—and no body is there!—appallingly vacant as vast is the soul of a man!

Pierre is the novel in which Melville tests for himself the limits of tolerable knowledge, and it may therefore be a nervier book than *Moby-Dick*, in which Melville still preserves a certain clinical detachment from the insupportable pain he is writing about. In *Pierre*, Melville confronts head-on the possibility that the idea of transcendence—the idea of a stable truth that exists outside of time and manifests legible meaning in the constitution of the universe—is not only undemonstrable but fatal to one's ability to live in a contingent world. *Pierre* is Melville's private howl at this recognition, and most readers have found the urgency of its prose not only incessant but frantic. In *Moby-Dick* Melville still manages to keep Ishmael's intellectual play with the idea

of a contingent universe apart from Ahab's visceral rage. The result is the contrapuntal structure of the book—an aesthetic and, I think, a self-therapeutic triumph that Melville was never to achieve again.

In *Moby-Dick* it is “Ahab and anguish [who] lay stretched together in one hammock,” and it is Ahab whose “torn body and gashed soul bled into one another.” To the extent that Ahab is freakish, his pain remains a pathology about which we may speculate rather than an articulate anguish that we recognize as a constituent part of our own experience. Melville also lets us overhear, through the great soliloquies, Ahab quarreling with himself. Ahab sees only fragments of a human world when he looks to sea; yet even as he enumerates the inventory of loss beneath the waves, “where unrecorded names and navies rust, and untold hopes and anchors rot,” he knows his own embittered blindness to the “God omnipresent...unwarped primal world” which the ocean comprehends. He longs for this world, but it is invisible to him.

Filled as it is with uncommon characters and arcane nautical terms, *Moby-Dick* never lets the alien world of whaling slip away into the merely exotic. Before *Moby-Dick* is through with us, Ahab's hourly calculations of the white whale's course make perfect sense. Lest our imagination relax into the voyeurism that exotic stories permit, Melville turns homely illustrations into startling images by injecting them into strangely hospitable contexts: after staving the boats of Stubb and Flask, the whale “disappeared in a boiling maelstrom, in which, for a space, the odorous cedar chips of the wrecks danced round and round, like the grated nutmeg in a swiftly stirred bowl of punch.” After reading this passage, can one ever move a spoon in a tureen without thinking back to it again?

Deploying these kinds of images that collapse huge distances between worlds apart, *Moby-Dick* reveals itself as an instance of sheer literary virtuosity. It furnishes one dazzling solution after another to the persistent

literary problem of conveying to an innocent reader the palpable reality of an unfamiliar world, thereby making us feel at least potentially Ahab's anguish as our own. *Moby-Dick* is not finally a statement or a puzzle or a performance—or any of the things that literary criticism would reduce it to. It is a book that begins by refusing to begin, deferring its own story by requiring the reader to force a passage through the “extracts,” which are the debris of other stories. It is a book that undercuts all its own conclusions—tutoring us in the anatomy and history of whales that are “wonderful...except after explanation”—so that it cannot properly be said to end. *Moby-Dick* is as nearly endless as an artifact can be. It was, and is, a gift to democracy because it compels our respect for “Men...[of] mean and meagre faces,” as well as for “man, in the ideal, [who] 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.”

To read *Moby-Dick* is to acquire anew this knowledge, which, despite its indispensability for a democratic culture, can be dissipated by experience. Like the whale, it “must,” if we wish truly to read it, “remain unpainted to the last.” For anyone who has experienced *Moby-Dick*, it is a privilege to introduce it to another reader—but a privilege that is abused if extended much beyond the invitation. As Melville says of the sperm whale's brow, “I but put that brow before you. Read it if you can.”

Andrew Delbanco

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A NOTE ON THE TEXT

This Penguin Classics edition of Melville's *Moby-Dick* reproduces the authoritative Approved Text of the Center for Scholarly Editions (Modern Language Association of America), published by the Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library in 1988 and edited by Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle.

MOBY-DICK;
OR,
THE WHALE.

BY
HERMAN MELVILLE,
AUTHOR OF
"TYPEE," "OMOO," "REDUBER," "MARDI," "WHITE-JACKET."

NEW YORK:
HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS.
LONDON: RICHARD BENTLEY.
1851.

Facsimile title page of the first American edition

IN TOKEN
OF MY ADMIRATION FOR HIS GENIUS,
This Book is Inscribed
TO
NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

ETYMOLOGY

(Supplied by a Late Consumptive Usher to a Grammar School.)

[The pale Usher—threadbare in coat, heart, body, and brain; I see him now. He was ever dusting his old lexicons and grammars, with a queer handkerchief, mockingly embellished with all the gay flags of all the known nations of the world. He loved to dust his old grammars; it somehow mildly reminded him of his mortality.]

Etymology

“While you take in hand to school others, and to teach them by what name a whale-fish is to be called in our tongue, leaving out, through ignorance, the letter H, which almost alone maketh up the signification of the word, you deliver that which is not true.”

Hackluyt.

“WHALE. * * * Sw. and Dan. *hval*. This animal is named from roundness or rolling; for in Dan. *hvalt* is arched or vaulted.”

Webster's Dictionary.

“WHALE. * * * It is more immediately from the Dut. and Ger. *Wallen*; A.S. *Walw-ian*, to roll, to wallow.”

Richardson's Dictionary.

יָם,

Hebrew.

κῆτος,

Greek.

CETUS,

Latin.

WHÆL,

Anglo-Saxon.

HVAL,

Danish.

WAL,

Dutch.

HWAL,

Swedish.

HVALUR, *Icelandic.*

WHALE, *English.*

BALEINE, *French.*

BALLENA, *Spanish.*

PEKEE-NUEE-NUEE, *Fegee.*

PEHEE-NUEE-NUEE, *Erromangoan.*

EXTRACTS

(Supplied by a Sub-Sub-Librarian.)

[It will be seen that this mere painstaking burrower and grub-worm of a poor devil of a Sub-Sub appears to have gone through the long Vaticans and street-stalls of the earth, picking up whatever random allusions to whales he could anyways find in any book whatsoever, sacred or profane. Therefore you must not, in every case at least, take the higgledy-piggledy whale statements, however authentic, in these extracts, for veritable gospel cetology. Far from it. As touching the ancient authors generally, as well as the poets here appearing, these extracts are solely valuable or entertaining, as affording a glancing bird's eye view of what has been promiscuously said, thought, fancied, and sung of Leviathan, by many nations and generations, including our own.

So fare thee well, poor devil of a Sub-Sub, whose commentator I am. Thou belongest to that hopeless, sallow tribe which no wine of this world will ever warm; and for whom even Pale Sherry would be too rosy-strong; but with whom one sometimes loves to sit, and feel poor-devilish, too; and grow convivial upon tears; and say to them bluntly, with full eyes and empty glasses, and in not altogether unpleasant sadness—Give it up, Sub-Subs! For by how much the more pains ye take to please the world, by so much the more shall ye for ever go thankless! Would that I could clear out Hampton Court and the Tuileries for ye! But gulp down your tears and hie aloft to the royal-mast with your hearts; for your friends who have gone before are clearing out the seven-storied heavens, and making refugees of long-pampered Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael, against your coming. Here ye

strike but splintered hearts together—there, ye shall strike unsplinterable glasses!]

Extracts

“And God created great whales.”

Genesis.

“Leviathan maketh a path to shine after him;

One would think the deep to be hoary.”

Job.

“Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah.”

Jonah.

“There go the ships; there is that Leviathan whom thou hast made to play therein.”

Psalms.

“In that day, the Lord with his sore, and great, and strong sword, shall punish Leviathan the piercing serpent, even Leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.”

Isaiah.

“And what thing soever besides cometh within the chaos of this monster’s mouth, be it beast, boat, or stone, down it goes all incontinently that foul

great swallow of his, and perisheth in the bottomless gulf of his paunch.”

Holland’s Plutarch’s Morals.

“The Indian Sea breedeth the most and the biggest fishes that are: among which the Whales and Whirlpooles called Balænæ, take up as much in length as four acres or arpens of land.”

Holland’s Pliny.

“Scarcely had we proceeded two days on the sea, when about sunrise a great many Whales and other monsters of the sea, appeared. Among the former, one was of a most monstrous size. * * This came towards us, open-mouthed, raising the waves on all sides, and beating the sea before him into a foam.”

Tooke’s Lucian. “The True History.”

“He visited this country also with a view of catching horse-whales, which had bones of very great value for their teeth, of which he brought some to the king. * * * The best whales were caught in his own country, of which some were forty-eight, some fifty yards long. He said that he was one of six who had killed sixty in two days.”

*Other or Ochter’s verbal narrative taken down
from his mouth by King Alfred. A.D. 890.*

“And whereas all the other things, whether beast or vessel, that enter into the dreadful gulf of this monster’s (whale’s) mouth, are immediately lost and swallowed up, the sea-gudgeon retires into it in great security, and there sleeps.”

MONTAIGNE.—*Apology for Raimond Sebond.*

“Let us fly, let us fly! Old Nick take me if it is not Leviathan described by the noble prophet Moses in the life of patient Job.”

Rabelais.

“This whale’s liver was two cart-loads.”

Stowe’s Annals.

“The great Leviathan that maketh the seas to seethe like boiling pan.”

Lord Bacon’s Version of the Psalms.

“Touching that monstrous bulk of the whale or work we have received nothing certain. They grow exceeding fat, insomuch that an incredible quantity of oil will be extracted out of one whale.”

Ibid. “History of Life and Death.”

“The sovereignest thing on earth is parmacetti for an inward bruise.”

King Henry.

“Very like a whale.”

Hamlet.

“Which to recure, no skill of leach’s art

Mote him availle, but to returne againe

To his wound's worker, that with lovely dart,

Dinting his breast, had bred his restless paine,

Like as the wounded whale to shore flies from the maine.”

The Fairie Queen.

“Immense as whales, the motion of whose vast bodies can in a peaceful calm trouble the ocean till it boil.”

Sir William Davenant. Preface to Gondibert.

“What spermacetti is, men might justly doubt, since the learned Hofmannus in his work of thirty years, saith plainly, *Nescio quid sit.*”

*Sir T. Browne. Of Sperma Ceti and the
Sperma Ceti Whale. Vide his V.E.*

“Like Spencer's Talus with his iron flail

He threatens ruin with his ponderous tail.

Their fixed jav'lins in his side he wears,

And on his back a grove of pikes appears.”

Walter's Battle of the Summer Islands.

“By art is created that great Leviathan, called a Commonwealth or State—
(in Latin, Civitas) which is but an artificial man.”

Opening sentence of Hobbes’s Leviathan.

“Silly Mansoul swallowed it without chewing, as if it had been a sprat in
the mouth of a whale.”

Holy War.

“That sea beast

Leviathan, which God of all his works

Created hugest that swim the ocean stream.”

Paradise Lost.

——“There Leviathan,

Hugest of living creatures, on the deep

Stretched like a promontory sleeps or swims,

And seems a moving land; and at his gills

Draws in, and at his trunk spouts out a sea.”

Ibid.

“The mighty whales which swim in a sea of water, and have a sea of oil
swimming in them.”

Fuller's Profane and Holy State.

“So close behind some promontory lie

The huge Leviathans to attend their prey,

And give no chance, but swallow in the fry,

Which through their gaping jaws mistake the way.”

Dryden's Annus Mirabilis.

“While the whale is floating, at the stern of the ship, they cut off his head, and tow it with a boat as near the shore as it will come; but it will be aground in twelve or thirteen foot water.”

Thomas Edge's Ten Voyages to Spitzbergen, in Purchass.

“In their way they saw many whales sporting in the ocean, and in wantonness fuzzing up the water through their pipes and vents, which nature has placed on their shoulders.”

Sir T. Herbert's Voyages into Asia and Africa.

Harris Coll.

“Here they saw such huge troops of whales, that they were forced to proceed with a great deal of caution for fear they should run their ship upon them.”

Schouten's Sixth Circumnavigation.

“We set sail from the Elbe, wind N. E. in the ship called The Jonas-in-the-Whale. * * *

Some say the whale can't open his mouth, but that is a fable. * * *

They frequently climb up the masts to see whether they can see a whale, for the first discoverer has a ducat for his pains. * * *

I was told of a whale taken near Hitland, that had above a barrel of herrings in his belly. * * *

One of our harpooneers told me that he caught once a whale in Spitzbergen that was white all over.”

A Voyage to Greenland, A.D. 1671.

Harris Coll.

“Several whales have come in upon this coast (Fife). Anno 1652, one eighty foot in length of the whale-bone kind came in, which, (as I was informed) beside a vast quantity of oil, did afford 500 weight of baleen. The jaws of it stand for a gate in the garden of Pitfirren.”

Sibbald's Fife and Kinross.

“Myself have agreed to try whether I can master and kill this Spermaceti whale, for I could never hear of any of that sort that was killed by any man, such as his fierceness and swiftness.”

Richard Stafford's Letter from the Bermudas.

Phil. Trans. A.D. 1668.

“Whales in the sea

God's voice obey."

N. E. Primer.

"We saw also abundance of large whales, there being more in these southern seas, as I may say, by a hundred to one; than we have to the northward of us."

Captain Cowley's Voyage round the Globe. A.D. 1.729.

* * * * * "and the breath of the whale is frequently attended with such an insupportable smell, as to bring on a disorder of the brain."

Ulloa's South America.

"To fifty chosen sylphs of special note,

We trust the important charge, the petticoat.

Oft have we known that seven-fold fence to fail,

Tho' stiff with hoops and armed with ribs of whale."

Rape of the Lock.

"If we compare land animals in respect to magnitude, with those that take up their abode in the deep, we shall find they will appear contemptible in the comparison. The whale is doubtless the largest animal in creation."

Goldsmith, Nat. His.

“If you should write a fable for little fishes, you would make them speak like great whales.”

Goldsmith to Johnson.

In the afternoon we saw what was supposed to be a rock, but it was found to be a dead whale, which some Asiatics had killed, and were then towing ashore. They seemed to endeavor to conceal themselves behind the whale, in order to avoid being seen by us.”

Cook’s Voyages.

“The larger whales, they seldom venture to attack. They stand in so great dread of some of them, that when out at sea they are afraid to mention even their names, and carry dung, brim-stone, juniper-wood, and some other articles of the same nature in their boats, in order to terrify and prevent their too near approach.”

*Uno Von Troil’s Letters on Banks’s and
Solander’s Voyage to Iceland in 1772.*

“The Spermacetti Whale found by the Nantuckois, is an active, fierce animal, and requires vast address and boldness in the fishermen.”

*Thomas Jefferson’s Whale Memorial to the
French minister in 1788.*

“And pray, sir, what in the world is equal to it?”

*Edmund Burke’s reference in Parliament
to the Nantucket Whale-Fishery.*

“Spain—a great whale stranded on the shores of Europe.”

Edmund Burke. (somewhere.)

“A tenth branch of the king’s ordinary revenue, said to be grounded on the consideration of his guarding and protecting the seas from pirates and robbers, is the right to *royal* fish, which are whale and sturgeon. And these, when either thrown ashore or caught near the coasts, are the property of the king.”

Blackstone.

“Soon to the sport of death the crews repair:

Rodmond unerring o’er his head suspends

The barbed steel, and every turn attends.”

Falconer’s Shipwreck.

“Bright shone the roofs, the domes, the spires,

And rockets flew self driven,

To hang their momentary fires

Amid the vault of heaven.

“So fire with water to compare,

The ocean serves on high,

Up-spouted by a whale in air,

To express unwieldy joy.”

Cowper, on the Queen’s Visit to London.

“Ten or fifteen gallons of blood are thrown out of the heart at a stroke, with immense velocity.”

*John Hunter’s account of the dissection
of a whale. (A small sized one.)*

“The aorta of a whale is larger in the bore than the main pipe of the water-works at London Bridge, and the water roaring in its passage through that pipe is inferior in impetus and velocity to the blood gushing from the whale’s heart.”

Paley’s Theology.

“The whale is a mammiferous animal without hind feet.”

Baron Cuvier.

“In 40 degrees south, we saw Spermacetti Whales, but did not take any till the first of May, the sea being then covered with them.”

*Colnett’s Voyage for the Purpose of
Extending the Spermacetti Whale Fishery.*

“In the free element beneath me swam,

Floundered and dived, in play, in chace, in battle,

Fishes of every color, form, and kind;
Which language cannot paint, and mariner
Had never seen; from dread Leviathan
To insect millions peopling every wave:
Gather'd in shoals immense, like floating islands,
Led by mysterious instinct through that waste
And trackless region, though on every side
Assaulted by voracious enemies,
Whales, sharks, and monsters, arm'd in front or jaw,
With swords, saws, spiral horns, or hooked fangs."

Montgomery's World before the Flood.

"Io! Pæan! Io! sing,
To the finny people's king.
Not a mightier whale than this
In the vast Atlantic is;
Not a fatter fish than he,

Flounders round the Polar Sea.”

Charles Lamb’s Triumph of the Whale.

“In the year 1690 some persons were on a high hill observing the whales spouting and sporting with each other, when one observed; there—pointing to the sea—is a green pasture where our children’s grand-children will go for bread.”

Obed Macy’s History of Nantucket.

“I built a cottage for Susan and myself and made a gateway in the form of a Gothic Arch, by setting up a whale’s jaw bones.”

Hawthorne’s Twice Told Tales.

“She came to bespeak a monument for her first love, who had been killed by a whale in the Pacific ocean, no less than forty years ago.”

Ibid.

“No, Sir, ’tis a Right Whale,” answered Tom; “I saw his spout; he threw up a pair of as pretty rainbows as a Christian would wish to look at. He’s a raal oil-butt, that fellow!”

Cooper’s Pilot.

“The papers were brought in, and we saw in the Berlin Gazette that whales had been introduced on the stage there.”

Eckermann’s Conversations with Goethe.

“My God! Mr. Chase, what is the matter?” I answered, “we have been stove by a whale.”

“Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Whale Ship Essex of Nantucket, which was attacked and finally destroyed by a large Sperm Whale in the Pacific Ocean.” By Owen Chase of Nantucket, first mate of said vessel. New York. 1821.

“A mariner sat on the shrouds one night,

The wind was piping free;

Now bright, now dimmed, was the moonlight pale,

And the phosphor gleamed in the wake of the whale,

As it floundered in the sea.”

Elizabeth Oakes Smith.

“The quantity of line withdrawn from the different boats engaged in the capture of this one whale, amounted altogether to 10,440 yards or nearly six English miles.” * * *

“Sometimes the whale shakes its tremendous tail in the air, which, cracking like a whip, resounds to the distance of three or four miles.”

Scoresby.

“Mad with the agonies he endures from these fresh attacks, the infuriated Sperm Whale rolls over and over; he rears his enormous head, and with wide expanded jaw snaps at everything around him; he rushes at the boats with

his head; they are propelled before him with vast swiftness, and sometimes utterly destroyed.

* * * It is a matter of great astonishment that the consideration of the habits of so interesting, and, in a commercial point of view, of so important an animal (as the Sperm Whale) should have been so entirely neglected, or should have excited so little curiosity among the numerous, and many of them competent observers, that of late years must have possessed the most abundant and the most convenient opportunities of witnessing their habitudes.”

Thomas Beale's History of the Sperm Whale, 1839.

“The Cachalot” (Sperm Whale) “is not only better armed than the True Whale” (Greenland or Right Whale) “in possessing a formidable weapon at either extremity of its body, but also more frequently displays a disposition to employ those weapons offensively, and in a manner at once so artful, bold, and mischievous, as to lead to its being regarded as the most dangerous to attack of all the known species of the whale tribe.”

*Frederick Debell Bennett's Whaling
Voyage Round the Globe. 1840.*

October 13. “There she blows,” was sung out from the masthead.

“Where away?” demanded the captain.

“Three points off the lee bow, sir.”

“Raise up your wheel. Steady!”

“Steady, sir.”

“Mast-head ahoy! Do you see that whale now?”

“Ay ay, sir! A shoal of Sperm Whales! There she blows! There she breaches!”

“Sing out! sing out every time!”

“Ay ay, sir! There she blows! there—there—*thar* she blows—bowes—bo-o-o-s!”

“How far off?”

“Two miles and a half.”

“Thunder and lightning! so near! Call all hands!”

*J. Ross Browne’s Etchings
of a Whaling Cruise. 1846.*

“The Whale-ship Globe, on board of which vessel occurred the horrid transactions we are about to relate, belonged to the island of Nantucket.”

*“Narrative of the Globe Mutiny,” by
Lay and Hussey, survivors. A.D. 1828.*

“Being once pursued by a whale which he had wounded, he parried the assault for some time with a lance; but the furious monster at length rushed on the boat; himself and comrades only being preserved by leaping into the water when they saw the onset was inevitable.”

Missionary Journal of Tyerman and Bennet.

“Nantucket itself,” said Mr. Webster, “is a very striking and peculiar portion of the National interest. There is a population of eight or nine thousand persons, living here in the sea, adding largely every year to the National wealth by the boldest and most persevering industry.”

Report of Daniel Webster’s Speech in the U.S. Senate, on the application for the Erection of a Breakwater at Nantucket. 1828.

“The whale fell directly over him, and probably killed him in a moment.”

“The Whale and his Captors, or The Whaleman’s Adventures and the Whale’s Biography, as gathered on the Homeward Cruise of the Commodore Preble.” By Rev. Henry T. Cheever.

“If you make the least damn bit of noise,” replied Samuel, “I will send you to hell.”

Life of Samuel Comstock (the mutineer), by his brother, William Comstock. Another Version of the whale-ship Globe narrative.

“The voyages of the Dutch and English to the Northern Ocean, in order, if possible, to discover a passage through it to India, though they failed of their main object, laid open the haunts of the whale.”

McCulloch’s Commercial Dictionary.

“These things are reciprocal; the ball rebounds, only to bound forward again; for now in laying open the haunts of the whale, the whalers seem to have indirectly hit upon new clues to that same mystic North-West Passage.”

From “Something” unpublished.

“It is impossible to meet a whale-ship on the ocean without being struck by her mere appearance. The vessel under short sail, with look-outs at the mast-heads, eagerly scanning the wide expanse around them, has a totally different air from those engaged in a regular voyage.”

Currents and Whaling. U.S. Ex. Ex.

“Pedestrians in the vicinity of London and elsewhere may recollect having seen large curved bones set upright in the earth, either to form arches over gateways, or entrances to alcoves, and they may perhaps have been told that these were the ribs of whales.”

*Tales of a Whale Voyager
to the Arctic Ocean.*

“It was not till the boats returned from the pursuit of these whales, that the whites saw their ship in bloody possession of the savages enrolled among the crew.”

*Newspaper Account of the Taking and
Retaking of the Whale-ship Hobomock.*

“It is generally well known that out of the crews of Whaling vessels (American) few ever return in the ships on board of which they departed.”

Cruise in a Whale Boat.

“Suddenly a mighty mass emerged from the water, and shot up perpendicularly into the air. It was the whale.”

Miriam Coffin or the Whale Fishermen.

“The Whale is harpooned to be sure; but bethink you, how you would manage a powerful unbroken colt, with the mere appliance of a rope tied to the root of his tail.”

A Chapter on Whaling in Ribs and Trucks.

“On one occasion I saw two of these monsters (whales) probably male and female, slowly swimming, one after the other, within less than a stone’s throw of the shore” (Terra Del Fuego), “over which the beech tree extended its branches.”

Darwin’s Voyage of a Naturalist.

“‘Stern all!’ exclaimed the mate, as upon turning his head, he saw the distended jaws of a large Sperm Whale close to the head of the boat, threatening it with instant destruction;—‘Stern all, for your lives!’”

Wharton the Whale Killer.

“So be cheery, my lads, let your hearts never fail,

While the bold harpooneer is striking the whale!”

Nantucket Song.

“Oh, the rare old Whale, mid storm and gale

In his ocean home will be

A giant in might, where might is right,

And King of the boundless sea.”

Whale Song.

MOBY-DICK

CHAPTER 1

Loomings

Call me Ishmael. Some years ago—never mind how long precisely—having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen, and regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off—then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball. With a philosophical flourish Cato^{el} throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship. There is nothing surprising in this. If they but knew it, almost all men in their degree, some time or other, cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me.

There now is your insular city of the Manhattoes, belted round by wharves as Indian isles by coral reefs—commerce surrounds it with her surf. Right and left, the streets take you waterward. Its extreme down-town is the Battery, where that noble mole is washed by waves, and cooled by breezes, which a few hours previous were out of sight of land. Look at the crowds of water-gazers there.

Circumambulate the city of a dreamy Sabbath afternoon. Go from Corlears Hook to Coenties Slip, and from thence, by Whitehall, northward. What do you see?—Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries. Some leaning against

the spiles; some seated upon the pier-heads; some looking over the bulwarks of ships from China; some high aloft in the rigging, as if striving to get a still better seaward peep. But these are all landsmen; of week days pent up in lath and plaster—tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks. How then is this? Are the green fields gone? What do they here?

But look! here come more crowds, pacing straight for the water, and seemingly bound for a dive. Strange! Nothing will content them but the extremest limit of the land; loitering under the shady lee of yonder warehouses will not suffice. No. They must get just as nigh the water as they possibly can without falling in. And there they stand—miles of them—leagues. Inlanders all, they come from lanes and alleys, streets and avenues—north, east, south, and west. Yet here they all unite. Tell me, does the magnetic virtue of the needles of the compasses of all those ships attract them thither?

Once more. Say, you are in the country; in some high land of lakes. Take almost any path you please, and ten to one it carries you down in a dale, and leaves you there by a pool in the stream. There is magic in it. Let the most absent-minded of men be plunged in his deepest reveries—stand that man on his legs, set his feet a-going, and he will infallibly lead you to water, if water there be in all that region. Should you ever be athirst in the great American desert, try this experiment, if your caravan happen to be supplied with a metaphysical professor. Yes, as every one knows, meditation and water are wedded for ever.

But here is an artist. He desires to paint you the dreamiest, shadiest, quietest, most enchanting bit of romantic landscape in all the valley of the Saco. What is the chief element he employs? There stand his trees, each with a hollow trunk, as if a hermit and a crucifix were within; and here sleeps his meadow, and there sleep his cattle; and up from yonder cottage goes a sleepy smoke. Deep into distant woodlands winds a mazy way, reaching to

overlapping spurs of mountains bathed in their hill-side blue. But though the picture lies thus tranced, and though this pine-tree shakes down its sighs like leaves upon this shepherd's head, yet all were vain, unless the shepherd's eye were fixed upon the magic stream before him. Go visit the Prairies in June, when for scores on scores of miles you wade knee-deep among Tiger-lilies—what is the one charm wanting?—Water—there is not a drop of water there! Were Niagara but a cataract of sand, would you travel your thousand miles to see it? Why did the poor poet of Tennessee, upon suddenly receiving two handfuls of silver, deliberate whether to buy him a coat, which he sadly needed, or invest his money in a pedestrian trip to Rockaway Beach? Why is almost every robust healthy boy with a robust healthy soul in him, at some time or other crazy to go to sea? Why upon your first voyage as a passenger, did you yourself feel such a mystical vibration, when first told that you and your ship were now out of sight of land? Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and make him the own brother of Jove? Surely all this is not without meaning. And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all.

Now, when I say that I am in the habit of going to sea whenever I begin to grow hazy about the eyes, and begin to be over conscious of my lungs, I do not mean to have it inferred that I ever go to sea as a passenger. For to go as a passenger you must needs have a purse, and a purse is but a rag unless you have something in it. Besides, passengers get sea-sick—grow quarrelsome—don't sleep of nights—do not enjoy themselves much, as a general thing—no, I never go as a passenger; nor, though I am something of a salt, do I ever go to sea as a Commodore, or a Captain, or a Cook. I abandon the glory and distinction of such offices to those who like them. For my part, I abominate all honorable respectable toils, trials, and tribulations of every kind whatsoever. It is quite as much as I can do to take care of myself, without

taking care of ships, barques, brigs, schooners, and what not. And as for going as cook,—though I confess there is considerable glory in that, a cook being a sort of officer on ship-board—yet, somehow, I never fancied broiling fowls—though once broiled, judiciously buttered, and judgmatically salted and peppered, there is no one who will speak more respectfully, not to say reverentially, of a broiled fowl than I will. It is out of the idolatrous dotings of the old Egyptians upon broiled ibis and roasted river horse, that you see the mummies of those creatures in their huge bake-houses the pyramids.

No, when I go to sea, I go as a simple sailor, right before the mast, plumb down into the forecastle, aloft there to the royal masthead. True, they rather order me about some, and make me jump from spar to spar, like a grasshopper in a May meadow. And at first, this sort of thing is unpleasant enough. It touches one's sense of honor, particularly if you come of an old established family in the land, the Van Rensselaers^{e2}, or Randolphs, or Hardicanutes. And more than all, if just previous to putting your hand into the tar-pot, you have been lording it as a country schoolmaster, making the tallest boys stand in awe of you. The transition is a keen one, I assure you, from a schoolmaster to a sailor, and requires a strong decoction of Seneca and the Stoics to enable you to grin and bear it. But even this wears off in time.

What of it, if some old hunks of a sea-captain orders me to get a broom and sweep down the decks? What does that indignity amount to, weighed, I mean, in the scales of the New Testament? Do you think the archangel Gabriel thinks anything the less of me, because I promptly and respectfully obey that old hunks in that particular instance? Who aint a slave? Tell me that. Well, then, however the old sea-captains may order me about—however they may thump and punch me about, I have the satisfaction of knowing that it is all right; that everybody else is one way or other served in much the same way—either in a physical or metaphysical point of view, that is; and so

the universal thump is passed round, and all hands should rub each other's shoulder-blades, and be content.

Again, I always go to sea as a sailor, because they make a point of paying me for my trouble, whereas they never pay passengers a single penny that I ever heard of. On the contrary, passengers themselves must pay. And there is all the difference in the world between paying and being paid. The act of paying is perhaps the most uncomfortable infliction that the two orchard thieves^{e3} entailed upon us. But *being paid*,—what will compare with it? The urbane activity with which a man receives money is really marvellous, considering that we so earnestly believe money to be the root of all earthly ills, and that on no account can a monied man enter heaven. Ah! how cheerfully we consign ourselves to perdition!

Finally, I always go to sea as a sailor, because of the wholesome exercise and pure air of the forecandle deck. For as in this world, head winds are far more prevalent than winds from astern (that is, if you never violate the Pythagorean maxim), so for the most part the Commodore on the quarter-deck gets his atmosphere at second hand from the sailors on the forecandle. He thinks he breathes it first; but not so. In much the same way do the commonalty lead their leaders in many other things, at the same time that the leaders little suspect it. 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. And, doubtless, my going on this whaling voyage, formed part of the grand programme of Providence that was drawn up a long time ago. It came in as a sort of brief interlude and solo between more extensive performances. I take it that this part of the bill must have run something like this:

“Grand Contested Election for the Presidency of the United States.

“WHALING VOYAGE BY ONE ISHMAEL.

“BLOODY BATTLE IN AFFGHANISTAN.”^{e4}

Though I cannot tell why it was exactly that those stage managers, the Fates, put me down for this shabby part of a whaling voyage, when others were set down for magnificent parts in high tragedies, and short and easy parts in genteel comedies, and jolly parts in farces—though I cannot tell why this was exactly; yet, now that I recall all the circumstances, I think I can see a little into the springs and motives which being cunningly presented to me under various disguises, induced me to set about performing the part I did, besides cajoling me into the delusion that it was a choice resulting from my own unbiased freewill and discriminating judgment.

Chief among these motives was the overwhelming idea of the great whale himself. Such a portentous and mysterious monster roused all my curiosity. Then the wild and distant seas where he rolled his island bulk; the undeliverable, nameless perils of the whale; these, with all the attending marvels of a thousand Patagonian sights and sounds, helped to sway me to my wish. With other men, perhaps, such things would not have been inducements; but as for me, I am tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote. I love to sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coasts. Not ignoring what is good, I am quick to perceive a horror, and could still be social with it—would they let me—since it is but well to be on friendly terms with all the inmates of the place one lodges in.

By reason of these things, then, the whaling voyage was welcome; the great flood-gates of the wonder-world swung open, and in the wild conceits that swayed me to my purpose, two and two there floated into my inmost

soul, endless processions of the whale, and, midmost of them all, one grand hooded phantom, like a snow hill in the air.

CHAPTER 2

The Carpet-Bag

I stuffed a shirt or two into my old carpet-bag, tucked it under my arm, and started for Cape Horn and the Pacific. Quitting the good city of old Manhatto, I duly arrived in New Bedford.^{e1} It was on a Saturday night in December. Much was I disappointed upon learning that the little packet for Nantucket had already sailed, and that no way of reaching that place would offer, till the following Monday.

As most young candidates for the pains and penalties of whaling stop at this same New Bedford, thence to embark on their voyage, it may as well be related that I, for one, had no idea of so doing. For my mind was made up to sail in no other than a Nantucket craft, because there was a fine, boisterous something about everything connected with that famous old island, which amazingly pleased me. Besides though New Bedford has of late been gradually monopolizing the business of whaling, and though in this matter poor old Nantucket is now much behind her, yet Nantucket was her great original—the Tyre of this Carthage;—the place where the first dead American whale was stranded. Where else but from Nantucket did those aboriginal whalers, the Red-Men, first sally out in canoes to give chase to the Leviathan? And where but from Nantucket, too, did that first adventurous little sloop put forth, partly laden with imported cobble-stones—so goes the story—to throw at the whales, in order to discover when they were nigh enough to risk a harpoon from the bowsprit?

Now having a night, a day, and still another night following before me in New Bedford, ere I could embark for my destined port, it became a matter of concernment where I was to eat and sleep meanwhile. It was a very dubious-looking, nay, a very dark and dismal night, biting cold and cheerless. I knew no one in the place. With anxious grapnels^{e2} I had sounded my pocket,

and only brought up a few pieces of silver,—So, wherever you go, Ishmael, said I to myself, as I stood in the middle of a dreary street shouldering my bag, and comparing the gloom towards the north with the darkness towards the south—wherever in your wisdom you may conclude to lodge for the night, my dear Ishmael, be sure to inquire the price, and don't be too particular.

With halting steps I paced the streets, and passed the sign of “The Crossed Harpoons”—but it looked too expensive and jolly there. Further on, from the bright red windows of the “Sword-Fish Inn,” there came such fervent rays, that it seemed to have melted the packed snow and ice from before the house, for everywhere else the congealed frost lay ten inches thick in a hard, asphaltic pavement,—rather weary for me, when I struck my foot against the flinty projections, because from hard, remorseless service the soles of my boots were in a most miserable plight. Too expensive and jolly, again thought I, pausing one moment to watch the broad glare in the street, and hear the sounds of the tinkling glasses within. But go on, Ishmael, said I at last; don't you hear? get away from before the door; your patched boots are stopping the way. So on I went. I now by instinct followed the streets that took me waterward, for there, doubtless, were the cheapest, if not the cheeriest inns.

Such dreary streets! blocks of blackness, not houses, on either hand, and here and there a candle, like a candle moving about in a tomb. At this hour of the night, of the last day of the week, that quarter of the town proved all but deserted. But presently I came to a smoky light proceeding from a low, wide building, the door of which stood invitingly open. It had a careless look, as if it were meant for the uses of the public; so, entering, the first thing I did was to stumble over an ash-box in the porch. Ha! thought I, ha, as the flying particles almost choked me, are these ashes from that destroyed city, Gomorrah? But “The Crossed Harpoons,” and “The Sword-Fish?”—this,

then, must needs be the sign of “The Trap.” However, I picked myself up and hearing a loud voice within, pushed on and opened a second, interior door.

It seemed the great Black Parliament sitting in Tophet. A hundred black faces turned round in their rows to peer; and beyond, a black Angel of Doom was beating a book in a pulpit. It was a negro church;^{e3} and the preacher’s text was about the blackness of darkness, and the weeping and wailing and teeth-gnashing there. Ha, Ishmael, muttered I, backing out, Wretched entertainment at the sign of “The Trap!”

Moving on, I at last came to a dim sort of out-hanging light not far from the docks, and heard a forlorn creaking in the air; and looking up, saw a swinging sign over the door with a white painting upon it, faintly representing a tall straight jet of misty spray, and these words underneath —“The Spouter-Inn:—Peter Coffin.”

Coffin?—Spouter?—Rather ominous in that particular connexion, thought I. But it is a common name in Nantucket, they say, and I suppose this Peter here is an emigrant from there. As the light looked so dim, and the place, for the time, looked quiet enough, and the dilapidated little wooden house itself looked as if it might have been carted here from the ruins of some burnt district, and as the swinging sign had a poverty-stricken sort of creak to it, I thought that here was the very spot for cheap lodgings, and the best of pea coffee.

It was a queer sort of place—a gable-ended old house, one side palsied as it were, and leaning over sadly. It stood on a sharp bleak corner, where that tempestuous wind Euroclydon kept up a worse howling than ever it did about poor Paul’s tossed craft. Euroclydon, nevertheless, is a mighty pleasant zephyr to any one in-doors, with his feet on the hob quietly toasting for bed. “In judging of that tempestuous wind called Euroclydon,” says an

old writer—of whose works I possess the only copy extant—“it maketh a marvellous difference, whether thou lookest out at it from a glass window where the frost is all on the outside, or whether thou observest it from that sashless window, where the frost is on both sides, and of which the wight Death is the only glazier.” True enough, thought I, as this passage occurred to my mind—old black-letter, thou reasonest well. Yes, these eyes are windows, and this body of mine is the house. What a pity they didn’t stop up the chinks and the crannies though, and thrust in a little lint here and there. But it’s too late to make any improvements now. The universe is finished; the copestone is on, and the chips were carted off a million years ago. Poor Lazarus there, chattering his teeth against the curbstone for his pillow, and shaking off his tatters with his shiverings, he might plug up both ears with rags, and put a corn-cob into his mouth, and yet that would not keep out the tempestuous Euroclydon. Euroclydon! says old Dives, in his red silken wrapper (he had a redder one afterwards)—pooh, pooh! What a fine frosty night; how Orion glitters; what northern lights! Let them talk of their oriental summer climes of everlasting conservatories; give me the privilege of making my own summer with my own coals.

But what thinks Lazarus? Can he warm his blue hands by holding them up to the grand northern lights? Would not Lazarus rather be in Sumatra than here? Would he not far rather lay him down lengthwise along the line of the equator; yea, ye gods! go down to the fiery pit itself, in order to keep out this frost?

Now, that Lazarus should lie stranded there on the curbstone before the door of Dives, this is more wonderful than that an iceberg should be moored to one of the Moluccas. Yet Dives himself, he too lives like a Czar in an ice palace made of frozen sighs, and being a president of a temperance society, he only drinks the tepid tears of orphans.

But no more of this blubbering now, we are going a-whaling, and there is plenty of that yet to come. Let us scrape the ice from our frosted feet, and see what sort of a place this “Spouter” may be.

CHAPTER 3

The Spouter-Inn

Entering that gable-ended Spouter-Inn, you found yourself in a wide, low, straggling entry with old-fashioned wainscots, reminding one of the bulwarks of some condemned old craft. On one side hung a very large oil-painting so thoroughly besmoked, and every way defaced, that in the unequal cross-lights by which you viewed it, it was only by diligent study and a series of systematic visits to it, and careful inquiry of the neighbors, that you could any way arrive at an understanding of its purpose. Such unaccountable masses of shades and shadows, that at first you almost thought some ambitious young artist, in the time of the New England hags, had endeavored to delineate chaos bewitched. But by dint of much and earnest contemplation, and oft repeated ponderings, and especially by throwing open the little window towards the back of the entry, you at last came to the conclusion that such an idea, however wild, might not be altogether unwarranted.

But what most puzzled and confounded you was a long, limber, portentous, black mass of something hovering in the centre of the picture over three blue, dim, perpendicular lines floating in a nameless yeast. A boggy, soggy, squitchy picture truly, enough to drive a nervous man distracted. Yet was there a sort of indefinite, halfattained, unimaginable sublimity about it that fairly froze you to it, till you involuntarily took an oath with yourself to find out what that marvellous painting meant. Ever and anon a bright, but, alas, deceptive idea would dart you through.—It's the Black Sea in a midnight gale.—It's the unnatural combat of the four primal elements.—It's a blasted heath.—It's a Hyperborean^{ei} winter scene.—It's the breaking-up of the ice-bound stream of Time. But at last all these fancies yielded to that one portentous something in the picture's midst. *That* once

found out, and all the rest were plain. But stop; does it not bear a faint resemblance to a gigantic fish? even the great leviathan himself?

In fact, the artist's design seemed this: a final theory of my own, partly based upon the aggregated opinions of many aged persons with whom I conversed upon the subject. The picture represents a Cape-Horner in a great hurricane; the half-foundered ship weltering there with its three dismantled masts alone visible; and an exasperated whale, purposing to spring clean over the craft, is in the enormous act of impaling himself upon the three mast-heads.

The opposite wall of this entry was hung all over with a heathenish array of monstrous clubs and spears. Some were thickly set with glittering teeth resembling ivory saws; others were tufted with knots of human hair; and one was sickle-shaped, with a vast handle, sweeping round like the segment made in the new-mown grass by a long-armed mower. You shuddered as you gazed, and wondered what monstrous cannibal and savage could ever have gone a death-harvesting with such a hacking, horrifying implement. Mixed with these were rusty old whaling lances and harpoons all broken and deformed. Some were storied weapons. With this once long lance, now wildly elbowed, fifty years ago did Nathan Swain kill fifteen whales between a sunrise and a sunset. And that harpoon—so like a corkscrew now—was flung in Javan seas, and run away with by a whale, years afterwards slain off the Cape of Blanco. The original iron entered nigh the tail, and, like a restless needle sojourning in the body of a man, travelled full forty feet, and at last was found imbedded in the hump.

Crossing this dusky entry, and on through yon low-arched way—cut through what in old times must have been a great central chimney with fire-places all round—you enter the public room. A still duskier place is this, with such low ponderous beams above, and such old wrinkled planks beneath, that you would almost fancy you trod some old craft's cockpits, especially of

such a howling night, when this corner-anchored old ark rocked so furiously. On one side stood a long, low, shelf-like table covered with cracked glass cases, filled with dusty rarities gathered from this wide world's remotest nooks. Projecting from the further angle of the room stands a dark-looking den—the bar—a rude attempt at a right whale's head. Be that how it may, there stands the vast arched bone of the whale's jaw, so wide, a coach might almost drive beneath it. Within are shabby shelves, ranged round with old decanters, bottles, flasks; and in those jaws of swift destruction, like another cursed Jonah (by which name indeed they called him), bustles a little withered old man, who, for their money, dearly sells the sailors deliriums and death.

Abominable are the tumblers into which he pours his poison. Though true cylinders without—within, the villanous green goggling glasses deceitfully tapered downwards to a cheating bottom. Parallel meridians rudely pecked into the glass, surround these footpads' goblets. Fill to *this* mark, and your charge is but a penny; to *this* a penny more; and so on to the full glass—the Cape Horn measure, which you may gulph down for a shilling.

Upon entering the place I found a number of young seamen gathered about a table, examining by a dim light divers specimens of *skrimshander*. I sought the landlord, and telling him I desired to be accommodated with a room, received for answer that his house was full—not a bed unoccupied. “But avast,” he added, tapping his forehead, “you haint no objections to sharing a harpooneer's blanket, have ye? I s'pose you are goin' a whalin', so you'd better get used to that sort of thing.”

I told him that I never liked to sleep two in a bed; that if I should ever do so, it would depend upon who the harpooneer might be, and that if he (the landlord) really had no other place for me, and the harpooneer was not decidedly objectionable, why rather than wander further about a strange

town on so bitter a night, I would put up with the half of any decent man's blanket.

"I thought so. All right; take a seat. Supper?—you want supper? Supper 'll be ready directly."

I sat down on an old wooden settle, carved all over like a bench on the Battery. At one end a ruminating tar was still further adorning it with his jack-knife, stooping over and diligently working away at the space between his legs. He was trying his hand at a ship under full sail, but he didn't make much headway, I thought.

At last some four or five of us were summoned to our meal in an adjoining room. It was cold as Iceland—no fire at all—the landlord said he couldn't afford it. Nothing but two dismal tallow candles, each in a winding sheet. We were fain to button up our monkey jackets, and hold to our lips cups of scalding tea with our half frozen fingers. But the fare was of the most substantial kind—not only meat and potatoes, but dumplings; good heavens! dumplings for supper! One young fellow in a green box coat, addressed himself to these dumplings in a most direful manner.

"My boy," said the landlord, "you'll have the nightmare to a dead sartainty."

"Landlord," I whispered, "that aint the harpooneer, is it?"

"Oh, no," said he, looking a sort of diabolically funny, "the harpooner is a dark complexioned chap. He never eats dumplings, he don't—he eats nothing but steaks, and likes 'em rare."

"The devil he does," says I. "Where is that harpooneer? Is he here?"

“He’ll be here afore long,” was the answer.

I could not help it, but I began to feel suspicious of this “dark complexioned” harpooneer. At any rate, I made up my mind that if it so turned out that we should sleep together, he must undress and get into bed before I did.

Supper over, the company went back to the bar-room, when, knowing not what else to do with myself, I resolved to spend the rest of the evening as a looker on.

Presently a rioting noise was heard without. Starting up, the landlord cried, “That’s the Grampus’s crew. I seed her reported in the offing this morning; a four years’ voyage, and a full ship. Hurrah, boys; now we’ll have the latest news from the Feegees.”

A tramping of sea boots was heard in the entry; the door was flung open, and in rolled a wild set of mariners enough. Enveloped in their shaggy watch coats, and with their heads muffled in woollen comforters, all bedarned and ragged, and their beards stiff with icicles, they seemed an eruption of bears from Labrador. They had just landed from their boat, and this was the first house they entered. No wonder, then, that they made a straight wake for the whale’s mouth—the bar—when the wrinkled little old Jonah, there officiating, soon poured them out brimmers all round. One complained of a bad cold in his head, upon which Jonah mixed him a pitch-like potion of gin and molasses, which he swore was a sovereign cure for all colds and catarrhs whatsoever, never mind of how long standing, or whether caught off the coast of Labrador, or on the weather side of an ice-island.

The liquor soon mounted into their heads, as it generally does even with the arrantest toppers newly landed from sea, and they began capering about most obstreperously.