Moby-Dick

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF HERMAN MELVILLE

Herman Melville's writings have granted him worldwide renown since his death, at the end of the 19th century, but he was read only fitfully by the American public during his lifetime, and his greatest literary achievements were received with a mixture of puzzlement and disregard. Coming from a relatively well-to-do New York family, with aristocratic connections on his mother Maria Gansevoort's side, Melville's father Allan lost a great deal of money when Herman was a young man. As a result, Melville attended several schools in New York State, but never learned any one trade. He taught high school in various New York State locations, and later decided to try his fate on the open sea as a sailor, much as his narrator Ishmael does in *Moby Dick*. Melville gathered material on several long sea voyages, which was fictionalized later in the novels *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847). These novels established Melville's early reputation as a writer of adventures—a reputation Melville could not shake during his life, even as his work grew stranger, and became infused with philosophical and religious themes. Melville married in 1847 and began work on a series of other fiction projects, including *Moby Dick*, which was completed in 1851, in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Melville befriended fellow novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne during this period, and dedicated *Moby Dick* to him. The novel, now widely viewed as one of the greatest in the English language, earned mixed reviews upon its publication. Melville's other, later works, including *Pierre*, *Benito Cereno*, and *The Confidence-Man*, did even worse among the reading public. To earn money in later life, Melville took a job in a customs house. He died in 1891, and his reputation among American writers was not rehabilitated fully until the early 1900s.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The 1850s were a time of political upheaval in the United States, which led, ultimately, to the breakout of the American Civil War in 1861. They were also a period of rapid industrialization, or the transition from a local, "cottage" economy of artisanal production, to large-scale production of goods in urban centers, like New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Baltimore. Industrialization took place largely in the more densely-populated north, and resulted in the linking of northern cities with efficient rail lines, used to transport goods, and, later, materiel for the Civil War. In addition, the 1850s reflected a high point in the sailing and whaling industries, as large sailing vessels were used to transport items across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe, and across the Pacific and Indian Oceans to reach parts of Asia. These voyages were dangerous, but American sailing fleets—located in port towns along the northeast of the US, including New Bedford, Massachusetts, as described in *Moby Dick*—were large, and many boats offered positions to young men who wished to leave home. Thus *Moby Dick* treats many of the scientific advances being made at this time—advances in biology that allowed for a more detailed understanding of whale anatomy, for example—without abandoning the philosophical and religious investigations so prominent in a country that, 80 years after its founding, was still dominated by Protestant Christian denominations in New England and parts of the Mid-Atlantic. In this sense, *Moby Dick* uses the trappings of a whaling and adventure novel as an excuse, or a platform, for a much broader-ranging examination of American life in the middle of the 19th century.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Melville's *Moby Dick* might be compared, most immediately, to the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, with whom Melville struck up a friendship during the composition of the novel. Hawthorne was perhaps the most famous prose writer in the United States at the time, the author of poems and short stories like "Young Goodman Brown," and his *The Scarlet Letter* came out in 1850, not long before *Moby Dick*. *The Scarlet Letter*—a fixture on many American high school literature syllabi—tells the story of Hester Prynne, and the "shame" resulting from a pregnancy occurring outside the bounds of marriage. Hawthorne's examination of Prynne's psychological response to these events, as well as the feelings of those in her small New England town, show a complex understanding of the interaction of doubt, grief, and contentment. In some sense, then, the psychological inquiries made by Melville and by Hawthorne are a broad response to the primary literary currents in American life in the generation preceding them. That period, in the early 1800s, was dominated by the "transcendentalist" writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Emerson, drawing widely from the religious traditions of the East and West, wrote poems and essays investigating the particular American spirit he had encountered during his life in the "new world." And Thoreau, whose *Walden* is one of the most famous collections of memoir and philosophical reflection ever published, seeks to determine man's relation to nature, to his fellow man, and to friendship, all during a period of relative seclusion near the now-famous Walden Pond in Massachusetts. Thus Melville and Hawthorne wrote on similar themes—man's relationship to God, fate, and nature—but from the perspective of a more industrialized, more populous society in the middle of the 1800s. Melville, in particular, set several of his writings in New York City, which

was emerging at that time as one of the great urban centers in the new world.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Moby Dick; or, The Whale*
- **When Written:** 1850-1851
- **Where Written:** Pittsfield, Massachusetts
- **When Published:** 1851
- **Literary Period:** Pre-Civil War American fiction; the "transcendentalist" and "post-transcendentalist" eras
- **Genre:** Novel of the sea; whaling novel; episodic novel; novel of ideas; precursor to the modernist novel
- **Setting:** Primarily on the Pequod, a whaling vessel, throughout the Indian and Pacific Oceans, in the late 1840s
- **Climax:** On the third day of the chase, Moby Dick causes Ahab to kill himself, by snagging himself in his own harpoon-line; Moby Dick then smashes into the Pequod, drowning all aboard except Ishmael, who lives to report the story of the whale.
- **Antagonist:** Moby Dick, the White Whale
- **Point of View:** Mostly first person from Ishmael's point of view, although a number of sections appear to be narrated by a third-person-like presence, since Ishmael cannot have seen the events being reported in the narrative

EXTRA CREDIT

Short chapters. Although *Moby Dick* is often regarded, in the popular imagination, as a novel of interminable length, it is actually divided into 136 rather short chapters—some of which are no longer than a couple paragraphs. This style of writing, in which a larger narrative is broken into much smaller chunks, is known as "episodic" writing.

Alternate title. Perhaps as a way of emphasizing the novel's concern with whales and whaling, *Moby Dick* was initially titled *The Whale* when it was released in England in 1851.

PLOT SUMMARY

The novel begins with a famous line: "Call me Ishmael." Ishmael, the narrator of *Moby Dick*, seeks "freedom" from his life in New York City, and decides to head north to New Bedford, Massachusetts, to find a job on a whaling ship. In New Bedford, at the Spouter Inn, Ishmael meets Queequeg, a "native" man from Kokovoko, in the Pacific isles, who is trained as a harpooner on whale-ships—a man who actually hunts and catches **whales**. Although Ishmael is initially scared of Queequeg, the two quickly become friends, and vow to accompany each other on a ship of Ishmael's choosing, in Nantucket.

There, Ishmael comes across a ship called the Pequod, and when he speaks to two of the boats owners, Peleg and Bildad, he realizes that the captain of the Pequod, called Ahab, is a "strange" man, possibly mad, who does not tend to associate with others. Ishmael later finds out that Ahab lost his leg to a particularly nasty whale, who bit it off; this whale is called Moby Dick, and is famous for its whiteness, its ferocity, and its inability to be caught. Despite fears of Ahab—and the harsh-sounding prophecies of a man named Elijah, who warns Ishmael and Queequeg of the captain—the two men decide to ship out on the Pequod. The ship leaves Nantucket on Christmas Day.

Once at sea, Ishmael introduces the particulars of the boat and of whaling, and often makes asides to the reader regarding the historical, scientific, religious, and philosophical components of whale-fishing. Ishmael also introduces Starbuck, the practical and cautious first mate, Stubb, the wild and talented whale-fisher and second mate, and Flask, the "mediocre" third mate. Ahab finally makes an appearance on the deck of the Pequod, and announces to the crew that, although they are a normal whaling ship, they also have a special mission—to find and kill Moby Dick. Ahab vows to give a one-ounce gold doubloon to the first man to spot the "white whale."

The Pequod has a series of "gams," or meetings at sea, with other boats, some of whom have experienced good luck on the high seas, others which have been devastated by accidents, storms, or encounters with Moby Dick. One ship, the Town-Ho, tells a long story of a mutiny interrupted by Moby Dick; another, the Rose-Bud, simply complains of "sick" whales it has tied to its side. During this long intermediate section of the novel, the Pequod sails through the Indian and into the Pacific Oceans, Stubb catches a whale (and Ishmael describes how the whale is skinned, and its oil drained), and Ahab continues to plot for the white whale's destruction.

Ahab has the ship's carpenter make him a new ivory leg when his old one splinters, and Queequeg, believing that he is dying of fever, asks the carpenter to make him a casket, which, when Queequeg recovers, becomes the life-buoy for the ship. Ahab also asks the ship's blacksmith, Perth, to make him a new harpoon, which Ahab then "baptizes" with the blood of Tashtego, Daggoo, and Queequeg, the ship's three "heathen" harpooners. It is also revealed, in this middle section, that Ahab has snuck five men, one named Fedallah, and all from an unnamed country in Asia, aboard the Pequod, to help him find and kill Moby Dick. Stubb and Flask are convinced that Fedallah is the "devil incarnate," and that Ahab has sold his soul to the devil to catch the white whale.

Finally, near Japan, Ahab becomes sure that Moby Dick is nearby, after having several other gams with ships that have spotted the whale. Ahab sights Moby Dick first, and the whale chase goes on to last for three days. On the first, Ahab attempts to throw the harpoon at Moby Dick, but misses; his small whale-boat is capsized, but all return safely to the Pequod. On

the second, Ahab manages to snag Moby Dick with his harpoon, but Fedallah becomes caught in the harpoon-**line** and drowns when Moby Dick dives into the deep. On the third, though Starbuck warns Ahab to quit the mission, Ahab again approaches Moby Dick and throws his harpoon—but this time, Ahab is caught in the line, and he is hanged and drowned with his own rope. Moby Dick then turns and smashes into the Pequod, causing that ship to sink, and killing everyone aboard except Ishmael, who escapes "to tell the tale" by floating on Queequeg's coffin. Ishmael is picked up by the Rachel, a ship with which the Pequod previously had a gam. The novel ends.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Ishmael – The narrator of the novel, and its protagonist, Ishmael is a relatively poor young man in New York City at the beginning of the narrative. On a whim, Ishmael decides to take up a job on a whaling vessel, because he craves "freedom" and adventure. Ishmael meets and befriends Queequeg, a harpooneer, and the two set off on the Pequod, meeting Ahab, the ship's crew, and the terrible Moby Dick. Ishmael documents much of the action on the ship, and also informs the reader of the philosophically, scientific, and religious aspects of sailing and whaling. Ishmael is the only character in the novel to survive the wreck of the Pequod. It is worth noting that while Ishmael tells the reader to "Call him Ishmael," in the famous first line of the novel, there is no certainty that Ishmael is in fact his given name, a fact that both hints at the limits of knowledge that is a theme of the book and highlights the name's Biblical origin, as the Biblical Ishmael was an orphan of sorts, abandoned along with his mother Hagar by his father (and his mother's master) Abraham.

Queequeg – A harpooneer from the Pacific island of Kokovoko, Queequeg left his home and royal position on his Island at a young age to try his luck on whale-ships in the United States. Queequeg is a loyal friend to Ishmael, and the two have an intimate bond that transcends their differences and spans their entire time on the Pequod. Although Queequeg saves a number of characters in the novel from drowning, and almost dies of a fever, he survives until the wreck of the Pequod, in which he drowns.

Ahab – The "monomaniacal" captain of the Pequod, Ahab is a brooding, proud, solitary figure, deathly angry that the monster Moby Dick has eaten his leg. Ahab vows revenge on the animal, even though others, like Starbuck, warn him that no "revenge" is possible against a "dumb animal." Ahab admits that he is not just hunting Moby Dick, but "whatever lies behind" the **whale**, and his quest becomes a kind of metaphor for the human condition, battling for meaning and life in a world and against forces that are at once incomprehensible and unconquerable. Ahab is eventually killed by his own harpoon-**line**, in an attempt to harpoon Moby Dick before the whale smashes into the Pequod.

Moby Dick – The novel's antagonist, Moby Dick is a white **whale**, wild and lethal, hunted by many and killed by none. No one in the novel, not even Ahab, succeeds in catching the whale, and Moby Dick eventually destroys the Pequod and nearly all its crew. Moby Dick is seen by the characters as both a monstrous whale and as a symbol, or stand-in, for fate, divine power, or God himself.

Starbuck – Ahab's first mate, Starbuck is loyal, practical, ethical, and cautious, perhaps overly so. He does not want Ahab to attack Moby Dick, and recognized both the physical and moral danger of Ahab's obsession, but he also lacks the passion and conviction to stand up to Ahab. Starbuck notably passes up a chance to kill Ahab, deciding that to do so would be wrong, even if it were to save the rest of the crew.

Fedallah – Snuck aboard the Pequod by Ahab, Fedallah, or "the Parsee," is a man of indeterminate Asian origin, who serves as Ahab's harpooneer. Fedallah is believed by some on the ship, including Stubb and Flask, to be the "devil incarnate." Fedallah is killed during the second day of the chase, when he is caught in the **line** and dragged down into the water by Moby Dick.

Steelkilt – A gifted sailor from the area of the United States around Lake Erie, Steelkilt leads a mutiny on the ship the Town-Ho that nearly succeeds, until it is interrupted by the presence of Moby Dick. Steelkilt later escapes the ship and sails back to Europe, without being punished for his treason.

Pip – An African American boy, Pip has small jobs on the Pequod, mostly cleaning the decks, but goes mad after falling out of Stubb's whale-boat (he had been called into rowing duty after another sailor fell ill) and being left alone for some time in the sea before being rescued. Pip, in his madness, becomes attached to the also mad Ahab at the end of the novel.

Gardiner – Captain of the Rachel, Gardiner begs Ahab to help him find his son, who was lost in a whale-boat during the hunt for Moby Dick. But Ahab refuses to help Gardiner, saying he has no time to spare in his search for Moby Dick. Gardiner, still searching for his lost son, finds Ishmael after everyone else on the Pequod has been killed by Moby Dick.

Bulkington – The Pequod's pilot, or steering-man, as it leaves the docks in Nantucket, Bulkington is praised by Ishmael at the beginning of the novel and then forgotten. To Ishmael, Bulkington is a symbol of the many good men whose stories are not told, and who are made to die with the "more famous" or more notable men, like Ahab and Queequeg, who form the basis of the novel.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Father Mapple – A preacher at the Whaleman's Chapel, in New

Bedford, Father Mapple urges the sailors, through the Biblical story of Jonah and the Whale, to "do their duty," and to obey their captains while at sea.

Stubb – Ahab's second mate, Stubb is a gifted whaler and a free spirit, often seen smoking his pipe while doing difficult tasks. Stubb thinks Ahab is mad, but decides he has no problem following Ahab's orders to find and kill Moby Dick.

Flask – Ahab's third mate, Flask is mostly known as a "mediocrity," neither as cautious as Starbuck nor as gifted at whaling as Stubb.

Tashtego – One of the ship's "heathen" harpooneers, Tashtego is a Native American from Martha's Vineyard. Tashtego is the last of the Pequod's crew to fall beneath the waves when the ship sinks.

Daggoo – The third of the ship's "heathen" harpooneers, Daggoo hails from Africa, and is believed to be a "savage" by some of the crew-members.

Peleg – One of the Pequod's owners, Peleg warns Ishmael that Ahab is a strange captain and is perhaps mad.

Bildad – Another of the Pequod's owners, Bildad is known for his overt religiosity, and for his desire that Queequeg convert to Christianity before becoming a member of the Pequod's crew.

Mrs. Hussey – One of the managers of the Try-Pots Inn in Nantucket, Mrs. Hussey helps to get Ishmael and Queequeg settled as they are en route to their sea voyage on the Pequod.

Radney – Radney, first mate of the Town-Ho and enemy to Steelkilt, opposes his mutiny, but is killed by Moby Dick during the attempted hunt.

Fleece – One of the ship's cooks, Fleece is teased by Stubb for over-cooking the whale-meat Stubb has skinned from a **whale** he recently caught.

Boomer – Captain of the Samuel Enderby, Boomer has lost an arm to Moby Dick, just like Ahab has lost a leg. But unlike Ahab, Boomer does not hold a grudge against the **whale**, believing Moby Dick is only a "brute animal."

Elijah – A "prophet" who speaks to Ishmael and Queequeg before they board the Pequod, Elijah warns them of Ahab's madness, and of a shadow-crew, led by Fedallah, whom Ahab has snuck aboard the vessel.

The Pequod's carpenter – Greatly skilled at his craft, the Pequod's carpenter is asked to fashion Ahab a new leg out of **whale** ivory, and to make a coffin for Queequeg, which is later sealed and used as the ship's life buoy.

Perth – The ship's blacksmith, Perth is asked, by Ahab, to manufacture a new harpoon Ahab can use to kill Moby Dick.

Gabriel – Another prophet on the ship the Jeroboam, Gabriel warns his captain, Mayhew, and his first mate, Macey, not to hunt Moby Dick, since that **whale** is the "God of the Shakers."

Mayhew – Captain of the Jeroboam, Mayhew does not listen to Gabriel's warning, and Macey, the first mate, dies as a result, knocked off the decks by Moby Dick.

Macey – First mate of the Jeroboam, and killed by Moby Dick, Macey is another of the novel's characters to be murdered, mangled, or made to disappear by the **whale**.

Derick – A whaler of little skill and captain of the Virgin, Derick has a hard time catching any **whales**, and does not obey whaling etiquette, attempting to take some of the whales that the Pequod had been hunting.

Tranquo – A king on the island of Tranque. Ishmael reports that, after the events of the novel, he met with Tranquo and saw the king's **whale** skeleton, which measured 72 feet in length.

Peter Coffin – The owner of the Spouter Inn, where Ishmael meets Queequeg.

Hosea Hussey – The owner of the Try Pots Inn on Nantucket.

Yojo – Queequeg's god, represented in a little wooden idol.

Aunt Charity – Bildad's sister.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE

One of the novel's primary themes is that neither nature nor human life can be understood perfectly. At times during the voyage, the Pequod's crewmembers reflect, with feelings ranging from cheerful resignation to despair, on the uncertainty of their fate. This uncertainty parallels the doubts of religious faith. Ishmael notably remarks that "our souls are like those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them: the secret of our paternity lies in their grave, and we must there to learn it." The implication is that complete knowledge of oneself and of God comes only in death. Ignorance is a condition of human life. Human ignorance is also represented by a lack of knowledge, among the Pequod's crew at sea, about the world beyond its sight: the vessel must rely on encounters with other ships to gather news and information, as well as to gather clues about where Moby Dick might be.

In this way, the Pequod's doomed pursuit of Moby Dick symbolizes man's futile pursuit of complete knowledge. In explaining life at sea and the nature of whales, Ishmael's narrative teems with detailed references to scientific, religious, historical, and literary texts relating to the **whale** and whaling

history. However, Ishmael also emphasizes that the **whale** is "the one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last," and that the only way to know what a whale is really like is to go whaling oneself—a dangerous, often fatal enterprise. The **whale**, in its ultimate mystery, represents the limits of human knowledge.

FATE AND FREE WILL

Despite their awareness of the limits of human knowledge, Ishmael and other characters are often trying to interpret signs of the world around them in order to determine their fates. At the beginning of the book, Ishmael intimates that it was fate that led him to decide, after many merchant voyages, to sign up for a whaling ship—although at the time it felt like he was doing so of his own free will. Over the course of the novel, it remains a question whether fate is a real force driving the book's events or whether it is something that exists primarily in characters' minds.

As Ishmael and Queequeg head towards the Pequod to set sail, a mysterious and intimidating stranger named Elijah (like the Biblical prophet) drops ominous hints about the voyage they have ahead. Prophecies, portents, and superstitions are a major part of life on board the Pequod. No one believes more strongly in fate than Ahab, whose monomaniacal pursuit of Moby Dick is based, not just on the desire for revenge, but a belief that it is his destiny to slay the **whale**. This belief, combined with his egotism, actually leads him to ignore three major omens which suggest the voyage is doomed: the breaking of his quadrant, the compass needles going haywire after a storm, and the snapping of the ship's log-line. It remains unclear whether it is fate or Ahab's own free will that leads to his ruin.

NATURE AND MAN

The novel centers on man's multi-faceted interaction with nature, whether by trying to control or tame it; understand it; profit from it; or, in Ahab's case, defeat it. The book implies that nature, much like the **whale**, is an impersonal and inscrutable phenomenon. Man tends to treat nature as an entity with motives or emotions, when in fact nature is ultimately indifferent to man. The cautious and pragmatic Starbuck is one character who sees the **whale** as just an animal; he admonishes Ahab for seeking revenge on Moby Dick, saying, "To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous." Ahab gives a long reply that suggests he sees the whale, not just as an animal, but as the mask for a higher entity, "some unknown but still reasoning thing… 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." The novel portrays this defiance as both insane and blasphemous, contrasting it with the attitude of Starbuck, who avoids foolish risks and remains aware that he is there to kill whales for a living "and not to be killed by them for theirs."

RACE, FELLOWSHIP, AND ENSLAVEMENT

The book explores many different forms of equality, fellowship, and enslavement in human relations. A notable example of fellowship and racial tolerance is Ishmael's close friendship with Queequeg. Although Ishmael is initially repulsed and terrified by Queequeg's appearance and background, he soon perceives Queequeg to be principled, loyal, affectionate, and talented. The two men become "married," in Queequeg's parlance, meaning that they vow to join their fates and lay down their lives for each other.

The organization of the Pequod is portrayed as more meritocratic and less racist than society at large. The crew is racially diverse, with rank and pay dependent on skill; meanwhile, the men are financially interdependent, since none of them are paid upfront and any profit will arise from collective success. This interdependence also takes a physical form: Ishmael notes that the Pequod is distinct among whaling boats in that a harpooner and the crew member in charge of holding onto him with a **rope** are tied together, so that if the harpooner is dragged into the sea, the corresponding crew member will be dragged down too.

The Pequod does parallel conventional society in that the captain and mates are all white, while all the harpooners working under them (as well as many lower-order crew members) are non-white. However, *all* members of the Pequod's crew are subject to Ahab's whims and bouts of frenzy; in this sense, they are all equally enslaved. Early in the novel, Ishmael asks rhetorically, "Who ain't a slave?" He is referring to the fact that most people, and not just sailors like him, live at the beck and call of others; everybody follows orders, and everybody is subjugated in some way. Notably, Ishmael's chosen name ("Call me Ishmael," he says in the opening chapter, making it unclear whether it is his real or assumed name) is Biblical in origin, and refers to the prophet Abraham's son with the slave woman Hagar.

MADNESS

Through the contrasting characters of Ahab and Pip, the novel presents two very different portraits of madness and its consequences. Throughout the voyage, Ahab's madness holds sway over the sanity of other characters, most notably his reasonable and prudent first mate Starbuck. Insanity of a different kind is seen in Pip who, like Ahab, goes mad after a traumatic experience at sea. However, while Ahab's madness propels him to action, Pip's madness effectively paralyzes him and leaves his mind empty. Perhaps fittingly, then, Pip is the only person on board with whom Ahab

develops an affectionate and protective relationship.

One of the interesting implications of madness aboard the Pequod, however, is the willingness of the members of the crew to go along with Ahab's strange quest, even when they recognize how difficult, perhaps impossible, it would be to find a single whale in all the oceans of the world. But the crew of the Pequod *does* sign on for the whale-hunt, motivated not simply by the presence of the gold doubloon (which eventually goes down with the ship), but by the mania Ahab has encouraged, the "monomaniacal" pursuit for one whale.

RELIGION

Religion is a major point of reference for Ishmael. In New Bedford, before the voyage, he visits a "Whaleman's Chapel" and hears a long and heated sermon, delivered by the stern Father Mapple, that centers on the story of Jonah and the whale. The sermon recounts Jonah's futile attempt to flee God, and suggests that the harder Jonah tries to escape, the harsher becomes his punishment. Father Mapple emphasizes that, after being swallowed by the whale, Jonah does not pray for deliverance, but accepts his punishment. Only then does God relent and bring Jonah to safety. After being saved from the whale and the sea, Jonah goes on, in Father Mapple's words, "[t]o preach the Truth to the face of Falsehood." Jonah's preaching parallels Ishmael's eventual telling of his own whaling story, when he becomes (whether through luck, fate, or divine intervention) the lone survivor of the Pequod's wreck.

Although heavy with references to the Bible and Christianity, the book does not espouse one religion, instead suggesting that goodness can be found in people of any faith. After striking up a friendship with Queequeg, Ishmael quickly becomes tolerant of his new friend's religion, even going so far as to participate in Queequeg's ritual homage to a carven idol—a practice explicitly forbidden by Christianity. Religious tolerance is also a notable part of life on board the ship, with so-called heathens and Christians working side by side.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE WHITE WHALE

Moby Dick, or the White Whale, is not just the dominant symbol of the novel *Moby Dick*—he is also one of the most recognizable symbols in 19th-century American literature. At various points throughout the novel, Ishmael and other characters compare Moby Dick directly to a god—an all-powerful, seemingly unstoppable being, one that cannot be defeated, and who imposes its desires on the world around it. Ishmael, Ahab, and Starbuck (the "least courageous" and most doubting of the ship's mates) understand that the search for Moby Dick is not simply a mission of vengeance—although it is that, in part. They believe, instead, that the hunt is a microcosm of all humans' struggle against nature, fate, and death itself. The crew remarks on this apparent symbolism—that the whale-hunt stands in for a life of human struggle—throughout the journey, as Ahab disregards typical whaling protocol, and announces explicitly that the goal of the voyage is the death of one whale. That Moby Dick escapes at the end of the novel, killing everyone aboard the Pequod except Ishmael, further indicates that the Whale cannot be defeated, cannot be tamed or even understood. Witnesses, prophets, and missionaries will continue to make "pilgrimages" to the White Whale in order to see it, to believe in it, and to wonder at its terrible power.

THE ROPE (THE LINE)

In Chapter 60 of *Moby Dick*, Ishmael describes the line, or hempen rope, attached to the end of the harpoon used on the whale-boat, and thrown at a whale in order to kill it. Ishmael notes that the line is immensely dangerous for those aboard the whale-boat, as, when it unfurls, it can catch someone and instantly strangle them or knock them off the vessel. Furthermore, the line is so complicated in its coiling that it is especially difficult, during the tumult of whale-hunting, even to know where the line is, thus making it especially dangerous. But Ishmael does not leave the idea of "the line" here; instead, he goes on to note that "all men" must deal with "lines" of their own, "halters around their necks," obligations that tie them to other men, and to events beyond their control. In this way, the line or the rope of the whaling ship, used throughout the novel, symbolizes not just the dangers of whaling, but the complex network of dangers, accidents, and obligations surrounding all humans. Any person can be tripped up by a line at any time. Of course, Ahab, at the novel's end, is "done in by his own rope," meaning he is strangled by the line of his own whale-boat's harpoon. And in this way, Ahab's own impossible and murderous quest proves to be the cause of his death on the high seas. It is interesting to note, too, that "lines" often refer, in literary contexts, to lines of poetry—and Ahab quotes bits and pieces of the Bible and other literary works through *Moby Dick*. Thus the sailors on the Pequod are surrounded by physical lines, by the "lines" of fate and disaster, and by lines of the novel in which they are characters.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the

Penguin Classics edition of *Moby Dick or, The Whale* published in 2002.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Call me Ishmael.

Related Characters: Ishmael (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

One of the most famous sentences in world literature. Ishmael is the narrator of *Moby-Dick*, and for the first part of the novel he is also the most important character - a young man who, deciding to make his fortune on the sea, signs on to a whaling voyage with the notorious Captain Ahab. As the novel goes on, Ishmael's narrating position fades slightly to the background, and new chapters occupy the middle portion of the book - including extended meditations on whale anatomy and the nature of the whaling industry. It is not clear whether Ishmael, too, is the narrator of these sections, or whether another, unnamed narrator supersedes him (perhaps Melville himself).

It is also interesting to note that Ishmael does not directly say that Ishmael is his name - rather, he notes only that the reader can "call" him that. In the Hebrew Bible, Ishmael was another son of Abraham, born of the slave girl Hagar, and he was passed over in the family's succession in favor of Isaac. Whether this Biblical background bears on Ishmael the character is for the reader to decide.

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 procession of the whale, and, mid most of them all, one grand hooded phantom, like a snow hill in the air.

Related Characters: Ishmael (speaker), Moby Dick

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

From the beginning, Ishmael notes that the White Whale, Moby-Dick, has haunted him - although it is not clear how Ishmael could have known about the existence of Moby-Dick while living in New York City, unless he had heard about it in legends whispered from sailor to sailor. At any rate, Ishmael tells the reader that Moby-Dick (here described in poetic, mysterious, semi-religious language) has occupied his thoughts even before he determines he ought to try his hand at being a sailor.

Thus Ishmael's understanding of free will, in this opening chapter, seems to reflect Ahab's later conception - that man can only choose so much of his fate, and that a great deal of one's life is set out for him in advance. Ishmael might have chosen another occupation - he might have decided to stay in New York. But something pulled him toward the open sea, to the Pequod and Ahab and the search for Moby-Dick. And even if Ishmael can't identifying what pulled him, he knows nevertheless that it is a strong force.

Chapter 8 Quotes

The pulpit is ever this earth's foremost part; all the rest comes in its rear; the pulpit leads the world. From thence it is the storm of God's quick wrath is first descried, and the bow must bear the earliest brunt.

Related Characters: Ishmael (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes from one of the many, many "extended metaphors" in the novel, or moments where the narrator uses a comparison, over paragraphs and paragraphs, to describe another person, thing, or event in metaphorical, rather than literal, terms. Here, the pulpit (from which a religious preacher delivers sermons) is explicitly compared to the prow of a ship, pulling man's way through the world. The church in which Ishmael sits, before heading out on his whaling voyage, is a church visited by men on their way out to sea, and so the church becomes a boat, and the boat a church - these two are joined in the minds of all sailors.

In the case both of the ship and the church, the power of God to direct those on board is unquestioned. God is the entity causing the breeze to blow or to stand still, and God is the entity protecting the church from crises within it and outside it. God is, in each case, something like the weather, both preserving or damning those inside the ship or church.

Chapter 16 Quotes

I have forgotten to mention that, in many things, Queequeg placed great confidence in the excellence of Yojo's judgment and surprising forecast of things; and cherished Yojo with considerable esteem, as a rather good sort of god . . . .

Related Characters: Ishmael (speaker), Queequeg

Related Themes:

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

Ishmael describes at great length Queequeg's religious rituals, which at first he finds utterly confusing and strange. Queequeg does not worship a Christian god, but instead places all his faith in Yojo. Ishmael later realizes that Yojo satisfies, for the harpooner, the same logic as does the Christian god - that if, in other words, Christians place their lives in the hands of divine providence, so too do practitioners of other faiths. As Ishmael comes to meet different people from different walks of life aboard the Pequod, he is less likely to judge them as being odd or deviant for following a religion that is not his.

Coupled with this, too, is something else Ishmael realizes about the Christian faith - namely, that even those who practice it, like the Quakers from whom the Pequod is leased, can be immoral, or can follow rules that are not in line with those described in the Christian Bible.

Chapter 19 Quotes

Ye've shipped, have ye? Names down on the papers? Well, well, what's signed, is signed; and what's to be, will be; and then again, perhaps it won't be, after all.

Related Characters: Elijah (speaker), Ishmael, Queequeg

Related Themes:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

There is a great deal of prophecy in *Moby-Dick*:of predicting, or attempting to predict, the future based on information available in the present. Here, the prophet who stands near the Pequod seems to understand that the ship is headed for danger. The question, of course, is how this prophet (called Old Thunder by some, but also Elijah, the name of a famous Biblical prophet) can know this at all. There is a logical explanation: perhaps Old Thunder has heard from friends in the area that Ahab is a man possessed, and that the captain will stop at nothing to kill the white whale, even if it means killing his entire crew.

But Ishmael, and Melville, hold out for the possibility that there is another motivating factor - that Old Thunder really is in tune with the future, and that he can predict, as can Pip later in the novel, what is to come to pass. In this the novel echoes the nature of Biblical prophecy, in which characters emerge in the Bible's narrative to foreshadow events in later books and epochs.

Chapter 23 Quotes

But as in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God—so, better is it to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety!

Related Characters: Ishmael (speaker), Bulkington

Related Themes:

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

There are numerous interesting plot-threads bound up in this one quotation, itself taken from a very short chapter. Bulkington, as a character, perhaps featured more largely in drafts of the novel, but in the final version, as published, he is almost a stub of a character - a potential for drama never realized. Ishmael does note that Bulkington dies with the rest of the crew of the Pequod. He also notes that Bulkington was a man of adventure, someone ready to take the voyage that might result in his own death.

This is what causes Ishmael to rhapsodize about the nature of chance and risk-taking in a man's life. This aligns with the old adage, that a boat is safe in the harbor, but that boats are made to be taken out into the high seas - toward adventure. If that boat finds its demise there, then that peril was built into the very concept of the boat as a vessel, as a conveyance to another realm.

Chapter 36 Quotes

It's a white whale, I say . . . a white whale. Skin your eyes for him, men; look sharp for white water; if ye see but a bubble, sing out.

Related Characters: Ahab (speaker), Moby Dick

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 176

Explanation and Analysis

Ahab takes it upon himself in this section to explain, at least in part, what is so special about *Moby-Dick*. The whiteness of the whale, which will be described at other moments in the novel, is striking to Ahab - it is a reminder of how special that whale is. But it is not this alone that makes the whale Ahab's enemy. That, of course, has to do with Ahab's attempt on a previous voyage to kill Moby-Dick - an encounter that ends with Moby-Dick biting off one of Ahab's legs.

Starbuck and other characters will later beg Ahab to end his quest, which they consider foolish, to kill the animal that maimed him. They say this because revenge against an animal is, for them, fundamentally different from revenge against a human. Animals, they note, do not intend the violence they cause - it is simply in their nature. Moby-Dick does not hate Ahab - he merely wants to eat him, or keep from being killed himself. But, for Ahab, Moby-Dick's violence demands violence in return - an eye for an eye. Furthermore, Ahab seems wedded to the very idea of Moby-Dick as an horrifying, unbeatable force, a terrible challenge for Ahab to struggle against. It is not just hate, but also pride and even longing that drives him.

Chapter 41 Quotes

For one, I gave myself up to the abandonment of the time and the place; but while yet all a-rush to encounter the whale, could see naught in that brute but the deadliest ill.

Related Characters: Ishmael (speaker), Moby Dick

Related Themes:

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

This, in Ishmael's words, is the reason why he goes along with Ahab, at least in the beginning, on that man's quest to find and kill Moby-Dick, and to avenge the violence the whale has done to him. Ishmael, of course, has no bone to pick with the whale - it is his first voyage, and he has a hard time even understanding how Ahab could hate a "brute" with such force. But Ishmael also notes that he was susceptible to the desires and the rage of others in the crew. At least in the early part of the voyage, the other sailors also want to kill Moby-Dick, perhaps as a way of showing support for their captain, whom they love and fear. But as the novel goes on, this desire on the part of the crew to capture the whale, and therefore help their leader, goes by the wayside - the characters begin to wonder whether Ahab isn't insane, and whether the quest to kill the whale isn't the quest of a madman.

Chapter 42 Quotes

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? . . . Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color . . . is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows . . .?

Related Characters: Ishmael (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 212

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of the most famous chapters and passages in the novel. Ishmael wonders what exactly it is that makes Moby-Dick so special - and lands, as this passage indicates, on his color, and on the particular "terror of whiteness." White, according to Ishmael's logic, can be presence or absence - it can mean purity or lack of all characteristics - and it can belong to good or to bad things. What Ishmael settles on, at least in part, as that white connotes something special, apart from and beyond normal life - something worth pursuing, but also terrifying in its blankness and emptiness.

Ishmael also wonders why it is that Ahab has chosen to follow this white whale across the world. It is at this point in the novel that Ishmael realizes the whale might perhaps be secondary to Ahab's goal - that the whale might stand in for something larger than an animal, or revenge. The whale could, for example, be God himself - something divine and unreachable. Or it could be a goal toward which all humans strive - immortality, or the defeat of death.

Chapter 52 Quotes

❝ Round the world! There is much in that sound to inspire proud feelings; but whereto does all that circumnavigation conduct? Only thought numberless perils to the very point whence we started, where those that we left behind secure, were all the time before us.

Related Characters: Ishmael (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 258

Explanation and Analysis

Another opportunity for Ishmael's musings. Many important parts of the novel are the talks (or "gams") that occur between crews of boats passing each other on the high seas. Here, the Pequod falls in line with the Albatross, which is headed back for home, and whose nearly starving, nearly mad crew marvels at the Pequod's mission to sail around the world. It is only when Ishmael sees the Albatross and its crew that he realizes, fully, the difficulty of the enterprise in which they are engaged - and the terrible things that might befall the Pequod's crew after many months at sea.

These conversations between boats serve as the "messaging system" in a novel where letters, let alone vocal messages, cannot be exchanged between characters who spend many months or years at a time on ships. When the Pequod is out on the high seas, its crew is starved for human contact, and this makes interactions with ships like the Albatross all the more valuable, even if the Albatross's crew seems half crazed.

Chapter 54 Quotes

❝ So help me Heaven, and on my honor the story I have told ye, gentlemen, is in substance and its great items, true. I know it to be true; it happened on this ball; I trod the ship . . . I have seen and talked with Steelkilt since the death of Radney.

Related Characters: Ishmael (speaker), Steelkilt, Radney

Related Themes:

Page Number: 284

Explanation and Analysis

This is an important passage in the novel, because it indicates the time in which Ishmael is currently narrating the tale, and hints at Ishmael's fate. After all, we now know that, at this point, Ishmael must survive the voyage of the Pequod to find Moby-Dick - for how else would Ishmael be able to relate to the reader something that happens after Ishmael has been on that boat with Ahab and his crew?

The function of time in *Moby-Dick*, therefore, is highlighted in this scene. Ishmael is a conduit for the reader - he siphons off the story of Ahab and his men and presents it to the person holding the novel in his or her hands. But Ishmael also seems not to be bound by certain physical considerations, as others in the novel are - he does not, in short, go down with the ship. He is free to tell his tales to future generations - something not possible for Ahab or Starbuck.

Chapter 60 Quotes

❝ All men live enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halters round their necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever-present perils of life.

Related Characters: Ishmael (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 306

Explanation and Analysis

Another important metaphorical passage in the novel. Here, the "line" (or rope) can represent many things. It can be the lines of the novel itself - the words that Ishmael has relayed to the reader, and which contain the story of Ahab's journey and his attacks on Moby-Dick. The line can also be the rigging of the Pequod, which literally holds the men together, draws them into a common goal of keeping one another afloat. This second line, as Ishmael mentions, can be dangerous, as it can "catch" a man who's not looking and drag him overboard.

This leads to the third kind of line drawing men together in the text, the lines of fate, the web in which all men and women are born, and in which they die. Ishmael seems, as the novel progresses, to ascribe more and more to the idea of a blind fate that has arranged for the lives and deaths of all people. He believes that, by embarking on the Pequod, he has entered into one of these networks of fate, even if he does not know, while the voyage is happening, whether or not he will survive.

Chapter 68 Quotes

O, man! admire and model thyself after the whale! Do thou, too, remain warm among ice. Do thou, too, live in this world without being of it. Be cool at the equator; keep thy blood fluid at the Pole. . . . retain, O man! in all seasons a temperature of thine own.

Related Characters: Ishmael (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 334

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is another instance in which Ishmael uses a feature of physical anatomy to derive a metaphysical, or philosophical, concept. Here, the layer of fat underneath a whale's skin Ishmael likens to a blanket that keeps the whale warm in cold weather and relatively cool in warm weather. This regulating blanket is the method by which the whale retains an equilibrium, and this enables a whale to roam the entire world, without regard to the temperature of the water in which the whale swims.

Ishmael is clearly taken by this kind of anatomical feature, and wishes that all men would be so capable of adapting to their circumstances. Here, the whale is no longer an enemy of man. It is instead a source of wisdom, of guidance for human life, and even a religious figure to look up to (the idea of "liv[ing] in this world without being of it" comes from the Bible). Ishmael holds up the whale as an example of human adaptability. And in doing so, he points out the frailty of the human body - something that can be so easily defeated by animals, by weather, by the roughness of the seas.

Chapter 71 Quotes

Think, think of thy whale-boat, stoven and sunk! Beware of the horrible tail!

Related Characters: Gabriel (speaker), Moby Dick

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 344

Explanation and Analysis

Gabriel, like Old Thunder, is another one of the novel's prophets - a person who, though seemingly a normal human, has also taken on a religious quality that enables him, or so he claims, to see into the future, and to predict events that others might not be aware of. Here, Gabriel (another Biblical name, that of a messenger angel) warns that Moby-Dick is more powerful than any man - that no one would be able to defeat the white whale alone, and that perhaps only a beneficent fate could make such a battle even something a man might be able to live through.

Thus Old Thunder and Gabriel both believe that Moby-Dick is himself a god-like figure, one whose power is so far superior to man's that there is nothing a man can do to save himself. Gabriel, like Old Thunder, urges the men around him to consider man's relationship to the divine - that God is the master of all things, and that if God has sent this whale in his stead to rule the waters, man must respect the overwhelming force of that animal.

Chapter 75 Quotes

The Right Whale I take to have been a Stoic; the Sperm Whale, a Platonian, who might have taken up Spinoza in his latter years.

Related Characters: Ishmael (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 367

Explanation and Analysis

This chapter demonstrates the philosophical values that Ishmael ascribes to the animals he meets. Of course, the Right Whale could no more be a Stoic, or the Sperm Whale a "Platonian," than could any other non-sentient creature be a representative of any philosophical school. Ishmael notes this in part to demonstrate his own education, which, as he notes earlier, he has picked up himself, without formal schooling. (Indeed, Ishmael might have had a great deal of time to read on the whale boat, although he does not talk explicitly about this reading).

The notion that non-human actors in the novel might think and behave like humans is an important one. For it is this idea that motivates Ahab in the first place, causing him to ascribe to Moby-Dick a bloodthirstiness that might not, in fact, be a part of the animal's make-up - for as Starbuck argues, Moby-Dick probably bears no grudge against Ahab at all. It is Ahab, like Ishmael, who believes that the animals of the deep should be treated like humans on land, as

rational, thinking beings.

Chapter 82 Quotes

Perseus, St. George, Hercules, Jonah, and Vishnoo! there's a member-roll for you! What club but the whaleman's can head off like that?

Related Characters: Ishmael (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 398

Explanation and Analysis

Another one of Ishmael's short philosophical essays, in which he takes up a topic related to whaling and its history. Here, Ishmael demonstrates his broad learning and understanding of the Greek and Roman classics, to argue that a great many heroes in antiquity fought and defeated whales. This was a way, he argues, of demonstrating superiority over beasts that tower over human beings. Ishmael notes that it is somehow natural for humans to attempt to conquer beasts of this size, and to demonstrate, therefore, their power over the natural world that surrounds them.

The consequence of this likeness, too, is to raise whalemen in Ishmael's day to the level of Greek or Biblical heroes. Ishmael might do this in part because he wants to aggrandize himself. But he seems also to genuinely believe that Ahab and the crew of the Pequod are engaged in a special and heroic journey on the high seas, something of which not all men would even be capable.

Chapter 92 Quotes

What then shall I liken the Sperm Whale to for fragrance, considering his magnitude? Must it not be to that famous elephant, with jeweled tusks, and redolent with myrrh, which was led out of an Indian town to do honor to Alexander the Great?

Related Characters: Ishmael (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 449

Explanation and Analysis

Ishmael here takes up some features related to the physical appearance and the smell of a sperm whale. Ishmael argues that sperm whales in fact do not smell the way people expect them to, and neither does whale oil. What does smell, however, is a sick whale, but sick whales also produce ambergris, a substance derived from whale oil, and a fragrance of great value on land.

Ishmael then muses on the relation between a sick animal and its ability to produce something so magnificent as ambergris. Ishmael also argues that whale oil itself is miraculous, and by comparing the whale to Alexander the Great's elephant, Ishmael demonstrates that he places the sperm whale at the absolute top of the animal pyramid, as regards its beauty, its inherent valor, and its majestic nature. That the sickness of the whale makes its oil even more valuable is, for Ishmael, merely another reflection of the power and wonder of that animal.

Chapter 99 Quotes

Cook! ho, coo! and cook us! Jenny! hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, Jenny, Jenny! and get your hoe-cake done!

Related Characters: Pip (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 475

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, each of the characters take turns checking out the doubloon that Ahab has nailed to the center mast of the Pequod. This doubloon is reserved for the person in the crew who sights the white whale first - it is designed as an extra reward, for the crew is already as excited as Ahab, or nearly so, to find the whale and to kill it.

When others see the doubloon, they speak their thoughts aloud in an aside to the audience, as though they were characters in a play (and, indeed, there are entire chapters of the novel that are rendered as dialogue in a play, as though Ishmael has constructed the scenes in this way for the reader better to understand them). Here, when Pip speaks aloud, however, he does not say anything comprehensible to the average listener. Instead, he remarks obliquely just how valuable the doubloon is - and how wondrous it would be to spot the whale and to kill it.

Chapter 100 Quotes

❝ He's welcome to the arm he has, since I can't help it, and didn't know him then; but not to another one. No more White Whales for me; I've lowered for him once, and that has satisfied me.

Related Characters: Boomer (speaker), Moby Dick

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 482

Explanation and Analysis

Boomer, the speaker of these lines, is the captain of an English vessel called the Samuel Enderby. Boomer excites Ahab, when the ships stop to speak to one another, by saying that he has in fact encountered Moby-Dick. At this point, Boomer emerges as a foil to Ahab, for he too is a man who has wrestled with the white whale. Boomer has lowered boats against Moby-Dick, and, falling off his boat, tore his arm, and a ship doctor then amputated it. Boomer feels that he has "given enough" to the white whale, and vows to go back home and preserve his life.

This, of course, is what separates Boomer from Ahab, and makes the two men mirror images of one another. After his encounter with the white whale, Boomer realizes the limits of his own human strength, and feels he has given his best to the fight - that he is simply not strong enough to defeat the whale. Ahab, however, has vowed after his first encounter with Moby-Dick to stop at nothing in trying to kill him.

Chapter 103 Quotes

❝ Thus we see how that the spine of even the hugest of living things tapers off at last into simple child's play.

Related Characters: Ishmael (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 495

Explanation and Analysis

Ishmael spends a great deal of the novel marveling at the size of the sperm whale, at its majesty in the water, at how it resembles the Biblical "fish" in which Jonah sat for three days. Ishmael spares no amount of description in arguing that these whales are larger than life, that there is nothing man can do to stop them except to pray that the whale itself folds under the battle with the harpooneers.

And yet Ishmael also notes that there are parts of the sperm whale so small as to nearly vanish. These parts show that the whale has some relation to human scale - that it is, after all, a living thing, that it is mortal, that it can be killed. Even though whales, in Ishmael's telling, are godlike creatures, they are ultimately not gods - for they are built according to the same laws that structure human life.

Chapter 109 Quotes

❝ Oh, Life! Here I am, proud as a Greek god, and yet standing debtor to this block-head for a bone to stand on. Cursed be that mortal interindebtedness which will not do away with ledgers. I would be free as air; and I'm down in the whole world's books.

Related Characters: Ahab (speaker), The Pequod's carpenter

Related Themes:

Page Number: 514

Explanation and Analysis

Starbuck has reported to Ahab, just before this quotation, that the oil casks in the Pequod are leaking, and that a ship's carpenter will have to inspect them to ensure that the oil collected from the whales they have already killed will be preserved. When Starbuck realizes that Ahab cares nothing for this oil - that the voyage is entirely for the purpose of capturing and killing Moby-Dick - he is afraid that the captain has lost his mind, and that he is willing to endanger his entire crew in order to satisfy this one objective. Starbuck tells Ahab that he must worry about himself, that his own bloodlust could result in the death of many men.

Ahab, for his part, recognizes in the quote that there are physical constraints on him - that if, for example, the boat were to leak and sink before reaching the white whale, then Ahab's entire mission would come to naught. This is difficult for Ahab to stomach, because his pride and his belief in his own force and mission is unmatched.

Chapter 110 Quotes

They asked him, then, whether to live or die was a matter of his own sovereign will and pleasure. He answered, certainly. In a word, it was Queequeg's conceit, that if a man made up his mind to live, mere sickness could not kill him: nothing but a whale, or a gale, or some violent, ungovernable, unintelligent destroyer of that sort.

Related Characters: Ishmael (speaker), Queequeg

Related Themes:

Page Number: 523

Explanation and Analysis

This is a very important passage, for here Queequeg echoes a sentiment that Ahab has also expressed in the novel - namely, that a man's living or dying has only to do with one's will, his choice to survive. There are some things beyond man's control, and one of those things is Moby-Dick himself, a beast so large as to be almost godlike. Queequeg and Ahab both recognize that there is some fate to those interactions, and that there is nothing they can do to stop the whale if fate determines that the whale is to defeat them.

But illness is another matter. Queequeg believes in this passage that he has total control over his own body - that he can make it listen to his wishes. This has long been a dream of man, that the mind can triumph over the earthly strictures placed on that mind by the realities of living in a body on earth. Queequeg, for his part, really believes that his own mind can conquer the weaknesses of his body. (It's also notable that while he considers illness to be something easily overcome, a murderous whale is on the same level as a storm or other "act of God.")

Chapter 133 Quotes

Men, this gold is mine, for I earned it; but I shall let it abide here till the White Whale is dead; and then, whosoever of ye first raises him, upon the day he shall be killed, this gold is that man's, and if on that day I shall again raise him, then, ten times its sum shall be divided among all of ye! Away now!

Related Characters: Ahab (speaker), Moby Dick

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 602

Explanation and Analysis

Not only does Ahab believe that he must be the man to kill Moby-Dick, and that it is fair to risk the lives of many men in order to kill the animal that (he believes) has wronged him; Ahab also vows that he was always fated to be the one to spot Moby-Dick, and that the doubloon he placed on the mast could have only one owner, and that is the man that placed it there.

In this passage, then, Melville displays Ahab's total megalomania, or belief that he, and he alone, is capable of defeating the whale, of spitting in the eyes of fate, of ensuring that order will be restored in the universe after the whale has taken his leg. No man could possibly think in these terms unless he were deluded, and yet Ahab really does think in them. And though he is single-mindedly set in his mission, he nevertheless manages, despite the metaphorical blindness of his obsession, to see the whale and to claim the money he placed before the crew.

Chapter 135 Quotes

Now small fowls flew screaming over the yet yawning gulf; a sullen white surf beat against its steep sides; then all collapsed, and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago.

Related Characters: Ishmael (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 624

Explanation and Analysis

Not only has the white whale defeated Ahab, despite Ahab's best efforts to kill him. Not only has the whale defeated the entire crew, the group of men Ahab has marshaled to aid in this attack. The white whale has, in fact, obliterated all remnants of the Pequod, all evidence that the boat even existed and once sailed the sea. These things are gone completely when the boat sinks and is sent to the bottom of the ocean.

The narrator, or Ishmael, in this scene thus relates how completely man is at the mercy of nature. Despite all Ahab's ravings and the power of his will and hate, there was nothing he could do to stop the boat from sinking, to prevent nature from taking over the scene and rolling the waves once more over the boat. For all his yelling that he controlled fate, fate has mastered Ahab here - and the rest

of the crew along with him.

Epilogue Quotes

❝ On the second day, a sail drew near, nearer, and picked me up at last. It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her tracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan.

Related Characters: Ishmael (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 625

Explanation and Analysis

This Biblical story of Rachel (who is immortalized as the archetype of a mother mourning for her lost children) ties the book together, and shows that, even in the moments where he approached death, Ishmael believed, based on Biblical precedents, that he might be saved. Ishmael is orphaned because the crew of the Pequod, his family, has gone down with the ship. He no longer has Ahab as his leader and father - he no longer has Queequeg as a brother (and possible beloved, in some interpretations). Ishmael is indeed all alone, and he has "escaped" to relate to the reader the story of Moby-Dick, the whale who defeated man's best efforts to kill him.

Thus Ishmael's actions seem to be foretold, as so many actions in the novel have been spoken of by prophets and seers, men who appear crazy to other men, but seem to know the future as the crew of the Pequod does not. Ishmael now, presumably, goes back to land and writes the story of Moby-Dick - the novel the reader now holds in his or her hands.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: LOOMINGS

The novel begins with a famous sentence: "Call me Ishmael." The novel's narrator, Ishmael, is a young man from New York City, who is preparing to go on a whaling voyage for several reasons—to make money, to entertain himself, and to leave behind what he considers the stifling confines of city life, which make him bored. Ishmael begins the novel with a long description of the relationship of water—rivers, lakes, and especially oceans—to man's desire for freedom and beauty. Ishmael states that artists often incorporate water into their poems and paintings, and that men who work all day in offices in New York can be found staring at the water surrounding Manhattan when they leave the office.

There is an important ambiguity in that first line. For it is not entirely clear whether Ishmael is asking us simply to "refer" to him as Ishmael—perhaps as a pseudonym—or whether Ishmael is his given name. Ishmael, in the Hebrew Bible, was the son of Abraham and Hagar, Abraham's servant, and was therefore the son passed over when Isaac was named Abraham's primary heir. This is consistent with Ishmael's sense of existing apart from society—that is, as a sailor, rather than on land. And it further forebodes his total aloneness at the end of the novel.

Ishmael further clarifies that he was looking to go to sea not as the commander of a vessel, nor as a tourist, but as a "simple sailor," one who is paid for his time on the boat, and who can enjoy the "fresh air" and "exercise" a life at sea affords. Ishmael closes the chapter by wondering why, exactly, he chose to go on a whaling vessel at this particular moment in his life, and how he ended up finding the "white whale" so central to the ensuing narrative. Ishmael says he is not sure how the Fates acted in the way they did, but he feels that his presence on this boat (to be described later), with this captain and crew, was somehow preordained, even though it seemed, at the time, that he was determining the course of his life. He closes the chapter by saying that one "grand hooded phantom," or whale, occupies his thoughts even to the present day.

Another of the novel's themes is here introduced. On the one hand, a sailing vessel represents an opportunity to try one's luck on the open seas, where everything seems permitted, and where the laws of the land do not entirely apply. But life at sea is also life on a small ship, without much freedom of physical movement, and according to the customs sailors have accumulated over a number of years. Ishmael also seems to believe that life at sea is governed by a sense of "fate" far larger than any one man's control—that the wind, seas, and behavior of animals like whales are governed by some other, more powerful force.

CHAPTER 2: THE CARPET-BAG

Ishmael narrates how he wound up on the particular boat, the Pequod, on which the novel focuses. He decided to leave Manhattan and to travel first to New Bedford, Massachusetts, from which he could catch a smaller boat to Nantucket Island, where many whalers begin their journeys. But after arriving in New Bedford on a cold night in December, he found that there were no more small boats to Nantucket, and that he would have to spend the night in town. Because he was poor at the moment, he decided to find the cheapest in that would take him.

Melville often writes of the burgeoning seaport towns of the northeastern coast of the United States. Here, New York, New Bedford, and Nantucket are all regions that deal in shipping and other port activities. New Bedford is also a very successful town—rather than the relatively small town it is today—and New York has yet to fully differentiate itself as the largest and most prosperous city in the country.

Ishmael walks by a series of inns, attached to bars (or "public houses") that appear too expensive for his budget. He finds, down by the water, a place called the Spouter Inn, owned (as stated on the sign) by a man named Peter Coffin. Although Ishmael is worried by the dreary look of the place, and ominous name of its owner, he decides to walk inside regardless. Ishmael pauses in the narration to muse upon the story of Lazarus and the rich man (known as Dives), from the Gospel of Luke. In that story, Lazarus lay outside the rich man's house for many days, and the rich man gave him no food or money—after both died, however, the rich man found that Lazarus received divine care, and the rich man did not. Ishmael then interrupts his own musing, and states he will describe the dark, sooty Spouter Inn in the next chapter.

Although Ishmael worries a great deal about money in the early chapters of the novel, money will cease to be a primary concern once the novel shifts into its section on the open seas. For the gold doubloon that Ahab so dramatically nails to the main-mast of the ship is worthless on the sea—it cannot be spent on anything—and many of the sailors are not even sure that they will return to land alive at all. But, in the beginning of the novel, one of Ishmael's primary motivations for shipping out to sea is to make a living for himself, as he barely has any money to his name. Meanwhile, possible foreboding abounds.

CHAPTER 3: THE SPOUTER-INN

Near the Ishmael describes the entrance to the Spouter Inn, near which hangs a painting of a dark sea-scene, in many dark hues. Ishmael puzzles over the subject of the scene, and eventually concludes that the picture shows a "half-foundered" (or sinking) ship with three masts—although it could also portray a leviathan, or whale, in the murky water. The inn's bar also contains a great many old harpoons and spears, for catching whales, and the bar itself is shaped like a whale's jaw. The locals call the bartender there Jonah, because he appears to live in the whale's mouth.

One of the novel's first of many intimations that dangers await the Pequod at sea. In particular, Ishmael seems fixated on the idea that a leviathan, or whale, would be capable of capsizing an entire ship simply by ramming into it. Of course, the Pequod will be destroyed by Moby Dick in exactly this way, making the painting an accurate foreshadowing of the novel's events. And yet, the painting is also inscrutable, and therefore what it shows is very open to interpretation, and so the way that the painting plays into the fate of the Pequod is not clear.

After eating supper nearby, Ishmael finds the landlord, Peter Coffin, and asks if he has a bed available for the night. Jonah replies that there isn't much space, but that Ishmael can share a room, and bed, with a mysterious harpooneer. At first Ishmael agrees, although he is less than enthusiastic about sharing a bed (the innkeeper thinks sharing a cot is normal for sailors, but Ishmael remarks to himself that, in fact, even in cramped sailing conditions, sailors usually have their own bunks). But as the evening wears on, and the crew of the Grampus, another whaling ship, enters the bar and begins drinking heavily, Ishmael wonders when the harpooneer will arrive, and what kind of person he will be. Ishmael also hears many of the sailors speak in hushed, reverential tones about Bulkington, a fellow-sailor on the Grampus.

Another of the novel's features is its reference to other whaling vessels. Like men in general, there appears in the novel to be great variation between the disposition of the various whalers with whom Ishmael comes in contact. There are whalers like those on the Grampus, who return from the sea ready to drink and carouse, perhaps because the whale-hunt has been successful. And there are those like the crew of the Rachel, encountered at the end of the novel, who have suffered horrible misfortunes on the high seas. That sailors all have individual bunks attests to the "dignity" of sea-life, and the sense of each sailor as an individual within a larger society, making it a metaphor for society or political state.

The innkeeper teases Ishmael when Ishmael expresses anxiety about sharing his bed with the harpooneer. The innkeeper tells him that the harpooneer is out that night "selling his head," and intimates that the harpooneer has dark skin and is from a "far-off" place. Ishmael wonders what it might mean for the man to be "selling heads," and the innkeeper finally reveals that the harpooneer is from the area around New Zealand, and he sells dried, shriveled heads as a kind of "curio" from that region. The innkeeper shows Ishmael into the bedroom where the harpooneer is staying, and Ishmael marvels at the strangeness of the harpooneer's clothing, lying folded in the room—Ishmael believes it resembles a doormat.

The first reference to Queequeg, who will become Ishmael's "bosom friend" and closest confidant aboard the Pequod. Coffin, the innkeeper, appears to do his best to convince Ishmael that Queequeg is dangerous. This is in keeping with widespread fear, among whaling communities, of the "heathens" from faraway places who often served as harpooneers. Yet exactly these "foreign" men were chosen to work the harpoons because the jobs were often considered "too dangerous" for white men to perform.

Ishmael takes off his clothes and crawls into the small bed, then tries to go to sleep. After a short time, however, Ishmael notices a man coming into the darkened room—the harpooneer. Ishmael notices, with horror and fear, that the man is from a "foreign land," that he carries a tomahawk and a large head, in which he seems to keep his dried heads, and that he has tattoos in dark purple ink, all over his face, neck, arms, and back. Ishmael considers jumping out the window of the room, but they are on the second floor, he does not want to behave "like a coward," and he worries that he will not be able to escape successfully without hurting himself.

An instance of Ishmael doing his best to convince himself of his own personal and psychological strength. At later instances in the novel, too, as when Ishmael falls out of a capsizing whaling-boat, Ishmael must remind himself that whaling is a dangerous business, and that he has signed up for exactly this. There are other sailors aboard the Pequod, however, who appear to relish the dangers they encounter—these include men like Stubb, the second mate.

The harpooneer begins a religious ceremony wherein he prays to a small black wooden idol, which Ishmael calls a "manikin." After this prayer ceremony, the harpooneer turns around and, seeing Ishmael in the bed, assumes Ishmael is dangerous, and brandishes his tomahawk. Ishmael, terrified, calls for Peter Coffin. Coffin arrives in the room and tells Ishmael and the harpooneer, named Queequeg, that the two are to share a room together. Ishmael criticizes Coffin for not saying, earlier, that Queequeg is a "cannibal" (by which Ishmael means a native of the Pacific islands in which the practice of cannibalism sometimes occurs). Coffin, laughing, replies that Queequeg is a peaceful man, despite his cannibalism, and that he will happily share the room with Ishmael.

As it turns out, Coffin has been playing a joke on Ishmael. Queequeg's peacefulness is part of the image of tolerance depicted in the book, of men of all different stripes necessarily coming together in the working of the ship and pursuit of fortune. Queequeg's religious idol, revealed to be named "Yojo," plays little role in the novel, other than to comfort Queequeg, and to convince him that Ishmael will be the one to select the whaling ship on which they set out. Ishmael then selects the Pequod, setting in motion the events of the novel. Queequeg therefore seems content to entrust his fate to the whims, as he interprets them, of this small wooden idol, or "manikin."

This convinces Ishmael, who remarks to himself that it is "better to sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian." Ishmael tells Coffin to tell Queequeg, who speaks in in a kind of broken English Ishmael doesn't entirely understand, to put away his tomahawk (which is also his pipe), since smoking in the bedroom would be dangerous to both men. Ishmael and Queequeg go to sleep, and Ishmael remarks that "he never slept better in his life."

A famous line in the novel—Ishmael here realizes that social distinctions between "heathen" and Christian are probably less important than the human distinctions between good and dishonest men. Ishmael will encounter similar instances that will test his prejudices, or preconceptions about men unlike him, while aboard the ship.

CHAPTER 4: THE COUNTERPANE

Ishmael wakes the next morning, and finds that Queequeg has "draped his arm" across him in a "most affectionate manner." Ishmael also sees that the tattoos on Queequeg's arm are almost indistinguishable from the patchwork pattern on the "counterpane," or bedspread. Ishmael remarks that the experience of Queequeg holding him in the morning reminds him of another time, long ago, as a child, when his stepmother sent him to bed early. The young Ishmael awoke by himself in his old house, in the middle of the night, and, still half in a dream, thought that "another hand" lay clasping his—a hand as from a dream, or a "phantom." Ishmael is reminded of this scene, now, in the Spouter Inn, because Queequeg's hand exerts the same pressure on Ishmael's as did that phantom hand long ago.

A very famous instance in the novel, and one that has prompted a great deal of scholarly debate as regards the nature of Ishmael and Queequeg's intimacy. On the one hand, to a contemporary reader, it seems that Ishmael might be hinting, somewhat coyly, at the possibility of a sexual relationship between the two, or at least at the reality of homosexual male desire. But other critics contend that Melville is merely reinforcing the brotherly bond between these sailors, and that their physical intimacy was common at the time. It is also possible that Melville intended both readings.

But Ishmael shakes off the vision, and rouses Queequeg, who begins to dress (and who, courteously, says to Ishmael in their shared language that he will dress first, allowing Ishmael the room "to himself" afterward). Queequeg puts his boots on under the bed, washes his body but not his face, and uses his harpoon, which he has also brought into the room, to shave his face. Ishmael marvels at these preparations, and says he has never seen anything like it. Ishmael also believes that Queequeg is "in transition" from cannibalism, or savagery, into "civilized" behavior—thus explaining the strangeness of his dressing routine.

Another famous scene in the novel. Queequeg shaving with his harpoon is exactly the kind of thing a man who is "half-savage, half-civilized" might do. Ishmael, for his part, does not appear to recognize the parts of his own character that are perhaps "less civilized"—the fact that he has no money, and that he does not always understand the manners and humor of the men with whom he interacts. But Queequeg is obviously "foreign," and therefore Ishmael feels comfortably laughing quietly at his strange morning routine.

CHAPTER 5: BREAKFAST

Ishmael rises and sees Peter Coffin the next morning—although he is a little embarrassed at having been tricked by Coffin into sharing a room with a cannibal (and one who turned out to be utterly harmless), Ishmael tells the reader that it is important to take a joke well, and to be able to laugh at oneself. Ishmael goes in to breakfast with other whalers and sailors staying at the Spouter Inn—some of whom have just come back from long sea-voyages. Although Ishmael expects that these "old salts" will talk loudly and willingly of their lives on the open ocean, Ishmael is instead shocked to find that the breakfast is largely silent, and that the whalers, though they have probably done brave deeds, have very little to say for themselves. Ishmael notes that Queequeg eats a strange breakfast of beefsteaks, "cooked very rare," which he lances with his harpoon. That implement seems never to leave his side.

An example of Ishmael's expectations about whaling, and the realities of the lifestyle that are in fact quite different. Ishmael perhaps wonders why all whalers aren't like the carousers aboard the Grampus, who stomp onto shore, demanding alcohol and speaking loudly of their triumphs. But Ishmael also detects a darker side to whaling—perhaps a recognition that the job is particularly dangerous, that men are often lost, and that the reality of life on the open water is one of privation, loneliness, and long separation from land. Queequeg, for his part, seems to have no problem with the apparent silence of the other whalers.

CHAPTER 6: THE STREET

Ishmael goes out for a "stroll" in the streets of New Bedford, and remarks that there, as in New York, Philadelphia, and other port towns, one might find a good number of "exotic" individuals not unlike Queequeg—men from islands in the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, who have joined the whaling trade and therefore walk around the port towns between voyages. Ishmael also notes that young boys arrive in New Bedford from inland places, like the Green Mountains in Vermont, looking "green" (or inexperienced) themselves, and hoping for great adventures aboard whaling ships. Ishmael ends the chapter by stating that New Bedford's primary industry is whaling, and that the many fine houses there—and well-dressed young women—are attributable to the riches of the whaling trade.

"Exotic," for Ishmael, can mean either domestic or international, depending on the context. Although Americans from Vermont are not going to a foreign country when they come to New Bedford, they are nevertheless about to embark on a lifestyle completely different from that in which they were raised. Whereas someone like Queequeg, who comes from the far-away Pacific isles, has spent his entire life around water, and seems to be less afraid of living for long periods on a ship, and plying his trade on the sea. Ishmael's depiction of the interactions of these cultures around shipping and whaling cities again emphasizes the sense that there is a fundamental connectedness between people beneath their differences.

CHAPTER 7: THE CHAPEL

Ishmael comes in out of the cold and sleet and into the Whaleman's Chapel, in which he finds a number of tablets inscribed with the names of whalers and sailors who have died, and had their bodies lost, while on sea-voyages. Ishmael is surprised to find Queequeg also in the chapel, although Queequeg is a "heathen," or non-Christian. Ishmael also sees young women there, sitting apart, who appear to be mourning lost loved ones. As Ishmael sits, waiting for the service to start, he remarks that "there is death in whaling," and that it might be his fate to die on his upcoming voyage. But Ishmael also says to himself that his body is but "the lees [sediment] of his better being," and that, whatever might happen to him, it will not affect his immortal soul, which cannot be destroyed.

Here, Ishmael comes face-to-face with the reality that whaling is no pleasure-sport, but is in fact an extremely dangerous occupation—one that promises adventure and the possibility of physical harm in equal measure. Ishmael steels himself with reference to his "soul," a religious consideration, but the remainder of the novel does not seem to emphasize Ishmael's trust in divine protection. Instead, Ishmael seems to think that fate itself—a fate that is not religious, but has more to do with the realities of the natural world—will determine whether he lives or dies at sea.

CHAPTER 8: THE PULPIT

Ishmael watches as the preacher of the chapel, named Father Mapple and famous in New Bedford for his sermons, enters the chapel and climbs, using a ladder, onto the pulpit, which is shaped like the prow of a whaling ship. Ishmael remarks on the scene, which appears to separate Father Mapple from the rest of the congregation. There is also a picture of a little angel in the corner of the chapel, shining onto the pulpit with its radiant light. Ishmael closes this brief chapter by convincing himself that it is proper the chapel have a pulpit shaped like a boat, since the pulpit is the "prow of the world," or the part of human society that leads man forward in time, against whatever storms or difficulties God, or life, or fate seem to toss at man.

Yet, despite Ishmael's lack of reliance on religious teachings as the novel progresses, Ishmael nevertheless recognizes the power of religious rhetoric, and is here impressed by Father Mapple's chapel, and by the particular architecture of the pulpit. Ishmael and many of the other sailors often use nautical imagery to describe things on land—as though their time on the ship becomes the primary metaphor for understanding the world around them. In this way, they sail through their lives just as a ship sails through danger in the open ocean.

CHAPTER 9: THE SERMON

Mapple begins his sermon with a prayer and a hymn, the latter taken from the end of the first chapter of the Book of Jonah in the Bible, in which Jonah is "swallowed by a whale." Mapple states that the story of Jonah is important for two reasons: it provides advice for men and women who wish to avoid a life of sin; and it provides advice, too, for leaders of men, or "captains" in life, who wish to keep others from sin. Mapple begins retelling the story of Jonah, framing it in terms of a man on a whaling vessel in the nineteenth century. Mapple emphasizes that Jonah is "fleeing from God" because of crimes and sins he has committed, and Mapple seems also to blame the greed of the captain for letting Jonah on the ship, since Jonah promises to pay the captain a large sum of money for safe passage.

One of the first references in the novel to the story of Jonah, which will be reinterpreted and rehashed throughout the narrative. Ishmael seems to accord a primary importance to the story, because it is in the Bible, and because it is one of the first instances in recorded literature in which man interacts with a whale. Notably, too, Jonah is saved by God after being swallowed by the whale—he is tested, but is ultimately redeemed. Yet Mapple's sermon also touches on the captain, who in this case makes selfish decisions based on money. The emphasis on captains foreshadows Ahab, though Ahab's "sin" has nothing to do with money.

Mapple continues with the story of Jonah: God sends a storm to upset the ship on which Jonah travels, and Jonah comes abovedecks, telling the crew that he believes he is the cause of the ship's distress. The crew then throws Jonah overboard, and Jonah is saved from drowning by being swallowed, whole, by a "leviathan," or whale. In the whale's stomach, Jonah repents and tells God that only He can guarantee Jonah's "deliverance," and God, pleased that Jonah exhibits such devotion in his time of crisis, eventually allows Jonah to escape the whale's stomach.

Readers of the Hebrew Bible often forget that Jonah was punished, and swallowed by the whale, as "repayment" for disobeying God's direct orders to go and preach in a certain part of the Mediterranean region. Jonah's time in the whale causes him to realize that God is in fact all-powerful, and only when Jonah submits then is Jonah set free and allowed to return to the land.

Thus Mapple draws to the conclusion of his sermon, and to his original "two points" of the Jonah story. He reiterates that Jonah recognized his sins and repented, and for that he was saved. But Mapple also explains the nature of Jonah's original crime, from which he wished to flee and to board the ship in the first place—that Jonah was to preach God's word and failed to do so, that Jonah had disobeyed God's orders. Mapple states that the story of Jonah is, for him and for others who are "pilots of men," a warning about shirking one's duty, about ignoring God's commands, about believing that there is a morality other than God's that dictates man's actions. Mapple closes his sermon by asking, "what is man that he should live out the lifetime of his God?"

Mapple therefore reinforces this "moral" to the story—that, like Jonah, the sailors who leave from New Bedford must always keep in mind the orders of their superiors, and must avoid doing what their own conscience tells them, as that conscience might be wrong, or cowardly. Of course, Ahab, Ishmael's captain, considers himself a god aboard his own ship, and therefore Ishmael would be obeying both his "captain" and his "lord" if he were to follow Ahab's commands. And, for the most part, Ishmael is in fact obedient to Ahab's wishes. Yet Mapple's sermon continues to resonate as Ahab's mad refusal to submit, his belief in his own destiny to kill Moby Dick, endangers all. Should the men submit to Ahab as Jonah does to God? Should men submit to their human leaders?

CHAPTER 10: A BOSOM FRIEND

Ishmael leaves the chapel at the end of the sermon and walks back to the Spouter Inn, where he sees Queequeg by the fire, the latter having left before the sermon's close. Ishmael watches as Queequeg prays again to his "idol," the small wooden god, and as Queequeg then takes up a large book, one he cannot read (since he is illiterate), and pages through it, counting 50 pages at a time before starting again with the next 50. Ishmael says to himself that Queequeg is a "noble" and "good" man, even if a cannibal and a savage, and Ishmael feels a good deal of warmth toward Queequeg for this reason.

In these earlier chapters of the novel, Ishmael does seem, on occasion, to laugh inwardly at Queequeg's "backwardness," as here, when Queequeg demonstrates he does not actually know how to read a book. But, later on, Queequeg will repeatedly demonstrate his prowess on a whale-ship, and Ishmael will have reason to be in awe of his friend, rather than to make fun of him—even if in gentle fashion, as in this scene.

Ishmael, wanting to be friendly with Queequeg, shows him what the words and pictures in the book signify, and Queequeg offers that the two should share a pipe, to which Ishmael agrees. Queequeg then presses his forehead against Ishmael's and says that the two are now "bosom friends," meaning that Queequeg would "gladly die" for Ishmael. Ishmael says that, although the two barely know one another, it seems reasonable with Queequeg, who is so open of spirit and friendly, to commit to such deep friendship so fast. Queequeg invites Ishmael to worship his small idol. Ishmael, believing it is God's will to do the will of one's fellow man, and that Queequeg's will is that Ishmael worship this idol, gladly joins in the prayers to the idol, and does not consider this a violation of his Presbyterian upbringing. Queequeg also splits his money evenly with Ishmael, and Ishmael accepts it, since he has very little cash to his name. Ishmael and Queequeg get back into bed together, and Ishmael remarks that they are as comfortable in the bed, falling asleep, as would be husband and wife.

A very important scene in the novel. Ishmael appears to recognize a central religious truth about Christianity, as he interprets it. Namely, if a Christian God is a generous one, and wants man to be generous to his fellow-men, then, in this instance, Ishmael is right to allow Queequeg to practice his own religious rituals, and to do everything within his power to make his friend happy, so long as it does not compromise his own beliefs and practices. It sounds like a sensible idea, on Ishmael's part, but in fact, if all men were to follow this principle, a great deal of human religious conflict would be avoided entirely. At this point in the novel, therefore, Ishmael reveals a remarkable openness of spirit, if also a certain naiveté, as to how others might treat those they find different, "exotic," or "strange."

CHAPTER 11: NIGHTGOWN

Ishmael muses on his second night in bed with Queequeg. The two spend much of the first part of the evening "chatting and napping" next to one another. Ishmael thinks to himself that to be warm in a bed requires that one feel the cold outside one's blankets. He therefore says that rich men, with fireplaces in their bedrooms, are "missing" an important part of warmth, which is the proximity of coolness. Ishmael opens his eyes around midnight to see that Queequeg is smoking indoors from his tomahawk-pipe. The two share the pipe, and Ishmael encourages Queequeg to tell him of his upbringing, and how he has found his way to New Bedford.

In this scene, Ishmael and Queequeg once again mimic the behavior of a married couple, although it is not clear, here as before, whether Melville intends this as a sign of their brotherly connection, or as a hint, perhaps, at a more significant and romantic attachment. In either case, the literal "sharing of the pipe" is sufficient to cement a bond between the two men that will remain throughout the novel, even as Ahab's quest overtakes the action aboard the Pequod.

CHAPTER 12: BIOGRAPHICAL

Queequeg tells Ishmael, using his broken English, that he was born on a Pacific isle called Kokovoko—Ishmael says that the island "cannot be found on any map." Queequeg's father was the king of Kokovoko, and indeed much of his family possessed royal blood. But Queequeg, despite his high birth, wished to see the world, and when a ship visited Kokovoko from Sag Harbor, NY (a town on the eastern tip of Long Island), Queequeg "vowed a vow" to board the ship and partake in the adventures of a Christian sailor.

Interestingly, Melville spells this island name various ways in the course of the novel—probably simply as a mistake or oversight, although one wonders if Melville is imputing to Ishmael, the narrator, an inability to name exactly the island of Queequeg's birth. Queequeg's love of the sea is outstripped only by his desire to participate in the North American whaling trade.

But the ship from Sag Harbor would not let Queequeg aboard, and he paddled his canoe out to a strait, one the ship would have to cross. There he threw himself out of the canoe and climbed the side-rigging of the ship. Once aboard, the captain allowed him to stay and sail back to America, but Queequeg, despite his royal blood, was kept below-decks, with the other sailors. Though Queequeg was horrified by the dissipation and drunkenness of the sailors when they reached Sag Harbor and Nantucket, he continued life as a harpooneer on whaling vessels. Queequeg finishes his story, and when Ishmael informs Queequeg that he wishes also to join a whaling vessel from Nantucket, Queequeg pledges that he will "follow Ishmael wherever he goes," and get onto the same whaling boat in Nantucket.

Queequeg does not fall into the stereotypes of the hard-drinking, hard-living whaler. He has no wife and no children; he does not drink and only smokes his ceremonial pipe; and indeed he does not seem given to having fun of any kind, although he is a warm and caring friend. Ishmael, who is far less stoic than Queequeg, and far less outwardly courageous, holds his friend's moral virtue in high esteem. And Queequeg seems to sense that Ishmael will be a loyal friend to him, even as conditions aboard the Pequod deteriorate, and Ahab's madness threatens to derail the entire voyage.

CHAPTER 13: WHEELBARROW

Ishmael pays for the inn's room with some of Queequeg's money, and the two place their belongings—both their bags—into a wheelbarrow they borrow from someone on the street. As Ishmael and Queequeg walk down to the wharf, to pick up the packet-steamer Moss, which will take them to Nantucket, some people on the street stare at the apparent friendship of a white man and a "cannibal."

Melville has prepared the reader to accept that a man from Polynesia and a man from New York City might walk together in New Bedford, or in Nantucket—these whaling and fishing towns were among the most diverse and cosmopolitan of American locales in the mid-1800s.

Queequeg tells Ishmael a story of the first time he saw a wheelbarrow, in Sag Harbor. Not knowing what to do with it, he strapped his belongings inside and strapped the wheelbarrow to his shoulders, thus carrying it through the crowds instead of wheeling it. When Ishmael wonders aloud that Queequeg must have been taken for a foreign fool, Queequeg tells another story, of a white sailor who landed on the island of Kokovoko once, and who went to a large banquet with all the island's dignitaries. The white captain, thinking that a large punchbowl was a "finger-glass," rinsed his hands in it, only to be laughed at by all those present, who knew the bowl was for the purpose of ceremonial drinking.

Queequeg here demonstrates an important lesson in the "relatively" of politeness and etiquette across cultures. On the one hand, in the US, Queequeg is viewed as a hopelessly crude savage, one who does not understand even the most fundamental of American customs. But Queequeg is just as quick to point out that every culture has its customs—and, therefore, that every culture has its own conception of what is polite and what is "savage."

Queequeg and Ishmael load their belongings onto the Moss, and set out through the cold wind for Nantucket. Once the boat is underway, Queequeg finds a "young sapling," about to set out on his first whaling voyage, making fun of Queequeg "behind his back." Queequeg takes the young boy and throws him up in the air. The boy lands on his feet unharmed, but the captain of the Moss comes up to Queequeg and upbraids him, saying that Queequeg could have killed the boy. When Ishmael intervenes and explains to Queequeg the captain's words, Queequeg replies that the boy was a "small fish," and that Queequeg has no need to harm such a small creature.

The first of Queequeg's rescues. Here, Ishmael and Melville never mention this particular boy again, but it is safe to say that Melville has inserted this scene in order to foreshadow Queequeg's rescue of other characters in the novel, including Pip, after he falls out of Stubb's whaling-boat. Queequeg has courage and a willingness to help others that people who see him as a savage do not. In a sense, too, Queequeg is Ishmael's "savior," as the life-buoy intended for him—the man's casket—is the flotation device Ishmael uses after the Pequod sinks.

But just after this conversation, the winds whip the boom back and forth, and the boom knocks the young boy off the decks of the ship. Queequeg, sensing that the boy might drown, throws a line around the boom to steady it, and jumps into the water, finding the boy beneath the waves and swimming him back to the Moss, and to safety. The boy and the captain are thankful for Queequeg's efforts, and Ishmael remarks to himself that, after this moment, he "clove to Queequeg like a barnacle." Queequeg accepts only fresh water as repayment, and calmly smokes his tomahawk-pipe on deck.

Queequeg's virtue and courage are characterized by an inability to glory in his achievements. Where other sailors might attempt to use their "rescues" in order to advance their careers, or perhaps to lighten their other duties aboard the vessel, Queequeg is content to do a good deed, to receive some small recognition for it, and to carry on with himself.

CHAPTER 14: NANTUCKET

Ishmael and Queequeg arrive in Nantucket with no further misadventure. Ishmael fills this brief chapter with a rhapsody on the nature of Nantucket, where, as the story goes, a small Native American boy was once carried by a bird, and where his family went after to find him, and settled, thus founding the town. Nantucket is now almost entirely a port for whaling and fishing, and Ishmael remarks that, although the great colonial powers of the earth seek far and wide for land to add to their empires, Nantucket "controls two-thirds of the world" because its denizens control the seas, and make their money in pursuit of "walruses and whales."

This one of the earliest of Melville's, and Ishmael's, fugues: short chapters on a theme unrelated to the general narrative thrust of the novel. Here, Ishmael takes a moment to underscore just how important Nantucket is to the whaling industry and to the economy of the US in the 1800s. Ishmael's tone, characteristic throughout, is one of emphasis, and of great rhetorical rigor—in this chapter alone, he uses rhetorical questions, repetition, and other devices of ancient Greek and Roman rhetoric (or persuasive speaking) to convince the reader of his point.

CHAPTER 15: CHOWDER

Ishmael and Queequeg disembark in Nantucket and, upon the recommendation of Peter Coffin, proceed to an inn owned by Coffin's cousin, a man named Hosea Hussey. Ishmael and Queequeg, after some searching, find this inn—the Try Pots—and meet Mrs. Hussey, who is taking care of the inn while Hosea is out. Ishmael finds the picture of two gallows on the inn's signpost to be unnerving, just as he found Peter Coffin's name to be a strange foreboding of death. But the two go inside. Mrs. Hussey asks whether the two would like "cod" or "clam," meaning cod or clam chowder, and the two men order both and eat their chowders with glee, as the soup is exceptionally delicious.

Even Ishmael, who purports to know something about marine culture, is confused by the two soup options, indicating that it is not only Queequeg who has trouble comprehending the customs and etiquette particular to the whaling town of Nantucket. Unlike Coffin, Mrs. Hussey takes a dimmer view of Queequeg's "strange" activities in the room, as will be evidenced, later, by her unwillingness to let Queequeg continue in his "Ramadan," or ritual fasting period, in the hotel room. Again Ishmael sees a name as foreboding, but with so many foreboding things can one really trust any of them?

After commenting that all the food, all the rooms, indeed even the milk in the Try Pots smells of fish—Nantucket being a fishing town—Ishmael goes with Queequeg upstairs to bed. Mrs. Hussey welcomes them to their room, saying only that she will take Queequeg's harpoon from him, since once, at the same inn, a man was found dead, stabbed with his harpoon in the night. Ishmael and Queequeg fall quickly asleep.

Similarly, Mrs. Hussey does not want Queequeg to have his customary weapon—which, as above, he uses to shave and likes to keep wit him—since apparently the crowd at the Try Pots can be a rowdy one. This again seems to indicate that Mrs. Hussey does not completely trust this "cannibal" who stays under her roof.

CHAPTER 16: THE SHIP

That next morning, Queequeg informs Ishmael that his little wooden god, named Yojo, has told him that Ishmael is to select the sailing vessel on which they will voyage, and that, furthermore, Ishmael is to do this according to his own free will and inclination. Although Ishmael wants Queequeg's advice in choosing the ship, he acquiesces and goes out to find a boat. Ishmael isolates three possibilities: the Devil-dam, the Tit-bit, and the Pequod, the last named for an "extinct tribe of Massachusetts Indians." Ishmael's inclinations guide him to the last ship, and so he chooses it.

A good example of the interplay of fate and free will in the novel. On the one hand, Yojo and Queequeg both want Ishmael to choose the ship on which they will sail. Therefore, they trust implicitly in Ishmael's judgment. But they also believe it is preordained that Ishmael's good judgment will result in . . . their fate, meaning that whatever their future is, it will come about according to Ishmael's wishes. In some sense, too, Ahab's quest for Moby Dick is both self-initiated and (he believes) beyond his immediate control.

Ishmael looks over the Pequod, and finds it to be an old and beautiful ship, adorned, as he would later find out, by its owner and former captain, Peleg, with a great deal of carving and a dark stain of paint—all of which indicate its many voyages around the world. Ishmael goes up to the decks and sees a teepee-like structure pitched there. Going inside, he finds an old sailor and asks if that man is the captain of the boat, and announces that he, Ishmael, would very much like to serve as a sailor on the Pequod.

Melville knows that, in order to "build up" the character of Ahab, he must first provide the reader with several "false starts" in that direction. He therefore makes it seem that Peleg might be the captain of the vessel—until, that is, Peleg admits that the ship's captain is an even more mysterious man, one who very rarely shows his face above-decks.

This old sailor asks whether Ishmael has any experience on boats, and when Ishmael says he has been on merchant ships, the old man becomes enraged, saying that sailing on a whaling vessel is different, and far more difficult, than sailing on a merchant ship. The old sailor then asks if Ishmael is trustworthy, and tells him to look at Captain Ahab before he decides to sail on the Pequod. Ishmael is surprised, thinking that the old man is the captain of the boat, but the man introduces himself as Peleg, part owner of the boat along with another man named Bildad. Peleg tells Ishmael that Ahab lost his leg to a whale—and not just any whale, but the "monstrousest parmacetty [Spermaceti] that ever chipped a boat."

The first introduction of Ahab's disability—the loss of his leg. Peleg makes it seem that, in some sense, Ahab's quest is understandable—that any man who has been "dismasted" might reasonably hold a grudge against the whale who ate his leg. But other characters in the novel, notably Starbuck and, later, Boomer, say it is wrong to impute human motives to Moby Dick—that he is, instead, simply an animal, and a ferocious one, and that one cannot exact revenge against a "dumb brute."

Peleg pushes Ishmael further, asking if Ishmael is willing to throw a harpoon down a "whale's throat," and whether Ishmael can't "see the world," as many potential whalemen wish, by just standing on the docks and looking at the ocean, instead of putting himself in danger on the high seas. But Ishmael insists that he is up to the challenge and ready to be a whaler, and at this, Peleg tells him to go below-decks, talk to Bildad, and sign up for the next voyage.

Ishmael places special importance on the notion of sailing on a whaling ship, rather than on any merchant vessel. As will be revealed later on, Ishmael believes that whaling itself is a noble calling, prefigured in history, with a vast number of literary, philosophical, and religious dimensions unknown to common fishing ships.

Ishmael writes that both Peleg and Bildad were Nantucket Quakers, but are hardly peaceful for that—though they speak the odd Quaker vernacular, which sounds like the language of the Bible, they are angry men with a fighting spirit. Ishmael says that Peleg is a "blusterer," a talkative and somewhat hypocritical man, and that Bildad is "more pious," more like a typical Quaker, though he also works his men hard and gives them very little in the way of rations or money. Ishmael believes his pay should be the 275th lay, or 1/275 of the ship's profits at the end of whaling. But Ishmael is shocked to learn that Bildad and Peleg will offer him only 1/777 of the profits, known in the industry as a "long lay."

In the novel, characters tend to be caricatures, in a positive sense of the word—they are often defined by a few strong characteristics, and might be interpreted as embodiments of a given set of values. Thus, Peleg believes religiosity isn't important in a sailor; Bildad does. Peleg freely takes the name of the Lord in vain; Bildad would never do so. The way pay on a whaling ship works is important: the men do not make a salary. The make a percentage of the profits of the ship. Speaking in modern language, every sailor has "equity" in the voyage. They make their fortune—literally and figuratively—through the luck and skill of their collective effort.

Ishmael is offended at this paltry offer, but believing this is the ship for him, and not caring too much for the pay, he signs anyway, and asks if he can bring his friend Queequeg along the next day. Peleg and Bildad agree. As Ishmael is walking back to Queequeg, however, Ishmael asks Peleg if he can meet Ahab, now that he is signed on for the voyage. But Peleg says that Ahab is out of sorts, not taking visitors at the moment. And when Ishmael asks if Ahab isn't the name of a Biblical king so wicked that, when he was killed, "dogs wouldn't lick his blood," Peleg warns Ishmael not to bring up this story around Ahab.

The Biblical tales told in Moby Dick, including the references to Rachel and her orphans, to Ahab, and to Jonah, are typically stories of discomfort, sadness, and cruelty. Although the story of Jonah has a positive ending, the stories of Ahab and Rachel do not, and Melville appears especially awed by the overwhelming power and mystery of these stories—by the idea that God, rather than being just a source of infinite goodness, is also a force of "fate," or apparently indiscriminate cruelty to men.

Before Ishmael leaves, Peleg tells him that Ahab was a little "out of his head" after his leg was bitten off by a certain whale, and that Ahab is somewhat "moody," but he is a good captain, and he has a young wife and child living in Nantucket. Ishmael thinks a little on the idea of Ahab as he walks back to the Try Pots, but says that other ideas and excitement about the voyage began to preoccupy him, and so he forgets Ahab for the time being.

This is the first explicit reference to the fact that Ahab might not be entirely of sound mind. It is not clear, as the novel progresses, to what extent Ahab is "insane," and to what extent his pride, drive, and anger have simply taken control of his life. Ahab does appear, at best, to have a total disregard for anything except his personal whale-hunt.

CHAPTER 17: THE RAMADAN

Ishmael returns to the Try Pots and attempts to get into the room he shares with Queequeg, but, although he sees through a crack in the door that Queequeg's harpoon is inside (having been taken at some point from Mrs. Hussey during the morning), Queequeg is nowhere to be found. Ishmael goes off to find Mrs. Hussey, worried that Queequeg has disappeared or harmed himself, and Mrs. Hussey thinks that Queequeg, like the man before him, has died in his room of a harpoon wound. But Mrs. Hussey doesn't want Ishmael to break down the door. In his haste, however, Ishmael cannot wait, and he rushes at the door, only to find Queequeg sitting quietly inside, with his wooden idol Yojo seated atop his head.

Queequeg's serenity is remarkable, and is often a source of veneration for Ishmael. Here, Ishmael wonders how Queequeg could possibly be able to sit all alone, for an entire day, without food or water, and without human contact. But it is precisely this internal strength in Queequeg that Ishmael finds so admirable, indeed inspirational. Ishmael, for his part, is often scared of the difficulties of whaling—for example, when his whale-boat first capsizes—and he continually looks to Queequeg for guidance and support.

Ishmael is relieved to find Queequeg there, and believes that this day of prayer, his "Ramadan," or fast, cannot last much longer. Queequeg is unresponsive to Ishmael's questions, and Ishmael goes down to dinner, coming back to find Queequeg in the same position. Queequeg still will not respond to Ishmael or even acknowledge his presence, and Ishmael goes to sleep, at last convincing Queequeg to listen to him. Queequeg ceases his fast and pays attention to Ishmael as the latter delivers a speech on religious custom. Ishmael says he has no reason to make fun of Queequeg's religious rite, but he continues that fasting itself is bad for the body, and that all religious rites are somewhat silly if taken to extremes.

Another important piece of wisdom, derived by Ishmael from his experiences with Queequeg. Here, Ishmael realizes a principle that would now be called the moral relativity of religions—the idea that religious custom itself varies across the world, and that these variations might seem strange to parties outside the religion, even as they are perfectly normal to the religion's adherents. Ishmael slowly learns more about himself, his friend Queequeg, and about the wider world as the novel continues.

Queequeg does not understand much of Ishmael's speech, however, and when Ishmael asks if Queequeg's stomach ever becomes upset after a fast, Queequeg responds that, when his village kills many enemies in a fight and eats them in large numbers after the battle, no one, even those eating lots of human flesh, ever has stomach trouble. Ishmael finds this story strange and unnerving, but nevertheless falls asleep with Queequeg, and in the morning, both eat a large breakfast, leave the Try Pots, and make their way to the Pequod, to begin their voyage.

Here, however, Ishmael has a bit more trouble understanding a simply "relativistic" difference between Queequeg and himself—Ishmael would never eat human flesh. Melville clearly delights in the portrayal of Queequeg as a cannibal, but as a "kind" one, who would only eat his enemies in battle—never his friends. It is further humorous—and illustrative of the divide in understanding between Queequeg and Ishmael—that Queequeg sees fit to explain that cannibalism never leads to stomach trouble, as if that was Ishmael's concern about it.

CHAPTER 18: HIS MARK

As Ishmael and Queequeg approach the Pequod, Peleg and Bildad, from the wigwam, exclaim that they wish Ishmael had told them that Queequeg is a "heathen," and that all "heathens" who ship out on a whaling vessel from Nantucket must show paperwork proving they have converted to Christianity. To this, Ishmael counters that Queequeg is a member of the "First Congregational Church," and when Bildad asks if this is the First Congregational in Nantucket, Ishmael replies that Queequeg is instead a member of the universal church of "believers," and that this qualifies him as well as anyone to ship on the vessel. This appears to convince Peleg, especially after Queequeg demonstrates his accuracy with the harpoon by throwing it directly at a small speck in the water, from the deck.

Ishmael attempts to show Peleg and Bildad what he has learned about the "oneness" of man's religions—that, so long as man prays to a higher power, it does not really matter whether this power is called the Christian God or the God of some other religious group. It is not clear the extent to which Peleg and Bildad actually believe in Ishmael's explanation, but they apparently want Queequeg as a member of the ship's crew, and so are willing to pretend that his "Christian" faith is satisfactory.

But Bildad persists in wanting Queequeg to convert the Christianity, pressing into his hand a religious tract in English, which Queequeg cannot read, even after Queequeg has "signed" his ship documents by putting his "mark" underneath his name, as written by Peleg. When Bildad continues bringing up the subject of Christian providence, and how God's help has aided the Pequod on numerous voyages, Peleg contests Bildad, saying that Peleg himself and Ahab's desire to avoid death kept the ship afloat during previous misadventures at sea—and that God's "desire" for the ship had nothing to do with it. But Bildad mumbles about Providence to himself as he walks away from Peleg, Ishmael, and Queequeg.

It was apparently rather common in the 1800s for people to sign with "marks," rather than with signatures, especially if those signers were not able to write their own names—and this was more common than one might imagine. Although there is a long line of legal basis for signing "by mark," here Bildad wonders if they haven't made a mistake allowing a "pagan" onto the vessel. The disagreement between Bildad and Peleg about whether God cares about the ship is indicative of larger debates about God and God's interaction (or lack thereof) with the world.

CHAPTER 19: THE PROPHET

As Ishmael and Queequeg are leaving the Pequod, they run into a man who does not identify himself, who asks if the two know the history of the Pequod, and of its Captain Ahab, whom the man calls "Old Thunder." When the man persists, asking if Ishmael and Queequeg have signed the papers, and making insinuations and sighs—"what's be will be,"—when Ishmael says that they have signed, Ishmael fires back, asking if the man has information about Ahab and his history that he wants to share. Ishmael adds that it is easy for a man to "pretend that he has a secret," if he simply does not say entirely what he means.

The novel is, in many ways, a novel of prophecies, and in this chapter, the commentary of Elijah is no exception. Elijah seems to know that Ahab's search for the white whale will end in bloodshed for the crew. And yet it isn't clear whether Elijah is simply making an educated guess—based on the obvious fact of Ahab's "monomania"—or whether Elijah does in fact have the ability to read the future, or if Elijah himself is crazy. Regardless, the dubious value of the prophet's prophecies is further marked by the fact that they come too late—Ishmael and Queequeg have already signed up.

But the man says only that Ahab lost his leg to a whale, and under suspicious circumstances. Ishmael asks the man's name, and he replies that it's Elijah, which Ishmael recognizes as the name of a Biblical prophet. Elijah asks also if Ishmael and Queequeg know about the "prophecies" regarding the Pequod, but when Ishmael asks for more information, Elijah leaves, then turns and follows many yards behind the two as they continue to walk along the wharf. Finally, however, when Ishmael decides to turn around and ask Elijah to explain his mysterious insinuations, he sees that Elijah has disappeared.

Elijah is also notable for his unwillingness to say, straight out, what he has prophesied regarding the ship and its crew. Once again Melville has filled the novel with omens and prophecies, while what is being prophesied or foreboded is entirely unclear, or made clear only in hindsight. And this is how it usually is with prophecy, that they imply that they will tell the future, but are understandable only in hindsight, when the future has come to pass. And it further highlights how men are always searching for clues to the future, to what will happen, and believe that they see such signs, but never really can know what "will be."

CHAPTER 20: ALL ASTIR

Ishmael reports that, for the next few days, Bildad and Peleg orchestrated the packing of the ship for a three years' journey—the typical amount of time a whaling vessel is on the high seas. Although some things, like food, utensils, and similar provisions, can be picked up at other ports along the way, most whaling implements (including harpoons) are specialized and must be packed with care before the voyage begins. Ishmael notes that Bildad's sister, named Aunt Charity, helps to pack the boat for the journey, bringing along pickles, flannel, and other goods. Ishmael closes the chapter by stating that Bildad and Peleg never allowed Ishmael to see Ahab before the ship set sail, and although this should have worried Ishmael at the time, he thought very little of it, assuming Ahab had good reason for staying away from the ship until it pushed off.

Melville and Ishmael adore chapters like these, in which they can list all the items one finds on a ship—just as Ishmael identifies many different types of whales, many different types of native societies, and other long lists of people and things throughout the novel, in chapter-length digressions. Here, Ishmael's purpose seems to be rather simple: to prove to the reader just how much needs to go onto a boat in order to allow dozens of men to survive, in at least marginal comfort, for a number of years, without prolonged access to ports of call along the way.

CHAPTER 21: GOING ABOARD

Ishmael and Queequeg come back to the ship the next morning, before sunrise, and intend to board for their journey, which they have heard will start that day. As they are climbing aboard, Elijah appears and stops them both, asking if they have seen the "four or five men" that just got on the vessel. Ishmael replies that he might have seen those men get on the boat, but he's not concerned with them; when Elijah says that Ishmael will perhaps find out who those men are, later on, Ishmael wonders who these mysterious men could be. But he and Queequeg leave Elijah and board the vessel, not seeing the "four or five men" at all.

An important prophecy. Of course, these five men will become the five-person "tiger crew" of Ahab's whale-boat. It is important to the captain that, like himself, they do not appear until the ship is long underway. Perhaps Ahab fears that this crew will be feared and loathed by other members of the Pequod—and in this, he is correct. Or perhaps he wants his "tiger crew" to be well-rested for the hunt for Moby Dick. But either way this subterfuge hints that the "fellowship" of the voyage, each sailor with his own share, is being undermined by the "tyrant" Ahab.

Ishmael and Queequeg do see a light on below-decks, however, and go down to find a "rigger" (a man rigging the boat for its journey) asleep there. Queequeg sits on the man's rear end (a custom in his country, he explains to Ishmael), and the two men share the tomahawk-pipe as the rigger sleeps. Finally, the rigger stirs and asks if Ishmael and Queequeg will be sailing on the Pequod. They say they will, and they go up above-decks with the rigger, hearing that Starbuck, the ship's chief mate, is there, and that Ahab is still secluded in his cabin on the ship—no one has yet seen him.

Another important and ancillary point, related to the preparations of the Pequod, are the sheer number of specialized jobs available for men aboard a whale-ship. Here, the "rigger"'s primary task is simply to put the boat in shape for the beginning of its journey; later, while on the open seas, the members of the crew will be asked to maintain this order. The rigger is joined by the likes of the ship's carpenter, its blacksmith, and its cook, all of whom will appear later. Men's roles define them on a ship, just as they do in society.

CHAPTER 22: MERRY CHRISTMAS

It is Christmas Day when the Pequod pushes off from shore, and Ishmael reports that Bildad and Peleg help to guide the vessel from port, as "pilots," before leaving the Pequod and getting onto another vessel, to take them back to Nantucket while the Pequod heads out into the open Atlantic. Ishmael hears tell of, and sees, Starbuck, the first mate, Stubb, the second, and Flask, the third, and he bustles along with the rest of the crew in preparing the boat for its long voyage. Bildad is loath to leave the Pequod and board the return ship to the port, but Peleg finally convinces him—after Bildad spends some minutes worrying atop the deck, pacing—that it's time to go. Bildad and Peleg then leave the Pequod in the command of Starbuck, while Ahab remains below-deck, hidden from view.

Melville makes a point of having the Pequod begin its journey on Christmas Day. Christmas, of course, apart from being an important Christian celebration and a day of nearly guaranteed rest across the country, is also a day of new beginnings, of the start of Jesus' life. Similarly, the Pequod is about to start a multi-year journey across the oceans of the world. But unlike the birth of Jesus, the shipping-out of the Pequod is tinged with a kind of brooding darkness, as exemplified by Ahab's "hiding" until the ship is well out of port.

CHAPTER 23: THE LEE SHORE

In this short chapter, Ishmael addresses the reader and points out that the man at the helm of the Pequod, as it first left shore, was Bulkington, under orders from Starbuck—the same Bulkington who was referred to in adulatory tones in the Spouter Inn in New Bedford. Ishmael tells the reader that Bulkington goes down with the Pequod at the end of the tale—an early reference to the ship's demise—and that boats and human souls seem designed for adventure, even when those adventures end in death and destruction. Ishmael states that "the highest truth" is "shoreless and indefinite," like God—that man must seek for this highest truth out in the waves, in the terror of the unknown. And he leaves this chapter as a "six-inch stoneless grave" to Bulkington, brave pilot of the doomed vessel.

In one of the novel's stranger passages, Ishmael sings the praises of the man, Bulkington, whom he mentioned very briefly in an early chapter regarding the Spouter Inn. Critical theories abound about Bulkington: some critics contend that he was to have a larger part in the narrative, but Melville simply forgot about him. Others claim that Bulkington is a symbol of the many crewmembers of the Pequod whose stories were not told in the novel—who were simply subsumed into the hunt for Moby Dick, and whose lives could form the basis for other books not yet written. In any event, Bulkington is to remain a mystery in the novel—never fully explained or characterized.

CHAPTER 24: THE ADVOCATE

Ishmael serves as an "advocate" to the reader, in this chapter, of the practice of hunting whales, Queequeg's profession and that of other harpooneers and sailors on the Pequod. Ishmael wonders aloud why whaling is not afforded more respect as a profession in the United States and around the world, and concludes that there must be some misunderstanding as to its form of "butchery," since whaling is in some sense no more gory than is warfare or other forms of hunting.

Ishmael enjoys putting on "parts" in his conversations with the reader. Here, he plays the role of the lawyer, or advocate, making a case about whaling. In other places, Ishmael is a willing raconteur, telling stories, or a scientist or "natural philosopher," attempting to make biological sense of the whale. Here he makes the case that whaling is as noble as war, or put another way that there is no reason to see war as noble and whaling as not.

Ishmael goes on to say that whaling is responsible for a great many of the advances in nineteenth century society, apart from its primary function: the provision of sperm-oil for oil lamps, the lamps that lit all of Europe and the Western world in the early 1800s. Ishmael says that, strikingly, whalers are some of the great explorers of the world—they have blazed watery trails throughout Australia, the Polynesian islands, and parts of Japan and the far east, although other explorers tend to get more credit for these "discoveries" than do whalers.

Ishmael also has a certain agenda with the reader: to explain that whaling is not just a noble or a heroic pursuit—but that whaling is itself one of the most important activities of man. Ishmael does this by arguing, almost as a kind of conspiracy theory, that whalers are "behind" the greatest innovations and discoveries of man. In other words, Ishmael believes that whalers are the secret engines of 1800s US society.

Ishmael closes the chapter by saying that perhaps the profession of whaling does not have its great "chronicler," even though many noble men, and descendants of important men, have taken up whaling as a way of making a living. Ishmael states that Queequeg, and men like him, are of inherently noble and distinguished character. And Ishmael concludes, implicitly, that perhaps the manuscript of this account, which forms the novel *Moby Dick*, might be his testament to the greatness and heroism inherent to whaling.

Ishmael, in a move that today would be considered "postmodern," addresses the act of composition of the book itself, saying that, in part, his job is to "speak" for those who will not speak for themselves—people like his companion Queequeg. In this sense, Ishmael is aware of, and indeed infuses the novel with, the idea of "writing a novel." This self-awareness was considered strange in Melville's time, and was a precursor to later developments in fictional narrative.

CHAPTER 25: POSTSCRIPT

Ishmael includes a brief addendum to his previous chapter, asking the reader whether he or she knows that oil is used to anoint the heads of kings when they are invested with the throne, and that, furthermore, the oil used for these services comes from the whale. This, Ishmael implies, is a testament to the inherent nobility of the act of whaling, and of the products whaling provides to humankind.

Another of Ishmael's small fugues, or tangential descriptions. This time, Ishmael makes clear that whaling is not just metaphorically "royal"—it is, in fact, bound up with the ceremonies that constitute royalty itself, throughout the world.

CHAPTER 26: KNIGHTS AND SQUIRES

Ishmael takes a moment to introduce the leadership of the Pequod. Starbuck, the first mate, is a Nantucketer and a Quaker, and Ishmael describes him as a skinny, tanned man seemingly "born of a drought," as though his "skin is too tight." Ishmael notes that Starbuck is also a superstitious man, more out of an abundance of caution than out of ignorance, and that he is a careful sailor who tells his fellow men always to be afraid of the whale.

Starbuck is an intriguing character—a moral pragmatist and a coward because of it; a careful man who fears convictions that are out of proportion, but who having no such convictions himself is unable to stand against them. That he has wound up as the namesake for a global coffee chain and the best character in Battlestar Galactica (in our opinion) has less to do with his traits and more with the awesomeness of his name. That name does, though, suggest his efforts to "buck" fate (or "stars") in the form of Ahab's quest.

Ishmael goes on to qualify the exact nature of Starbuck's bravery and personal courage, which, he indicates, the later narrative will reveal. Starbuck, he says, is a man of physical bravery, though he tends to minimize risk if he can. But Starbuck is terrified by more "spiritual" torments, of the kind that will come to afflict the crew of the Pequod. Ishmael says that it is difficult for him to write about the "abasement" of any man's moral strength, implying again that perhaps Starbuck's spiritual courage was wanting in the later pursuit of the whale. Ishmael ends the chapter by noting that he will later extol the virtues of other courageous men, whose courage might not be immediately evident.

Ishmael wants the reader to know, without ambiguity, that Starbuck will be central to the novel's moral considerations. Indeed, as Ahab later states, during the chase, Starbuck's caution and Stubb's bravado will form the "two poles" of human behavior, between which Ahab tries to steer. But, in truth, Ahab is neither patient and cautious, like Starbuck, nor impetuous, like Stubb. His is a third way—one characterized by "monomania," or the pursuit of a single objective, at the expense of all others.

CHAPTER 27: KNIGHTS AND SQUIRES

Ishmael goes on to describe the other two mates. Stubb, the second mate, is "calm and cool" in the face of danger—even when the whale is about to strike, as happens later in the narrative. A native of Cape Cod, Stubb is "inseparable" from his pipe, a feature as natural to him "as his nose." Stubb is joined by Flask, the third mate, a native of Martha's Vineyard, and a man who seems "personally affronted" by the whale, and whose courage in the fight takes a headlong form different both from Stubb's coolness and from Starbuck's reserve.

Stubb's pipe is a symbol of his ability to "multitask" while whaling. While Starbuck is out to make a living as a whaler, Stubb enjoys whaling so much that he does not feel it necessary to separate it from other activities he likes, including smoking his pipe, Interestingly, as a counterpoint to this, Melville will soon detail how Ahab throws his own pipe overboard—symbolizing Ahab's own desire to rid himself of enjoyable activities, and to focus entirely on hunting Moby Dick.

Ishmael names Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask the three "knights" of the Pequod, under the command of Ahab, and states that each knight takes out a whaling boat, when the whale is being tracked, and brings with him a harpooneer as a "squire," or assistant, to hook the whale. Starbuck's harpooneer is Queequeg; Stubb's is Tashtego, a Native American from Martha's Vineyard; and Flask's is Daggoo, an African "savage." Ishmael says that it is strange and worth remarking upon that Americans appear to provide the "brains" on the Pequod, and on many similar whaling ships, and non-whites the "brawn." Ishmael calls men like Tashtego and Daggoo "isolatoes," or men "of their own continent," and says that another young boy on the ship, a black boy named Pip, is also of the company of the isolatoes, and will be described later in the story.

The harpooneers will be of extreme importance in the novel, but not necessarily for their words—far more for their actions, for the extent to which they aid in the sighting and catching of whales. Queequeg, in particular, is indispensible to the crew of the vessel, and when it appears that Queequeg might die, of a flu toward the end of the novel, the crew not only mourns him but laments that they might not survive without Queequeg as their protector. That these men are described and knights and squires implies both their courage and valor, but also that they are bound to follow their "king"—Ahab.

CHAPTER 28: AHAB

Ishmael notes that the Pequod goes out into the Atlantic for several days, and still no one in the ship sees Ahab, who hides in his quarters. Ishmael wonders to himself if Elijah's prophecies weren't true—if Ahab isn't a cursed, mysterious man. One morning, Ishmael goes onto the quarterdeck, where the captain stands, and sees Ahab there. Ishmael notes that Ahab is a powerful, middle-aged man, with a large white scar running down the side of his body, "like a seam." Ahab also stands on a white leg made of polished sperm-whale bone, taken from a whale's jaw.

The notion of a "seam" is an interesting one. For continual mention is made to the fact that Ahab has been "put back together" after his near-deadly fight with Moby Dick—that, indeed, he is like a doll, sewn back into human shape. The question, of course, is whether the patching of Ahab has worked—whether he is indeed a normal man now, capable of leading a crew on the high seas. Ishmael, for his part, appears to recognize in Ahab the potential for a terrifying kind of madness.

Ishmael reports also that Ahab stands in a sort of "pivot-hole" worn into the deck of the Pequod, where he can rest his white leg while steadying his body and being able to turn around 360 degrees. Ishmael notes that Ahab seems preoccupied and has little to do with the day-to-day operations of the ship, as they are mostly setting out a due course into the Atlantic and south, and the whale-boats have not yet been "lowered" in pursuit of whales.

One of the striking descriptions of Ahab's disability—here, his "pivot-hole" shows the manner by which the Pequod has been made ready for him, and for his special physical state. Other mechanisms for this include a pulley-system for taking Ahab across to other ships, during gams, and a different pulley for hoisting Ahab up the mast, to spot whales.

CHAPTER 29: ENTER AHAB; TO HIM, STUBB

Ahab often walks the quarterdeck at night, when only the night-watch sailors are about, since he cannot sleep well in the evenings. The Pequod is drawing toward the Equator and Quito (capital of Ecuador), and the night-air has turned warmer and more pleasant. As Ahab paces the quarterdeck, his ivory leg scrapes against the wood and often wakes the sailors. But when Stubb goes above to tell Ahab, gently, that this is the case, Ahab curses him, calls him a dog, and tells him to "sleep in his grave" below the deck. Stubb takes umbrage at being called a dog, but Ahab again shouts him down, and Stubb retreats to the belowdecks.

One of the under-heralded aspects of the novel is its humor, and in this instance, the reader is reminded that Ahab's peg-leg would naturally cause the wood to resound below decks as he paces in the night. Stubb appears the best suited, of the three mates, for speaking to Ahab, since Stubb does not feel it necessary to amend his statements in order to please the captain. Yet Stubb is no match for Ahab.

Stubb, talking to himself as he walks back to sleep, says that Ahab is the strangest captain he has ever seen. Stubb also repeats what another sailor has told him: that Ahab's bunk is often disturbed the morning after he sleeps, indicating that Ahab tosses and turns the whole night long. Stubb wonders what must be wrong with the old man, and vows to find out at some point during the voyage.

Ahab's inability to sleep soundly will continue throughout the novel, until, by the chase sequence spanning the final three chapters, Ahab is not sleeping at all, but is instead keeping an all-night vigil, in case Moby Dick should reappear at any moment. It is characteristic of Stubb that he is not terrified but more interested or amazed by Ahab's strange behavior.

CHAPTER 30: THE PIPE

In this very short chapter, Ahab smokes a pipe and sits on the quarterdeck, appearing, according to the narrator (who is perhaps still Ishmael, although Ishmael is not present in the scene), to be the "king" of his domain—the Pequod and the sea filled with whales. But Ahab gets no joy out of smoking his pipe, and throws it angrily into the ocean.

In this fateful scene Ahab casts away the final piece of enjoyment to him, on earth, that does not have to do with pursuing the whale. Ahab will throw other things overboard later on, including the instruments used to direct the ship in the open ocean. His life becomes narrower and narrower, focused solely on Moby Dick.

CHAPTER 31: QUEEN MAB

In this short chapter, Stubb tells Flask of a dream he had the night before—the night he was told off by Ahab. Stubb dreams that Ahab kicked him with his ivory leg, and after doing so, that Ahab turned into a kind of "pyramid," and Stubb did his best to kick this pyramid back, but did no damage. Stubb muses, in the dream, as to whether it is better to be hit with a "living" or a "dead" thing—a living hand or foot, rather than an ivory one—and concludes it is far worse to be hit with something living. Then, in the dream, a "merman" with a hunched back appears, and tells Stubb that it was in fact an honor to be kicked by so noble a man as Ahab, and with an ivory leg—a leg worth a great deal of money.

A strange and surreal chapter, which also deviates from the relatively realistic descriptions established in the preceding chapters. The dream equates Ahab with ancient spiritual places (the purposes of which are lost to the understanding of modern men) and Ahab's ivory leg, here, achieves a kind of symbolic status—an indicator that Ahab is not entirely human, but rather has a part of him that more resembles a machine or an inanimate object. (Queen Mab, by the way, is a mythological bringer of dreams.)

Flask hears out this dream and concludes that it sounds like a "foolish" one. But Stubb believes it has given him some useful information about Ahab, and tells Flask that he will not fight with Ahab anymore—he will simply follow the man's orders. Stubb also tells the third mate that Ahab has been ordering men around to keep their eyes out for whales, especially a white whale. Stubb wonders what this could mean—white whales are exceedingly rare—and hurries to prepare the deck according to Ahab's wishes.

Stubb here decides to give in to Ahab, to follow his leader who he sees having a kind of greatness to him (even if it is a strange or frightening greatness). It is interesting that Stubb decides this even as he senses that the "white whale" might also be a stand-in for something larger—for a struggle against God and fate. The characters of the novel, interestingly, grasp Moby Dick both as a horrible monster and, simultaneously, as a symbol for other monstrous events in men's lives, and still follow the monomaniacal Ahab to face it. The grandeur and implacable power of Ahab's almost inhuman will is a critical aspect of the novel.

CHAPTER 32: CETOLOGY

Ishmael attempts to lay out for the reader a systematic overview of the kinds of whales, and the divisions into which whales might be separated. Ishmael notes that, though a great many writers from Biblical times onward have mentioned whales or leviathans in their texts, very few have a scientific understanding of whales, and even fewer know much about the sperm whale, the "king of the seas" and the whale being hunted by the Pequod. On the topic of whether a whale is a fish, Ishmael cites a good deal of scholarship debating the issue, but concludes that whales ought to be defined as "spouting, horizontal-tailed fishes with lungs and warm blood."

A famous chapter in the novel, one often referenced when critics speak of its "contemporary" or "postmodern" nature. Here, Ishmael attempts to help himself and the reader to understand whales through scientific means of observation and classification. And yet while this effort is elucidating it also highlights, purposely, that scientific knowledge can't explain all, or provide all understanding. Whales remain mysteries despite what is scientifically known about them, and thus they serve as a metaphor for nature and the world, for the spirit that men sense but can't *define.*

Ishmael divides the whales as though they are books. Book 1, chapter 1 is the sperm whale, the "spermaceti," the most majestic and most valuable (for its oil). Book 1, Chapter 2 is the right whale, which is also hunted like the sperm whale, but which produces an "inferior oil." Book 1, Chapter 3 is the fin-back whale, a "solitary" whale apparently marked, like Cain in the Bible, and separated from its fellow whales, swimming mostly alone. Ishmael also identifies the humpback, the razor-back, and the sulphur-bottom whales, although he states that he knows little about them, other than the basic features of their appearance, and their lack of oil-value.

The right whale serves as an interesting foil to the sperm whale, which, like Ahab, Ishmael considers to be the most noble on the seas, something akin to whale royalty. The right whale, on the other hand, is less noble, because it does not hunt for its food, but rather skims the water for small organisms. The right whale is also not as "majestic" when it swims, and its head and body cannot be used for the harvesting of the most useful of whale products—sperm oil.

Book 2 consists of the smaller whales—the grampus, the black-fish, and the narwhal. Many scholars debate whether or not these specimens are actual whales, and Ishmael states that the narwhal is notable for its tusk, whose purpose is debated among scientists. Ishmael wonders if the narwhal isn't singled out for its resemblance to the unicorn, which seems to inspire in men a kind of romantic sentiment. Ishmael rounds out Book 2 by discussing the killer whale briefly, stating that these whales tend not be hunted by Nantucketers.

Other whales might have a kind of scientific value—or, in the case of narwhals, a literary one—but they, too, lack the excitement of the sperm whale, perhaps because they do not produce oil, and perhaps because they do not put up nearly as much of a fight when caught. Indeed, the reader might wonder whether sperm whales aren't valued because of the difficulty men have in hunting them.

The final book, Book 3, consists of what Ishmael calls porpoises. Ishmael notably has a harder time differentiating among the porpoises, and among other kinds of "pseudo-whales." Ishmael then closes this chapter by saying that cetology, as a science (the study of whales) has much to be added to it, and that that branch of science, much like this narrative Ishmael is writing, is "but a draft—nay, but the draft of a draft."

A very important moment in the novel. That the novel itself might be a "draft"—an attempt to describe a subject that is too vast, too complex for one book—is another "postmodern" or contemporary-seeming idea. Melville clearly viewed his novelistic enterprise as Ishmael does, here—one that is impossible to fully complete. It also captures the idea of scientific and all knowledge, that it is some thing that is always growing, always revising and rewriting itself.

CHAPTER 33: THE SPECKSNYDER

Ishmael begins this short chapter by stating that whale-boats are different from other ships, in that they used to have two head officers—a captain and a specksnyder, or chief harpooneer. This office is now collapsed into that of the captain, but Ishmael points to the position of the specksnyder as an indication of the importance of the "harpooneer class" on a ship, and the centrality of the actual lancing of whales to the whaler's life. Ishmael then discusses, briefly, the nature of Ahab's particular grandeur. He is clearly a captain who delights in his "sultanism," or his dictatorship of the vessel. But Ishmael notes that this dictatorship does not manifest itself outwardly, in bright, fancy clothing, or in a noble bearing. Rather, Ishmael hints that Ahab will demonstrate his harshness, cruelty, and ultimately royal nature only later on, when the fight with the whale commences.

The comparison of Ahab to a "sultan" is an intriguing one. For Ahab's crew, the "tiger crew" that accompanies him on the whale-boat, is comprised entirely of men from Asia, and there is, indeed, a certain "orientalism" Ishmael associates with the captain of the vessel. Perhaps this has to do with the central mystery of Ahab—the fact that no one can explain why Ahab is so desirous of killing Moby Dick, above all other whales. For the east was, to people in Ishmael's time, a place of strange passions, of intense desires, and of mysteries that might not necessarily be sensible to men of "reason," in the west. The title also captures that the mysteries of Ahab give him a power over the ship and the men on it—that he rules completely.

CHAPTER 34: THE CABIN-TABLE

Ishmael then notes, briefly, the nature of Ahab's dining. Ahab eats his dinner each nigh with the three mates, and they sit at an ivory (whalebone) table over which Ahab presides, like the head of a family. Starbuck gets the largest portion of the three mates, then Stubb, then Flask, and Flask must leave the table first to tend to his duties back on deck—Stubb and then Starbuck follow him.

Division of life on a whale ship, like similar divisions in the military, break down along lines of "class" or status. Here, the officers of the ship, like the officers in the military, tend to associate with one another, and not with the crew, or troops. Ahab seems to emphasize this hierarchy, and his own place at its top, more than most.

Ishmael also describes, briefly, the meals eaten by the three harpooneers—Queequeg, Tashtego, and Daggoo—whose lip-smacking and "barbaric" manners tend to scare the dough-boy, or cook, on the ship. Ishmael notes that, although in some ships, the captain makes the officers and the harpooneers feel comfortable lounging and talking in the captain's quarters, Ahab engenders no such camaraderie, but instead keeps mostly to himself before and after meal times.

The harpooneers, for their part, act as something like "non-commissioned officers," or officers of a middle tier, between the ship's captain and mates, on the one hand, and the crew, on the other. The "strange" habits of the "savage" harpooneers (described by Ishmael in a manner that would now be considered offensive) are often viewed as impenetrable and mysterious by others on the vessel. Ahab is again notable for how he sets himself apart.

CHAPTER 35: THE MAST-HEAD

Ishmael describes the duty of sitting atop the mast-head, or the tip of each long spar extending upward from the deck of the Pequod. Ishmael notes, half-comically, that "mast-head-standing" has a long history: the Babylonians did something similar when they built the tower of Babel, and stone carvings of Napoleon, Admiral Nelson, and George Washington sit atop tall columns in the Western world and America. But Ishmael wishes to describe in greater detail the watch sailors must serve while sitting atop the masts.

As in other parts of the novel, Ishmael here does not seek only to describe the activity of sitting on the mast. Instead, he wishes to situate that activity within a historical context that describes, over time, how men have chosen to sit atop high things and look down upon the world. Fittingly, as his first example, Ishmael takes the Tower of Babel, an attempt by man, in Biblical times, to reach the sky—and which resulted in God striking down the tower as an overreach by men, and ensure that such an effort could never be done again by making men speak different languages. Looked at that way, the Babel story led to the diversity on the Pequod. Looked at another way, the story hints at Ahab's own possible overreach in his monomaniacal quest.

Ishmael says that sailors on the Pequod and similar vessels sit atop the mast for two-hour shifts while it is light out. The top of whaling vessels tends not to have crow's nests, or small seating areas, but rather have only two slats of wood upon which the sailor is to balance, either seated or standing. Ishmael says that the purpose of the mast-head watch is to spot whales, but that many young men, lulled into calming meditation by the serenity of the South Seas, think only of their own happiness and contentment, and never spot whales at all. Ishmael considers this a natural outcome of the beauty of the scene from the mast-head, although he notes that this phenomenon often angers harpooneers, who are hoping to hunt and kill whales.

Sitting atop the mast has two purposes in the novel. The first, as here, is inherently practical—one has the best view from this vantage, and therefore one might spot whales from here with great efficiency. Second, the top of the mast-head has a kind of philosophical importance on a whale-ship, as here, men are alone, able to view the sea in all its vastness. There are few places on a ship where a man can be completely alone with his thoughts, but the mast-head is one of those places. And in this high place of beauty and contemplation, men lose themselves.

CHAPTER 36: THE QUARTER-DECK

Ahab, after pacing for several days around the quarterdeck, and appearing as though he has something on his mind, tells Starbuck one day to rouse the enter crew aft (or behind the quarterdeck), as Ahab would like to address them. Ahab roars that he will give any man who spots a white whale with a curious jaw, and with three wounds in his side, an ounce of gold (which he nails to the mast of the Pequod). Tashtego, Daggoo, and Queequeg wonder aloud if this isn't Moby Dick, the same whale that bit off Ahab's leg, and Ahab agrees, saying that all the men aboard have shipped out not just on a normal whaling mission, but on a mission to capture and kill Moby Dick.

It is notable that this "big reveal," in which Ahab finally discusses his plans to use the Pequod's voyage as an excuse to find and kill Moby Dick, does not occur until the ship is well out to sea. Of course, this has a practical advantage—the crew will be less likely to mutiny, if they know that they are already far from land. But it appears that Ahab, and Melville, both want to savor the suspense of this moment—to lead up to it after hundreds of pages of narrative, rather than to have it described at the very beginning of the novel.

Starbuck alone protests to Ahab, saying that he and others shipped not for "vengeance" on one fish, but on a normal whaling adventure. But Ahab counters that it is not exactly the whale itself he wants to fight and kill, but the thing "behind it," whatever that might be—perhaps fate, or the unearthly power that has caused Ahab to lose his leg and nearly his life. Ahab then passes around a chalice so that all assembled may drink, and he calls the three harpooneers and mates together, to place their harpoons and hands together, and to agree to hunt Moby Dick to the end of the earth. Starbuck is concerned by the strangeness of this ritual of devotion to Ahab, but the rest of the crew seems excited to kill Moby Dick, and Ahab orders them all to disperse soon thereafter.

The crew is far from desirous of mutiny, however—they realize that Ahab cannot be dissuaded from his purpose, but they also wish, ardently, to find and kill Moby Dick themselves. The reasons for this are perhaps not easy to explain. Of course, the gold doubloon might be an enticement for some sailors, particularly those who don't not expect much money from the voyage, because they have been given a "long lay" like Ishmael. But there is something, too, in the collective fervor of the crew: they become "infected" with Ahab's passion, and wish only to serve their captain. Only the practical Starbuck, who is unaffected by fate or quests for glory, sees anything wrong in these events.

CHAPTER 37: SUNSET

This short chapter is told from the perspective of Ahab's internal monologue, and has him sitting alone in his cabin, reciting to himself that, although Starbuck appears worried about the Pequod's new mission, Ahab will exact revenge against Moby Dick, and "dismember" his "dismemberer." Ahab vows that "the path to his fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon his soul is grooved to run," meaning he will stop at nothing to achieve his goal of killing Moby Dick.

A beautiful sentence in the novel—that Ahab's purpose "is fixed . . . with iron rails, whereon his soul is grooved to run." One of the particularly exciting features of the novel is its insistence on densely-patterned, "poetic" language, in descriptions of internal states and external landscapes. This sentence is a grand example of Melville's descriptive abilities (not to mention the importance of trains at the time of the novel's writing).

CHAPTER 38: DUSK

Starbuck has his own internal monologue, in which he says to himself that Ahab is a madman, that nothing good can come of his obsession with Moby Dick, and that the crew now has come around to Ahab's cause and is acting mad as well. Starbuck wonders if the crew will be able to calm itself enough to go on watch tonight.

This will not be the first time that Starbuck grumbles to himself about Ahab's madness. The conflict between the pragmatic, practical Starbuck and the sultan-like, mysterious, fate- and pride-driven Ahab begins to take shape more fully.

CHAPTER 39: FIRST NIGHT WATCH

Stubb talks to himself, too, and in characteristic fashion, saying that of course Ahab is mad, but that Stubb will "go along with it," as is best. Stubb sees that Starbuck is worried about Ahab's obsession, but Stubb also feels that the best course is simply to follow orders—Stubb will follow Starbuck—and Starbuck ought to follow Ahab. Stubb leaves his place when Starbuck calls to him.

Stubb, for his part, sees the hunt for Moby Dick as a component of the larger excitement of whale-hunting itself. If hunting sperm whales is enjoyable, then hunting a large and especially devilish sperm whale is doubly exciting. Stubb sees following orders as the best means of allowing him to live the life he wants to—a whale-hunting life.

CHAPTER 40: MIDNIGHT, FORECASTLE

This chapter is structured as a small play, set on the forward deck of the Pequod. A group of sailors from countries all over Europe begin dancing on the deck, as a kind of wild celebration they say is brought on by Ahab's exhortation to them (to kill Moby Dick), and by the wine Ahab has had them drink. A Spanish sailor gets into a fight with Daggoo, but the sailors all scramble when a storm rises and they must go about "battening down" the ship to prepare for it. Pip, a small African boy who was taken onto the boat some time earlier, speaks quietly to himself, asking for God's help to protect him from the crazed and drunken sailors around him.

A bizarre chapter, and one of the first of numerous "playlets" that dot the novel. Melville uses these plays as a way to fully capture the diversity of people and thoughts on the ship without having to filter them through he consciousness of a narrator. It is interesting that in a novel so concerned about omens and prophecies and the impossibility of interpreting such things, that Melville sometimes feels the need to eliminate the interpretive force of an interpreting narrator from his book. It is interesting to note that, in this chapter, it is unclear where Ishmael has gone, or if he is even the narrator of the "playlet" at all.

CHAPTER 41: MOBY DICK

Ishmael tells the reader that he, too, was present during the wild revelry of that night, and that he was caught up in the excitement surrounding the pursuit of Moby Dick, which he initially supported. Ishmael states that, because it is often difficult for sailors to communicate with each other on the open seas (they typically do so only when they encounter each other side by side in the water), only rumors of Moby Dick circulated among whalemen. And these rumors tended to paint Moby Dick as an unconquerable monster, one capable of maiming and killing anyone in his path.

Ishmael then answers this "narrative quandary" by saying that, instead of writing the play, he was in fact an observer of the play from aboard the ship. This points to the fact that some other narrative intelligence must be "picking up" and "filling in" parts of the novel that Ishmael does not relate directly to the reader. The most obvious "other voice" is that of Melville himself, but it might just as easily be Ahab's internal perspective—the captain might see the ship as one grand stage, on which a play unfolds.

Ishmael goes on to say that some sailors believe Moby Dick to be immortal, incapable of being killed. Ishmael says that Moby Dick is notable for his "high brow," his "hump" on his back, a "deformed lower jaw," and, of course, his whiteness, which will be discussed at length in the next chapter. Ishmael then relates to the reader the nature of Ahab's first encounter with Moby Dick. Essentially, the White Whale stove (or capsized) the three small whale-boats in pursuit, and Ahab, in the water and swimming to safety, saw Moby Dick and attempted to stab him with a small knife. But Moby Dick took hold of Ahab's leg and bit it cleanly off.

Nothing about Moby Dick is ordinary. He is large and strange looking—his jaw is misshapen—and his whiteness is noticeable above all. One of the ironies of the novel is that the crew of the Pequod must search so intently for a creature that is immediately recognizable—a whale, indeed, that many crews on many different whale-ships have seen, across the oceans of the world. Moby Dick is well known and unmistakable, and yet he is hard to find. In this way—unmissable but hard to find—Moby Dick resembles God.

On this, Ahab's previous voyage, Ahab was taken back onto the Pequod and was wrapped in a strait-jacket as his leg-wound healed, for the bite had caused him to go "mad" during the return to the United States. Ishmael reports that Ahab's "monomania," or obsession with the whale, was not born of the bite itself but of the aftermath of the bite, when Ahab seemed to attribute the cruel powers of fate, and his ill luck, entirely to the whale—the whale then achieving a kind of "supernatural" significance. Ishmael ends the chapter by saying that, in hindsight, there was no mate or harpooneer on the vessel strong enough to stop Ahab—Starbuck was too morally week, Stubb too enthusiastic for the fight, and Flask too "mediocre." But Ishmael cannot "plumb" Ahab's motivations any further, since he is not entirely sure what drove Ahab to his own and the Pequod's eventual destruction.

"Monomania" means an irrational concern with a single idea or object. In this case, then, Ahab's monomania is expressed not just in a total concern with the white whale, but in an inability to achieve satisfaction unless that whale is hunted and killed. Ahab knows that to kill the whale would not change anything in the world—it would not, for example, bring back his leg—but, in killing Moby Dick, Ahab hopes to, and believes he must, win a symbolic victory against the cruelty of nature and fate. That Ahab would even seek such a battle—against the abstractions of life and faith—that causes Ishmael both to be unable to truly understand Ahab and to eventually curse Ahab's pride. But note how Ahab, like the whale who bit him, is at his heart unknowable, and what power such mystery gives to him.

CHAPTER 42: THE WHITENESS OF THE WHALE

Ishmael uses this chapter as a space to muse upon the whiteness of Moby Dick, which he believes to contribute to that whale's strange dread power. Ishmael states that, in many cultures around the world, whiteness is seen as a sign of nobility, of high birth, of royalty, or of leadership—he notes signs from various flags of Europe, from Native American rituals, and the white skin of Europeans themselves, which Ishmael claims "sets them above" the other races. Ishmael then states that white, when embodied in certain animals, lends them a kind of splendor, as in the albatross, the white shark, or the white horse.

Ishmael devotes an entire chapter to Moby Dick's color, as it is his most striking characteristic, and the epithet by which many, including Ahab, refer to him—the White Whale. Ishmael, once again employing "rhetorical," or persuasive, tactics in assembling this chapter, begins with the characteristics most commonly associated with the color white: a certain purity, perhaps even a holiness, as white is often identified with heaven's angels.

But Ishmael says that whiteness has another dimension—that of shadows, of ghosts, of things that are haunted. He points here to albino men and women and to spiritual apparitions as embodiments of this other, stranger whiteness. Ishmael muses that white carries a supernatural, alien quality because it is the absence of color, because it is so rarely found in nature in its purest form—without any other color contaminating it—and because "by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe." Ishmael says it is both the beautiful, appealing quality of white and its upsetting, ghastly, supernatural quality that imbue the search for the white whale with special significance.

But then Ishmael takes the color on a more philosophical turn, arguing that white is an "absence," and therefore whiteness has a mysterious or "ghostly" quality to it, which adds to the mystery of the White Whale itself. Again, Ishmael, like Ahab, finds ways to make the search for Moby Dick a quest not just for one animal, nor just for revenge, but for a kind of metaphysical satisfaction. Ahab wishes to destroy the whale and the "idea" behind the whale—whatever that idea might mean. Ishmael, meanwhile, is seeking meaning in Ahab's quest and in the object of his quest—the White Whale—and no matter what tactic Ishmael uses he continues to face void, immensity, the unknown. And it can certainly be said that all people face just the same thing as they face and try to understand the world, so not so starkly as Ishmael does.

CHAPTER 43: HARK!

Two sailors, filling the scuttle-butt (or drinking water container) are talking during the middle watch of the night. One unnamed sailors tells Cabaco, the other, that he thinks he hears coughing belowdecks somewhere, even though no men should be sleeping in that particular part of the boat. But Cabaco tells him to pay no mind to this, since he must be hearing things, and asks him to continue filling up the bucket with water.

Still more foreshadowing, regarding the stowaways, or members of Ahab's tiger crew. The prospect of stowaways was a real one in the 1800s, as ships were loaded in port for several days, and were large enough to allow people to hide out until the ship had left harbor. It would have been relatively common for sailors at the time to have shipped out on vessels later revealed to have stowaways aboard.

CHAPTER 44: THE CHART

Ishmael reports that Ahab could be seen the night of the storm in his own chambers, consulting several nautical charts of the "four seas," and collating information on where Moby Dick had been spotted previously by other ships. Although Ishmael indicates that it might seem impossible to find a single whale among all the world's oceans, Ahab nevertheless has a system wherein he looks at all the tracked locations of the whale over time, and uses them to predict his direction, or "line." Ahab believes that, because his crew is now in the South Pacific, and because he thinks Moby Dick is not nearby, he and the crew must wait another year in order to catch Moby Dick in his preferred feeding grounds of the South Pacific.

This part of the novel, like some other sections, strains believability a bit—although Ishmael will note, later, that some whales tend to have predictable patterns of feeding and mating, and tend, therefore, to haunt the same parts of the same oceans. But, again, it seems especially unlikely that the Pequod, even with Ahab at the helm, could locate a single whale in all the world's oceans simply by plotting out its previous sighting-locations on a map. Ishmael and Melville simply ask the reader to believe that this is possible, and in doing so imply a kind of connection between Ahab and Moby Dick.

Ishmael goes on to say that, when Ahab emerges from his cabin after looking at his charts, he often looks like a "man possessed," and is so caught up in his scheme to find the white whale that he loses the ability even to talk to the other sailors. Ishmael closes the chapter by saying that, like Prometheus, the Greek titan who stole fire from the gods, Ahab also has something "picking away at his heart" (Prometheus's punishment was to have a vulture pick away at his liver).

Another of Ishmael's classical or mythological comparisons. Prometheus was a titan who defied the Greek gods to give fire to men and was terribly punished. Ahab seeks to face Moby Dick—immense symbol of God, or nature, or perhaps just a dumb brute—defying God or perhaps just common sense, and he too is punished by the need always pecking at his heart. Ahab believes that he is powerful enough to command a kind of vengeance on the seas, the way that God wields his vengeance over men on earth.

CHAPTER 45: THE AFFIDAVIT

In this chapter, Ishmael proceeds as though in a court of law, to make clear to the reader that the story of Moby Dick is grounded in truth and isn't an utter fabrication. Ishmael avers that whales have been known to be wounded and then to wriggle out of their harpoons and attack whaling vessels; some whales, like Moby Dick, also become "famous" because they are easily recognizable from boats (because of notable features, like a hump), and because they are able to escape numerous whale-hunting attempts.

It is perhaps Ishmael's anxiety over the unbelievably or implausibility of certain parts of the novel, which causes him to insert this chapter, arguing that it is, in fact, possible to track a whale around the world, and to recognize that whale from afar. But, of course, Ishmael is a fictional character, and the whales he references in the ensuing parts of the chapter are fictional "famous" whales.

Ishmael goes on to list some other famous whales, including "New Zealand Tom" and "Don Miguel," who have also been hunted after numerous attempts and successfully killed—in the same manner Ahab hopes to kill Moby Dick. Ishmael says that "landsmen," or people who are not sailors, do not understand just how dangerous whaling can be, and just how many people are killed each year in whale-hunting accidents, as accurate figures for these deaths are not kept by any central authority.

The whaling industry in the 1800s was notoriously under-regulated, like many aspects of American society at that time, and so it is unsurprising that no statistics regarding whaler deaths were kept. Whaling companies and captains might also have feared that, if the true dangers of whaling were known, young men from the interior of the country would not want to try their hand at the trade, and the ships would be short-staffed.

And Ishmael continues, saying that some whales, when they are large enough, can even capsize not just whaling-boats but large vessels like the Pequod itself. Ishmael lists several instances in the 19th century wherein whales have done just this, and he references the journal of a man named Langsdorff, whose boat was nearly capsized after repeated rammings by an enraged sperm whale. Ishmael ends this rather informative and non-narrative chapter by adding that, in the time of the eastern Roman Empire at Constantinople, when Justinian was in command, a "leviathan" was found in the Propontis region (a nearby body of water) that was so large it could only have been the skeleton of a sperm whale. Ishmael uses this evidence as further proof that sperm whales have been "terrorizing" mankind for many centuries, across the globe.

One of Ishmael's tics, in the novel, is to directly foreshadow, with "scientific" evidence, the events that will appear later in the novel. Here, Ishmael wants the reader to be sure that a whale could, in fact, sink a boat simply by ramming into it; Ishmael will repeat this assertion later, and, finally, the Pequod itself will be sunk by a collision with Moby Dick. On one side, these comments seem to be attempts to attest to the realism of the novel. On the other, they continue to pile on the feeling that the events of the novel are fated, even as that fatedness may in fact be the subject of Ishmael telling his story through the lens of what he knows happened.

CHAPTER 46: SURMISES

Ishmael here writes that, although Ahab is singularly devoted to the catching and killing of Moby Dick, still he is "not unmindful" of the normal purpose of a whaling ship, which is to kill as many sperm whales as possible, for the collection of sperm oil and the enrichment of the crew. Ahab, Ishmael states, understands that even though members of the crew are "for" his quest at the moment, they might just as easily turn away from Ahab's command if left to their own devices for too long, and try to take over the vessel in a mutiny, since Ahab is so demonstrably maniacal.

Ahab's rational deduction here—that he must entertain the crew as the Pequod makes its way to find Moby Dick—demonstrates that Ahab is not completely seized by his madness. He is, in other words, aware that others on the vessel might not share his unbending desire to kill the White Whale. Thus, Ahab's "insanity" takes on a peculiar rationality and logic—he is so devoted to killing Moby Dick, he can will himself into a kind of sanity in order to protect himself and continue the chase.

Thus, Ishmael writes, Ahab knows he must keep his crew occupied, just as knights on a quest for the holy grail were occupied with intermediate adventures along the way. And Ahab also knows that any whale the Pequod can spot and kill is an opportunity to employ the crew in the catching of the White Whale, which still forms the central purpose of Ahab's tortured life.

Ishmael once again compares the whalers to heroic figures from the past—here, knights—and Ahab, head of those knights, would then be none other than King Arthur himself.

CHAPTER 47: THE MAT-MAKER

Ishmael begins this short chapter by saying that he and Queequeg are together weaving a "sword mat, for an additional lashing to their boat" (meaning the small boat they will use for whaling purposes). Ishmael muses that he feels the two of them, weaving together the yarn, are like two men on the Loom of Time, and that small chance events in this "weaving," like the position of each man's hands, determines the ultimate squareness and pattern of the mat, much as in life chance determines the course of one's journey.

Another of Ishmael grand metaphors. Here, the rug that Ishmael and Queequeg are making is not "simply" a rug, but is, rather, a method for visualizing the entirety of human life throughout history. It is not clear whether Ishmael tells Queequeg of his reveries, or whether Queequeg is at all receptive to the idea that the time aboard the whale-ship is filled with heroic, and philosophically-grand, activities.

At this moment, Tashtego from the mast-head calls out that he sees a school of sperm whales off to one side, away from the boat, about a mile or two off. The crew prepares for the whale-boats to be lowered, and when Ishmael turns away from his mat, he sees five dark-skinned men assembled behind Ahab, as though "they appeared from thin air."

Finally, the "tiger crew" emerges from the ship's hold. As in many other cases in the novel, the prophecy, first uttered by Elijah, proves valid—the ship was in fact holding several men below its decks, unbeknownst to the rest of the crew.

CHAPTER 48: THE FIRST LOWERING

One of this "dusky band," called Fedallah by Ahab, appears to be of Chinese or Filipino descent; he is the harpooneer of an extra whale-boat that Ahab takes as his own, and Ahab order Fedallah and the crew of "tiger-men," also from Manilla, to drop their whale-boat, on which Ahab will ride in search of the sperm whales. The other three boats—led by Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask—are also lowered into the water. Stubb exhorts his men to row, using strange and colorful language, and Starbuck remarks to him how strange it is that Ahab has smuggled five men aboard the Pequod—Starbuck believes this smuggling has something to do with Ahab's desire to use all power necessary to find and kill Moby Dick.

Starbuck, as is usual, is the first to understand, truly, what Ahab has done. He has spirited these five men aboard the ship, Starbuck thinks, because these men have some kind of "compact," or agreement, with Ahab, regarding the whale. It is extremely irregular for a captain to smuggle men aboard his own ship—thus, Starbuck believes, Ahab must have reason to want to hide these men from the rest of the crew. Starbuck will later come to the conclusion that the "dusky band" are agents from hell, sent to catch the white whale. Though it is worthwhile to note that Ahab himself thinks that Moby Dick is the devil, or at least devilish, and so his interpretation and Starbuck's are at odds.

Daggoo allows Flask to climb on his shoulders to see out into the ocean, with the hope of spotting the whales, and Tashtego looks also for whales as Stubb calmly smokes his pipe in the second boat. Ishmael is seated on Starbuck's boat, near Queequeg, and after rowing out in pursuit of three whales for a long period of time, Starbuck orders Queequeg to ready his harpoon to throw at a whale coming to the surface nearby. But the whale actually surfaces just under Starbuck's boat, and when it goes back under, it swamps the boat with water, nearly capsizing it. The crew of Starbuck's boat are all safe, but their pursuit has taken them far out of the path of the Pequod, and the crew use their oars to steady the craft so they can be picked up.

The first "stoving," or capsizing of a whale-boat, in the novel. It just so happens that Ishmael is aboard this particular boat, and though it is difficult to tell just what his reaction was, in the moment (as he is the one narrating the event as it happens), it becomes clear, later in the chapter, that he is terrified by the incident. Ishmael's "cowardice," or at the very least, his fear of some of the more dangerous aspects of whaling, is difficult to gauge, because it would require Ishmael speaking honestly about his own anxieties—something that would have been considered "unmanly" on a whaling vessel.

Finally, after hours have elapsed, Queequeg hears the Pequod through the mists, and the crew realizes that the ship is bearing back on them, to see if they have survived pursuit of the whale. The Pequod nearly hits Starbuck's boat as it comes around, and the crew of the whale-boat jumps out of the vessel to avoid the Pequod, then climbs back in once the Pequod has seen them. The crew ready themselves to be picked up by the Pequod, and do their best to fight off the chill that has borne down upon them since the whelming of their whale-boat.

And after the stoving, a rescue. Sometimes it is hard to visualize just how difficult the task of the Pequod is in these situations. Presumably, the Pequod's deck sits many, many meters above the surface of the water—thus, to turn the ship around and head toward a capsized whale-boat, the crew of the Pequod must then stop the ship and lower a rescue rope from a high distance, to help the swamped sailors climb back to safety.

CHAPTER 49: THE HYENA

Once he returns to the Pequod, Ishmael makes the rounds, asking Queequeg, Stubb, and Flask if it is a common occurrence for whale-boats nearly to capsize when hunting the whale. All men tell Ishmael that this is in fact a common occurrence, and that Starbuck is one of the more careful and conscientious of the boat-captains among whalers. Thus Ishmael decides, once he is back safely below-decks, to draft up a copy of his last will and testament, since it appears that every time a boat is lowered for a whale, Ishmael could lose his life. Ishmael has written wills before while on merchant vessels, but he thinks it more likely on this whale vessel that he could lose his life. He also says that, whenever he "outlives" one of his wills and returns to shore safe and sound, he feels like "Lazarus returned from the dead."

Another reference to a Biblical story, this time the tale of Lazarus. Lazarus was a man who died and was buried in a tomb, only to be brought back to life by Jesus after several days. The Lazarus story is believed by some to pre-figure, or foreshadow, the story of Jesus's resurrection after his crucifixion. Here, Ishmael himself will be "saved" after the capsizing of the Pequod—by the life-buoy made from Queequeg's coffin—and therefore Ishmael, too, will appear to die, only to be brought back to life at the last moment.

CHAPTER 50: AHAB'S BOAT AND CREW. FEDALLAH.

Stubb and Flask talk briefly of how strange it is that Ahab has his own whale-boat under his command. It is not common for the captain of an entire whaling vessel to have his own whale-boat, since the pursuit is so dangerous. And Ahab, having only one leg, will have a harder time than most maintaining balance in the whale-boat, since it rocks a great deal, and can cause even very able men with two legs to stumble.

Typically, the captain would stay on the vessel while the three mates would be sent into the water, in command of their own boats. This conversation prefigures how that typical arrangement will be overturned in the final chase of Moby Dick near the end of the book—Starbuck will be put in charge of the Pequod, while Ahab takes out his boat into the deep.

Ishmael also writes, briefly, that Fedallah and the others of the "tiger crew" do not ever really mingle with the remainder of the boat, and some among the sailors seem to think that this crew possesses a demonic quality. A bit of this is attributable to the Pequod's distrust of sailors from Asia, as they think that men from that region are not to be trusted, and are indeed descended from devious characters from long ago—at least, so run the rumors among the American sailors of the Pequod.

An instance of racism against the peoples of the Far East. The crew of the Pequod believes that Asian cultures are inherently mysterious, secretive, and perhaps even engaged in activities that seem devilish or idolatrous to followers of the Christian faith. Thus, the crew's racist attitudes amplify the already-strange environment aboard the ship after the revelation of this "tiger crew."

CHAPTER 51: THE SPIRIT-SPOUT

Over the course of several nights, when the Pequod sails among the smooth, blue, serene waters near the Azores, Fedallah mounts the mast-head and claims to see a white spout around midnight, illuminated by the moon. Although Ahab attempts to pursue this spout, and believes it, along with many of the crew, to be a sign of Moby Dick, the Pequod gets no closer to it, and soon leaves the calm waters and heads toward the Cape of Good Hope, where squalls continually toss the vessel. Ahab maintains a kind of serenity even during these squalls, however, and appears not to mind them; he stands always with his ivory leg screwed into its little bore in the quarter-deck, and keeps a constant lookout for the White Whale.

In some ways, the more difficult or harrowing the situation, the more calm Ahab becomes. It is the storm inside Ahab's mind, referenced at various points throughout the novel, which causes him the greatest torment. Therefore, an emergency outside his psyche—one that forces Ahab to use his body to fight the sea, a storm, or a whale—is, in a way, a relief from the psychological torture of his monomania. In this case, Ahab seems genuinely to enjoy the ocean's spray during the storm.

CHAPTER 52: THE ALBATROSS

In this short chapter, Ishmael reports that the crew of the Pequod comes near to another whaling vessel, called The Albatross, which has been bleached white by the sun, and on which the crew appears to be starving, half-mad, and clothed in "animal skins." Ahab attempts to pull up next to The Albatross and speak to the captain of that vessel, asking if the man has seen the White Whale; but the captain cannot hear Ahab over the high winds that whip about the two boats. Ahab notices that the school of fish that had been swimming with the Pequod immediately darted off to follow the Albatross when the ships passed, and Ahab assumes that this is because the fish are afraid of the Pequod's mission to sail around the world in search of Moby Dick. The two boats part, with Ahab yelling to the other captain, who still cannot hear him, that the Pequod is bound for the Pacific Ocean.

The first of the novel's many "gams," or conversations between ships. Gams are extremely important in the novel, as they were on the open seas during the 1800s. For ships had no other means of communicating with land—it was the exchange of letters from outbound to inbound ships, and vice versa, that allowed for occasional, if imperfect, information exchange between sailors and their families and friends. The crew of the Albatross, unfortunately, seems to have been wrecked by its time at sea, but some of the other ships the Pequod encounters seem positively bubbly despite years at sea. This shows the vast range of human experience possible aboard whaling vessels.

CHAPTER 53: THE GAM

Ishmael tells the reader that Ahab would probably not have had much to say to the crew of the Albatross, even if they were able to speak to one another within earshot—Ahab is interested only in news of the white whale, and nothing else. But, Ishmael continues, "gamming," or communication between whale-ships, is a very common practice, especially among the Americans. In a gam, two ships come up near one another, and the two captains meet on one ship, the two first mates on another. There, the captains and mates exchange stories of the sea, information about whales, and letters, if one is going into port and one coming out. Ishmael states that the gam is a very important, perhaps the most important, means of communication between whale vessels on the high seas.

For Ahab, however, the typical rules of "gamming" have been changed to suit his monomania. Ahab does not care to exchange letters with the shore—indeed, he has a wife and a child, mentioned to him occasionally by Starbuck, but Ahab does not desire information about them, nor does he wish to share any with them while out at sea. Instead, Ahab has only one question for the ships with which he comes in contact: "Hast thou seen the White Whale?" And his degree of interest in that ship depends entirely on their answer to the question.

CHAPTER 54: THE TOWN-HO'S STORY

Ishmael then states that, soon after seeing the Albatross, the Pequod came near another vessel, the Town-Ho, which had just returned from a series of terrible events. Ishmael introduces a novel narrative element into the novel—he relates the story of the Town-Ho as he later told it to a group of Peruvians in Lima, after the events of the novel "Moby Dick" had taken place. Ishmael claims he is doing this in order to retain the drama of the original story, which he did an excellent job of telling among the Peruvians.

This is one of the novel's stranger chapters, if only for its structure, which deviates from that of most of the rest of the text. Here, Ishmael implies early on not only that he survives the voyage on the Pequod, but that he thrives after the events of "Moby Dick," traveling to Peru, making a number of estimable friends, and becoming quite a story-teller in his own right.

The Town-Ho, as Ishmael relates, was a whaling vessel that had been taking on water slowly, and a crew of dozens of men was at the pumps down in the ship's hull, attempting to pump out the water while the Town-Ho approached a suitable harbor in which to repair the hull. One man, named Steelkilt, was in Ishmael's telling the most noble, most handsome, and finest sailor of the Town-Ho—a "Lakeman," or sailor from Lake Erie, who had learned the seaman's trade on the Great Lakes. Radney, the ship's first mate, took an instant dislike to Steelkilt, jealous as he was of the latter man's abilities.

Steelkilt is, in some ways, a foil for Ahab himself, although Steelkilt is a mutineer who wishes to reject the orders of his own captain. For Steelkilt is governed by his terrible pride, which keeps him from giving in even when the rest of his compatriots turn against him and his cause. Steelkilt's single-mindedness allows him to survive even after the mutiny is quashed. The difference, of course, between the two is that Steelkilt survives the encounter with Moby Dick, while Ahab, at last, does not.

Thus, one day, when Steelkilt was working the bilge pump with other sailors, Radney came to him and ordered him to sweep pig-droppings off the Town-Ho's decks—a job typically reserved for young boys on the boat. Steelkilt, offended at this order, refused, and Radney pushed him, eventually threatening to hit him with a hammer. In order to defend himself, Steelkilt punches Radney in the face, breaking his jaw, and when Steelkilt is attacked by other sailors on the boat sympathetic to Radney, two "canallers," or fellow men from the Lake Erie region, rush to Steelkilt's aid and congregate in the forecastle of the ship, claiming that, if the captain shoots them, it will start a mutiny or cause the vessel to sink, since it is still taking on water.

Radney, on the other hand, is an even more flawed, and more cowardly, version of Starbuck. Radney does not wish to follow Steelkilt, and indeed seems jealous of that man's immense abilities. Thus Radney sets himself to the destruction of his fellow-sailor. Starbuck, for his part, would not so actively thwart his fellow man—indeed, Starbuck has a chance to murder Ahab later in the novel, and does not do so. But Radney's inward turmoil is similar to that experienced by Starbuck, as Ahab continues his quest to find the white whale.

Steelkilt and the two other canallers manage to bring several other crew members to their aid, and do commence a mutiny against the captain of the Town-Ho, asking that they be permitted to abandon the ship the minute it reaches the closest port. But the captain will have none of it, and a group of the crew that has remained neutral manages to subdue Steelkilt and his sympathizers; they are then placed in a small hold in the ship's hull, and given only minimal rations of water and biscuit. After several days, all but Steelkilt and the two canallers have begged forgiveness and been allowed back onto the decks by the captain.

A mutiny was considered an immensely serious charge on the sea as well as on land. Captains of their vessels were in total control of the boat—indeed, they were almost like dictators. Any opposition to a captain was treated as a capital offense on land; that is, sailors could be hanged for their participation in a mutiny, or even for the contemplation or planning of a mutiny. Steelkilt recognizes the dangers of his position, but presses on regardless.

Finally, Steelkilt tells the two canallers that he is going to burst out of the hold the next morning and go on a murderous rampage on the decks, killing as many of the captain's men as he can. The canallers tell Steelkilt that they are with him in this final act of mutiny, but that night, they bind Steelkilt with cord and turn him over to the captain, hoping the captain will forgive them, punish Steelkilt, and allow the rest of the mutineers to leave the vessel at port. But the captain lashes the canallers and Steelkilt, after having them tied up in the rigging.

An instance of treachery, on the part of the fellow mutineers from the Great Lakes region. Of course, Steelkilt has also resisted authority, but he remains true in his opposition—he does not give in to the captain's or to Radney's demands. The Great Lakes men, on the other hand, seem to be opportunists, intent on saving themselves, no matter the principles they must violate in order to do so.

The captain, in a moment of mercy, however, then allows the canallers and Steelkilt to work their original jobs on the vessel, in the hopes that the mutiny has been quelled peacefully. Steelkilt hatches a plan to dash the brains in of Radney, the first mate, while Steelkilt and Radney are on night watch—this, as a form of revenge against the man who instigated Steelkilt's mutiny—but just as Steelkilt is about to put his plan in motion, a crew member raises the call that Moby Dick, the white whale, has been spotted not far off. The crew of the Town-Ho prepare to catch Moby Dick.

Moby Dick, in this instance, resembles the "deus ex machine," or the "god from the machine" of classical drama. This "god" descends from the celling of the stage just when the drama in a play becomes the most intense, or when the hero's situation becomes the most dire. Here, Moby Dick—already believed to be a god by so many on the high seas—relieves Steelkilt of the burden of his mutiny, and drags the captain and Radney into a fight in the deep.

Steelkilt goes out on a whale-boat with Radney, who is tossed from the small boat once Moby Dick is hooked on a line. Moby Dick then eats Radney, leaving only Radney's torn garment floating on the waves, and Steelkilt cuts the line to the whale, worried that Moby Dick is strong enough to sink the entire whaling boat. Steelkilt and several of the other mutineers then return to the Town-Ho and leave the ship as soon as the Town-Ho has docked at a Polynesian island.

Moby Dick appears capable not just of taking off the limbs of a man, but of eating an entire man whole. It is less clear whether sperm whales were actually inclined to this in the wild, especially if not provoked. But Moby Dick is a special case, hellbent on tormenting men wherever he finds them—and even consuming them, when he feels it is necessary.

Ishmael closes out his story by stating that the captain of the Town-Ho allowed Steelkilt and the other mutineers to leave the boat, since he was powerless to stop them (they were too strong and violent). The captain then staffed the vessel with Tahitian crew-members taken from a nearby island. Steelkilt and his allies were said to have taken up on another whaling vessel headed for France, although no one is sure of his whereabouts to this day. One of the Peruvians, hearing Ishmael's story, wonders if it can be true, and Ishmael swears that it is. Ishmael states that he heard the story from those who "gammed" with the Town-Ho, including Tashtego—he also states, somewhat mysteriously, that he has spoken with Steelkilt, somewhere, after the events of the near-mutiny occurred (that is, a time between the end of the narrative of the novel *Moby Dick* and the beginning of Ishmael's time among the Peruvians. This tale and chapter end.

An incredibly strange ending to the story. What Ishmael swears, at the close, is that, after the sinking of the Pequod, and before the events in Peru that bring on this "conversation" with his fellow Peruvians, Ishmael has had occasion to run into, and talk to, Steelkilt. Where this has happened, and under what circumstances, the reader will never know.

CHAPTER 55: OF THE MONSTROUS PICTURES OF WHALES

Ishmael quickly outlines the fact that, in many cultures, one is hard-pressed to find an accurate depiction of a whale, whether in painting, sculpture, or drawing. Ishmael states that Hindu, European, and even some early American accounts of whales manage to distort their size and shape, and he attributes these inaccuracies to the fact that a great many have never seen a whale alive in the water, and that most drawings come from reconstructions, or imagined versions, of whales derived from skeletons on display in museums. Ishmael wonders whether anyone might be expected to describe and depict a whale properly, if one hasn't seen an actual whale.

Now the novel turns to a series of descriptions—scientific, biological, and artistic—concerning the whale. Ishmael does this for several reasons. First, he "holds up" the progress of the events of the novel, thus building up the suspense for the big chase at its close. Second, he fills in the background of whale-science up till this point in human history, as a way of showing just how central the whale is to nineteenth-century culture. Third, through his descriptions of that whale science he continues to build up the sense of the ultimate unknowability of whales.

CHAPTER 56: OF THE LESS ERRONEOUS PICTURES OF WHALES, AND THE TRUE

Ishmael adds, however, that he has, on occasion, seen some accurate sketches, paintings, and engravings of whales, and that these happen to be done by French artists most frequently, especially by a man named Garnery. Ishmael concludes that Garnery was either a whaleman himself, or was "tutored" by a sailor at some point. Garnery's paintings are particularly good at depicting the sperm and right whales as they are being hunted by whale boats on the high seas.

Melville clearly spent a great deal of time researching depictions of whales from across various cultures, and in different time periods. Ishmael has discussed whale science and books about whales, here in his testimony that the best pictures of whales are made by those tutors by actual whalemen he begins to tout the value of the knowledge gained by experience.

CHAPTER 57: OF WHALES IN PAINT; IN TEETH; IN WOOD; IN SHEET-IRON; IN STONE; IN MOUNTAINS; IN STARS

Ishmael rounds out his chapters on depictions of whales by stating that the best sketches and carvings he has seen of leviathans were done by old sailors themselves, including a famous beggar, stationed on a London street for about ten years, who has next to him a board depicting an action scene with a whale. Ishmael states that whalemen often develop the ability to carve whale figures in various objects they find on their vessels, or they do this in their spare time after having left a life of whaling for good. Ishmael closes the chapter by stating that he, and other sailors, have often found that they can draw "constellations" of whales in the sky—that even in the heavens, one can find the shape of a whale traced out between the stars.

Ishmael reserves pride of place to those men who, untutored in the fine arts, nevertheless produce pictures of whales aboard whale-ships themselves, and in so doing fully elevates the value of the knowledge of direct experience. And at the same time he connects that knowledge to the celestial and therefore to fate—these same whalemen who can create whales better than scientists or artists, also are so affected by their experiences with whales that they see the whales in the stars.

CHAPTER 58: BRIT

Ishmael describes the "brit," or bright krill-like organism that runs in long "fields" in the oceans. This brit is fed upon by the right whales that follow the Pequod—for the right whale is not good for oil, and is therefore not hunted. Ishmael closes the chapter by noting that the right whales are like lawn mowers, mowing the "grass" of the ocean and skimming off the brit as nourishment. Ishmael then muses that the sea is "subtle," as it holds in its depths a great number of monsters not visible to the naked eye. The sea is filled with danger, and land is a place of serenity—and Ishmael notes that, in human souls, the same is true—that there is an "island" of peace surrounded by an "ocean" of fear and anxiety.

Ishmael describes right whales almost as if they are domesticated. But he uses this observation to then muse on something else, the fact that the beneath the peaceful right whales in the depths of the ocean live unseen monsters. He sees the ocean—unlike the land—as being a place defined by the unknown. That which is known is an island, surrounded by what isn't known. And once again Ishmael deftly connects this metaphor to men and life, which is similarly rich and dangerous with a surrounding unknown.

CHAPTER 59: SQUID

The Pequod takes a turn toward the island of Java, and Daggoo, up on the mast-head, believes he sees a white mass in the waters ahead. The whale-boats are lowered, but when the mates get close to the white "ghost," they realize it is only a giant squid—a rare sight even for experienced whalemen—and not Moby Dick. Ahab is disappointed and returns to the Pequod, although others on the boat understand that giant squid are often believed to be food for the sperm whale, and that this particular squid could mean that Moby Dick lives and hunts in their vicinity.

A false alarm that continues to raise tension in the hunt for Moby Dick. Yet even as it disappoints, it raises expectations that Moby Dick might be nearby... The fervor of the search propels itself.

CHAPTER 60: THE LINE

Ishmael describes the strong "line," or rope, that is tied to the end of a harpoon in a whale-boat. The line is coiled numerous times throughout the length of the whaleboat, and is longer than 200 fathoms in some cases (over one thousand feet). Thus the rope ends up taking up most of the volume of the whaleboat, and those men working the oars of the boat must be careful not to get caught in the line once the harpoon is thrown, as the line could cut the sailor in half or cause him to be thrown overboard. As worrisome as these lines may be, Ishmael notes, they are no more dangerous that other "lines" that wrap throughout the lives of mortal men—these metaphorical "lines" might also kill us at a moment's notice, although we do not know to what activity they are attached.

A chapter of enormous importance in the novel. The "line" has several different meanings. Of course, it refers to the actual rope tied to the harpoon, which enables the whale-boat not only to spear a whale but to remain attached to it. Second, the rope, as Ishmael explains, is a symbol for the kinds of danger man encounters in life—the entanglements of his many different fates. And third, the line is a reference to the composition of the novel itself, which consists of sentences, or lines of text, composed by Ishmael and presented to the reader by Melville himself.

CHAPTER 61: STUBB KILLS A WHALE

Queequeg senses that the presence of the squid means a sperm whale is nearby, and Ishmael, on the watch at the mast-head, spots one the next day; he calls, along with the other crew, that a whale has been sighted, although not the white whale, and boats are sent out to catch it. Stubb and his harpooneer, Tashtego, get to the whale first, and Tashtego hurls the harpoon at the whale, lancing it mortally; Stubb then has the rest of the boat's crew pull toward the dying whale, and Stubb then stabs the whale dozens of times, causing it to bleed red blood into the water until Tashtego tells Stubb that the whale is finished. Stubb remarks that "both pipes" have gone out: that his customary pipe has been doused with water, and that the whale's spout is also done, never to blow water and air again.

Stubb once again shows that there is nothing he loves more than hunting whales. In fact, during the whale-hunt, he is at his most lively and attentive—and he has occasion to use his myriad whale-hunting skills. The fact that his pipes go out when hunting the whale underscores the fact that he is smoking a pipe at all while hunting an animal weighing many tons. Stubb's joy in the chase is a continued marked contrast to Starbuck's disposition, which is characterized by excessive caution regarding the outcome of the whale-hunt. Starbuck is not in this for passion or fun—he's in it to do the job, to make the money.

CHAPTER 62: THE DART

Ishmael notes that during a whale-hunt the harpooneer and the headsman (in this previous case, Stubb) must switch places when the harpooneer throws out the harpoon, since the harpooneer is also expected to row an oar along with the other sailors, while the headsman does not. The headsman then takes over stabbing the whale once the harpoon has hooked it, but Ishmael believes this is unfair to the harpooneer, who must work as much as any other oarsman, and then who must summon "superhuman" strength to hit the whale with the long lance.

Ishmael makes sure the reader knows each of the implements a whale-hunter might use when out on the high seas. Much like a matador, a whale-hunter uses a long lance to wound the whale initially, then a small dagger to repeatedly strike the whale, in the hopes of causing it to "bleed out" and expire in the deep. And, much like a bull in a ring, a whale in the ocean takes a long time to rid itself of blood—meaning that many dagger blows are often necessary.

CHAPTER 63: THE CROTCH

Ishmael also states that the harpoon line has not one but two harpoons connected to it, in each boat, and that both harpoons are made to rest in a wooden "crotch" until they are thrown by the harpooneer. The second "iron" or harpoon is used in case the first does not land in the whale's side; but in any case, one or another of the harpoons usually dangles around the whale and is a danger to any sailors who come in its path. Ishmael states that he introduces these two "irons" here because they will factor later into the narrative.

Just as "the lines" warrant their own chapter, the "crotch" on which the harpoon sits will later relate to Ahab, who, in his final lunge at Moby Dick, will get caught in the lines, hooked around the crotch of the whale-boat, and will be flung from the vessel and hanged "by his own rope." Ishmael wants there to be no ambiguity about the deadliness of these implements aboard the whale-boat.

CHAPTER 64: STUBB'S SUPPER

The three whaleboats stick their harpoons in the whale and drag it back to the ship, where the crew then binds the whale with the Pequod, the whale's head at the ship's aftward part. Stubb orders the cook, named Fleece (an African American man) to fry up a piece of whale-meat that Daggoo and Tashtego have cut from the whale's side. While Stubb is eating the whale-steak, he jokes with Fleece, who seems not to understand that Stubb is joking—Stubb asks that Fleece tell the sharks, who are circling and eating the whale tied alongside, to quiet their chewing and stop eating in such a frenzy.

Stubb's delight in whale-hunting extends even to his dining after the hunt is complete. Ishmael makes Stubb appear, in these instances, somewhat like the "savages" Ishmael has described; Stubb wants to be sure he eats the actual flesh of the whale he has just hunted and killed, perhaps as a way of "consuming the life force" of that whale; perhaps as a simple celebration for a job well done.

Stubb continues to joke with Fleece, saying that Fleece doesn't know how to cook, especially whale-steak, and that Fleece ought to learn to follow orders better if he wishes to go to heaven. Stubb then leaves Fleece and, before going, asks that Fleece cut off and save the whale's testicles for Stubb's breakfast the next day. As Stubb walks out from the officer's eating quarters, Fleece remarks that Stubb, eating the whale-steak, was more like a shark than the real sharks outside the vessel.

Ishmael's bigotry extends beyond the harpooneers and into his description of Fleece, who does not feature in any other chapters of the novel. Fleece is portrayed as a stock, racialized character from 1800s vaudeville—an African-American man who does not understand the ironies of his white "superior." Stubb teases Fleece knowing full well that Fleece, in his capacity as cook, will follow any of Stubb's orders.

CHAPTER 65: THE WHALE AS A DISH

Ishmael remarks, in an aside, that some might find it strange that Stubb eats the whale's meat "by its own light" (since the lights in the cabin are lit by whale oil). Ishmael notes that the eating of whale meat is largely out of favor at the time of his writing, though parts of the whale, including its oil and its brains, were once considered delicacies in Europe. But Ishmael states that man eats all kinds of animals, and some (like ox) are eaten with utensils carved from the very bone of that animal—and so the eating of whale meat is not so different from other of man's carnivorous activities.

Ishmael seems to recognize that whale-meat and whale-fat will seem unpalatable to the common reader. In his comments about the whale being eaten in rooms lit by oil taken from the whale, Ishmael references rules for dining that derive ultimately from the Hebrew Bible—a set of rules known as "kashrut," or "kosher" principles—which prohibit (among other things) the eating of animals with utensils made from those animals. Ishmael is always pointing out the inconsistencies in the world, how things change and yet how the people of the present act like the customs of the present are totally rational.

CHAPTER 66: THE SHARK MASSACRE

Ishmael notes that, before the "cutting in" of the whale meat can take place, usually those involved in the whale hunt retire below-decks and sleep until early morning. But sometimes, in the South Pacific as the Pequod is, there are so many sharks that the cutting in must start more quickly, otherwise there would be little of the whale left in the morning. Ishmael states that the sharks around Stubb's whale were gnashing so violently that they sometimes bit each other, and that members of the crew had staves to crush their skulls—although this sometimes only caused others to bite in more of a frenzy. Queequeg, after pulling in one shark to skin it, is shocked that the apparently dead shark's jaw almost clamped down on his hand while he was handling it. Queequeg states that the sharks seemed possessed by some kind of ill spirit.

A notable chapter, if only for its depiction of the constant dangerous reality of the seas surrounding the whale-ship. The sharks here mentioned do not crop up very much in the text—and, indeed, many whalers are knocked out of their boats, without being troubled by sharks. But sharks of this particular region are much like vultures in the deserts of the American West, feeding on the expired carcass of the whale. In the way the sharks chomp mindlessly at the magisterial and fathomless whale there is an echo of the sharks gnawing at the body of the marlin in Hemingway's Old Man and the Sea, in which the sharks are sometimes seen as symbols of those who disbelieved in or abandoned Christ (symbolized by the marlin) after its death.

CHAPTER 67: CUTTING IN

Ishmael describes the process of cutting away the whale's blubber, which proceeds by "corkscrewing away" long strips of blubber, by means of winches and long staves (or knives). The crew of the Pequod crowds over to one side of the vessel to effect this, nearly causing it to tip over, as yards upon yards of blubber are pulled from the whale and stored in the ship's "blubber room."

In this beautifully concise description, Ishmael implicitly compares the "cutting in" of a whale to the corkscrewing of a lemon or similar fruit—the skin is taken off in a continuous "peel," and that peel assumes a curved shape, as the whale's body is gradually stripped of its outer layer of blubber.

CHAPTER 68: THE BLANKET

Ishmael comments that it is difficult to know whether the whale's blubber is its skin or is in fact the layer just below the skin—for there is a "skin's skin" to a whale, which is a fine transparent layer, that can be dried and used as a "bookmark," or for decorative purposes. Ishmael notes that the whale's blubber is much like the blanket or "counterpane" of a sailor—keeping the whale warm even in the northernmost climates of the world, near the North Pole.

At the time, it was considered a genuine mystery how a whale was able to survive in the cold northern seas. Here, Ishmael explains what, to contemporary minds, seems common-sensical—that a whale is protected by a layer of fat, which traps heat inside, keeping the whale's body at a steady temperature.

CHAPTER 69: THE FUNERAL

Ishmael reports that the whale's carcass is cut away from the ship after its head is taken on board (since the head contains most of the whale oil) and the blubber is safe in the blubber room. Ishmael notes that, although vultures will pick at the carcass for many months on the high seas, it looks like a "white phantom" there, and boats will steer clear of it as long as it persists, since the whale without its blubber and head is a shocking sight, even to accustomed sailors.

Unlike a human corpse, which, when buried at sea, disappears quickly under the waves with little more than a splash, the whale's carcass tends to float, and takes an immensely long time to decompose, once the sharks have stripped away all its meat and blubber. Ishmael appears haunted by the continued presence of the whale's body, even after death.

CHAPTER 70: THE SPHYNX

Ishmael loops back to the beheading of a whale—something he has only glossed over in the previous chapters—to say that it is no easy business, and that Stubb, so skilled in it, was able to do it in about "ten minutes." When the head is halfway hoisted and dragged behind the back of the boat, Ahab walks out to it and speaks directly to it, saying that, although the whale's head is now silent, this head has also seen "deeper" in the ocean that any man, and that the head of the whale is in some sense the most ancient living part of all the living beings on earth—as old as Abraham himself. Ahab's address to the head is interrupted by news from a sailor, that a ship has been spotted off the Pequod's starboard side.

Ishmael seems to engage in a science common to the time—that of phrenology, or the study of the shape of heads under the belief that head-shape matched the shape of the brain beneath and the personality housed in that brain. This pseudoscience was soon debunked, but a common human impulse remains in contemporary brain-scans and similar technologies—the desire to understand what happens inside a man's, or an animal's, head, when we do not have direct access to that creature's actual thoughts. Ahab, meanwhile, is moved by the mysteries the whale has seen.

CHAPTER 71: THE JEROBOAM'S STORY

The Pequod pulls up alongside the Jeroboam, and Stubb notices that there is a crew member on that ship named Gabriel, whose exploits were spoken of during the gam with the Town-Ho (although this was not mentioned in the Town-Ho chapter). Gabriel, a "Shaker" (or radical Christian) from Nantucket, was a loud and boisterous preacher on land, and once he shipped out on the Jeroboam, he became a religious fanatic and a prophet, warning sailors about the terrible end they would meet if they encountered the White Whale. Mayhew, captain of the Jeroboam, did not listen to Gabriel, nor did Macey, the mate, but others of the crew took to Gabriel's advice and considered him a true man of God. Gabriel announced that Moby Dick was the Shaker God itself, and that no one ought to kill it.

The Shakers were a Protestant religious sect of some influence in the 1800s. Ishmael seems especially interested in the branches of Protestant devotion that place special emphasis on man's fate and destiny—what the Calvinists, a sect of Protestants, would call man's "predestined fate." Gabriel, another of the novel's prophets, argues that Moby Dick is a God, and that to fight Moby Dick is to attempt to wrestle with God himself. Gabriel (which is also the name of one of God's archangels, in the Bible) argues that it is immoral even to consider challenging God in this way. While Mapple swathe story of Jonah as a tale that demanded sailors to follow their captains, Gabriel is making a similar argument about Moby Dick's status in regard to men (and to Ahab). So Gabriel sees Moby Dick as a god who must not be faced. Ahab sees Moby Dick as a force that must be faced. And others, later, will argue that Moby Dick is just a big white whale. Interpretations abound.

As if to demonstrate this, Moby Dick was then spotted off the Jeroboam's side, and a team was mounted to hunt it. But just as this was begun, the whale leapt into the air, knocked Macey from the deck, and caused him to drown. Although Mayhew considered this to be pure luck, others in the crew took Gabriel for a real prophet, and blamed Macey's death on Mayhew's unwillingness to believe that Moby Dick was a God.

Gabriel's prophecy, like many of the others in the novel, comes to pass—Mayhew, like Radney before him, is killed by Moby Dick. Moby Dick's vengeance, like God's, is swift, decisive, and dramatic. But is this because Gabriel is right and Moby Dick has some kind of supernatural power, or because Moby Dick happens to be a particularly big and powerful whale?

Ahab hears this story from Mayhew and Gabriel during a gam between the two boats, but states that he will still seek out Moby Dick (over Gabriel's loud objections). Starbuck finds a letter among the Pequod's sack for Macey, the dead mate, and hands it to the crew of the Jeroboam, but Gabriel throws it back to the Pequod, saying that this letter ought not to be read, for to do so would be a blasphemous business—because Macey has died. At this, the Jeroboam shifts away from the Pequod, and the sailors of the Pequod remark on the strangeness of this gam for some time afterward.

Melville appears to have a preoccupation with a certain form of "dead letter," or a piece of mail that is not delivered to its intended recipient, and instead is lost in transit. Here, the letter for Macey cannot be given to Macey, because the man himself is dead. Melville's other great depiction of "dead letters" comes in his story "Bartleby, the Scrivener," in which the title character is reported to work in mail office devoted to storing undelivered mail, in New York City. Gabriel is here arguing that in dying Macey has entered the unknown, and that the unknown must not be pierced.

CHAPTER 72: THE MONKEY-ROPE

Ishmael goes back to the process of "flensing" (or skinning) the whale of its blubber, stating that the man actually doing the cutting on the back of the whale, partially submerged in the water, was Queequeg. Ishmael was tied to Queequeg via something called the monkey-rope, meaning that the two were bound "as Siamese twins," and in Ishmael's mind, this embodied the ties between all men, the ties that keep men together and the ties that injure men, too, when something happens "on the other end of the rope." Queequeg finishes a long day's work of skinning the whale while Daggoo and Tashtego lance the sharks that are swimming nearby with their harpoons.

Another instance of ropes, or lines, in the novel. Here, instead of simply entangling and endangering men, as does the harpoon-line on a whale-boat, the "monkey-rope" ties together Ishmael and Queequeg. This helps each of them to continue skinning the whale, but also makes both vulnerable—were one of the men to fall, the other would fall as well. This means of support is also a means of potential destruction, as are so many tools aboard a whaling ship, and as are the non-physical connections that bind men together .

CHAPTER 73: STUBB AND FLASK KILL A RIGHT WHALE; AND THEN HAVE A TALK

The Pequod passes through a large area filled with krill, and this means that right whales are in the vicinity. Although the Pequod's crew is licensed only to hunt sperm whales, nevertheless Ahab orders that Flask and Stubb each take out a whale-boat and catch the nearest right whale—one that puts up a fight and drags them around the Pequod several times, but which eventually retires and dies.

Although it has not been mentioned until this point, there appear to be a series of different regulations and licenses for whaling vessels, regarding the kinds of whales they can hunt, and where they can hunt them. Presumably, because sperm whales are so valuable, few licensed sperm whale boats even consider hunting right whales.

Stubb and Flask then drag the right whale's carcass back to the Pequod, and discuss why Ahab would have ordered them to kill this particular whale, which is of little commercial use. Stubb states that Fedallah—the Persian man whom Ahab has invited on board—is actually "the devil" in disguise, and that Fedallah believes it good luck to pair a sperm whale's head, behind the ship, with a right whale's. Ishmael notes that the Pequod, dragging these two whale heads, looks like a donkey carrying its twin burdens along the sea.

One of the first explicit mentions of the potential "devilishness" of Fedallah, leader of the "tiger crew." Fedallah speaks very little in the novel, and when he does, it is exclusively to Ahab. But Fedallah also appears to be the only man to whom Ahab will listen—and this causes some of the men to believe that Fedallah might have some form of supernatural control over their captain. The men are always looking for signs, always interpreting those signs, always trying to penetrate the unknown and never able to.

CHAPTER 74: THE SPERM WHALE'S HEAD—CONTRASTED VIEW

Ishmael states that the head of the sperm whale is "more noble" than that of the right whale, and that the sperm whale can see two entirely different things with each of its eyes, since the eyes are on nearly opposite sides of the head. Ishmael also notes that the size of the eyes and ears of the sperm whale do not affect how readily it processes visual or aural information. Lastly, Ishmael notes that the three harpooneers will eventually detach the lower jaw of the sperm whale's head and saw off its teeth as souvenirs.

The sperm whale's head is described as the head typical of an animal who hunts. The sperm whale does not appear to need very large eyes or ears, because the sperm whale is only hunted by men. Otherwise, it is the sperm whale who is on the attack in the deep oceans of the world.

CHAPTER 75: THE RIGHT WHALE'S HEAD—CONTRASTED VIEW

Ishmael notes that the right whale has a mass of hairlike fibers inside its mouth, for catching very small sea creatures and eating them—its head is rather misshapen and resembles a shoe, as compared to the "chariot-like" appearance of the sperm-whales head. Ishmael muses that, when set side-by-side against the stern of the boat, the sperm whale's head looks "indifferent to death," or "Platonian," and the right whale's head looks set against the reality of death, one it knows it cannot avoid—like a Greek "Stoic."

An interesting distinction between two different philosophies. A Platonian, or follower of Plato's, would believe in a series of perfect "forms," thus understanding the body to be less important than the soul, which gives the body life. A Stoic, on the other hand, would be an adherent of ancient Stoicism, or the idea that earthly torment is simply a reality, to which one has to submit with patience and an even keel. The men—or at least Ishmael—now attempt to interpret or understand the dead whale heads through the lens of ancient Greek philosophy. It is a sentence that when stated plainly sounds ludicrous, but this again highlights that the whale ultimately is unknowable to all forms of human knowledge brought to bear against it.

CHAPTER 76: THE BATTERING-RAM

Ishmael notes that the forehead of the sperm whale is so thick and so strong (resembling "horses' hoofs") that the whale can use it quite effectively as a battering ram, without even feeling any pain. Ishmael begs the reader to believe that the whale can do this, as, later in the novel, there will be feats of "battering" the reader might not otherwise take to be truthful, if he has not seen the power of the whale's forehead.

Again, Ishmael makes plain to the reader that it would be possible—indeed, likely—that a large sperm whale, like Moby Dick, could use its head to destroy an entire whaling vessel. Of course, this is exactly what will happen to the Pequod at the close of the novel. Ishmael's tale continues to layer on the foreboding, continues to ramp up the feeling of fate.

CHAPTER 77: THE GREAT HEIDELBURGH TUN

Ishmael briefly describes the "case" or "tun" in which the sperm whale's spermaceti, or oil, is stored. This case is in the upper part of the head, and nearly runs for a third of the whale's body. A large whale can yield 500 gallons of spermaceti, and much if not all of this is caught and bucketed by the sailors on the ship—if they are careful, and do not spill the oil into the sea or on the decks.

Sperm oil is, of course, the ultimate goal of any whaling voyage. Ishmael describes the two ways this oil can be harvested from a dead whale. The first is from melting down the whale's blubber, which has been collected by skinning the whale. And the second is by collecting the whale's excess oil, located in a large "hold" in the whale's skull.

CHAPTER 78: CISTERN AND BUCKETS

Tashtego mounts the sperm whale's head and, hoisting it above the decks, lowers buckets into it with a winch, in order to catch the sperm whale oil. After about the "eightieth or ninetieth bucket," however, Tashtego slips and falls into the open sperm whale's head, and the entire head tumbles into the water. Daggoo rushes after him, thrusting into the top of the head in order to give Tashtego something to grab onto, and by which to be pulled out; but Stubb worries that Daggoo will succeed only in clobbering and injuring Tash with the spike. Queequeg, accustomed to saving people in the water, dives in after Tash, and, from the water, slices a hole in the sperm whale's head, pulling Tashtego out of the hole and up to the surface, to safety. Ishmael comments that it is as though Queequeg were "midwife" to Tash, and that Tash was literally "delivered" this way, like a baby.

Another instance in which Queequeg must rescue his fellow sailors. That the saving is characterize as a "birth" is significant and thematically rich. It puts Tashtego in the position of dying and then being reborn, much like Lazarus. But in this case Tashtego—a non-Christian—is saved by the bravery and fellow-feeling of Queequeg, another non-Christian. So it is not Christianity that generates such miracles but rather the fellow-feeling, generosity, bravery, which exist across cultures. Further, the saving of Tashtego links birth with death (the whale's and almost Tashtego's) and violence (Queequeg's cutting into the head).

CHAPTER 79: THE PRAIRE

Ishmael describes the "forehead" of the sperm whale, or the space between the eyes, which has no features other than small indentations and wrinkles in the whale's skin. Ishmael wonders, aloud, if there is a man of learning who can "read" the wrinkles of the whale's head, the way that some scientists are believed to be able to read the bumps in human skulls (via "phrenology"). Ishmael states that he is not capable of reading the sperm whale's forehead—nor the thoughts of the whale—but he presents this information to the reader, to make of it what he or she can.

Another instance of phrenology, this time explicit. Ishmael clearly wishes to bore into the minds of all those he describes—of Ahab, of Queequeg, of Moby Dick itself. But Ishmael seems to know that it is equally difficult or even impossible, for different reasons, to describe the thoughts of any of these. Ishmael seems to realize that the task of the writer is to imagine *oneself into the consciousness of another, be they human or animal.*

CHAPTER 80: THE NUT

Although Ishmael describes the sperm whale's brain as being very small—no larger than a "nut," and very far from the forehead—Ishmael attributes a "nobility" to the spinal column of the whale, which is quite thick, and whose vertebrae extend like "little skulls" all along its back. Ishmael says that the hump of the sperm whale, outlined by the spinal column, gives the whale an "air of indomitability," and Ishmael then comments that this "air" is in fact true—the sperm whale, especially Moby Dick, is almost impossible to defeat or capture.

Note how Ishmael has over the past few chapters examined the whale from the outside in, from blubber to skull to brain. Ishmael also makes clear to the reader that Moby Dick, and other sperm whales, are not so terrifying because of their native intelligence—which cannot be so great, since their brains are so small. Instead, Moby Dick's intelligence appears to manifest itself in the whale's sheer physical strength and size—this is what makes Moby Dick "sublime" and fear-inducing, his whiteness, his strange appearance, and his taste for human blood.

CHAPTER 81: THE PEQUOD MEETS THE VIRGIN

The Pequod comes near a German whaling vessel, called the Virgin, which is "pure" or "clean" of oil, meaning it has not captured a whale yet on its voyage, and does not even have oil enough to light its lamps. The Pequod donates some oil to the virgin and to Derick, its captain, in order to help it along. Very soon thereafter, a pod of sperm whales is spotted nearby, with one in particular bringing up the rear. This large, old whale seems injured in some way, and the three whaleboats of the Pequod set out after it.

Tashtego a few chapters earlier was reborn, birthed from a whale's head. The Virgin is a sort of joke, then—just as a virgin cannot have children, the Virgin does not require its men to be reborn as it has caught no whales. Further, this Virgin is also a Virgin in the sense of being inexperienced in comparison to the skillful knowledge, born from experience, held by those on the Pequod. Meanwhile, was the discovery of the pod of whales karma for the good deed done by the Pequod to the Virgin, or just a coincidence?

Stubb, Flask, and Starbuck, in command of the three whaleboats, become angry when they realize that the Virgin is also attempting to track the whale, even though the Pequod just did the Virgin a good turn by giving it oil. But Stubb, Flask, and Starbuck are too skilled for Derick, a poor whaler, and his crew—they throw their harpoons over Derick's whaleboat, impaling the large whale, nearly running over Derick's boat, and eventually dragging the whale back to the Pequod.

The Virgin is also inexperienced when it comes to the social rules and obligations of whaling. Yet its inexperience and lack of skill renders it barely a competitor to the men of the Pequod, who skillfully hunt and kill. There is a tension here between the frivolousness and purity of innocence, and the skill and deadliness of experience.

The cutting-in process seems promising, as the whale is old and its stores of sperm oil look large. But before the cutting-in can begin, the Pequod begins listing heavily to one side—the whale is not floating, as is customary for dead sperm whales, but is sinking, and there is nothing the crew of the Pequod can do to keep it upright. Queequeg eventually cuts through the thick iron chain holding the whale to the ship, and the whale sinks to the bottom of the ocean. Ishmael states that, sometimes, these whales rise again after several days—they fill with gas from their own decomposition and are pushed to the surface. The Pequod leaves the whale behind, however, and continues sailing. Ishmael spots the crew of the Virgin hunting a fin-back—whose spout looks like a sperm whale's, but who cannot be caught because it swims too quickly for a whaleboat. Ishmael laughs inwardly at the stupidity and selfishness of the crew of the Virgin.

The Pequod gets its rightful kill—which seemed like karma—and the whale turns out to be diseased and almost to sink the ship. So is that karma too? Or is nature taking vengeance on the Pequod for the suffering it caused the whale to endure? Or is this just a coincidence, too? The possibilities for interpretation are endless. The Virgin, meanwhile, continues its innocent blundering, as Ishmael (who once knew nothing of whaling but now is himself experienced), mocks them.

CHAPTER 82: THE HONOUR AND GLORY OF WHALING

Ishmael reports that he considers a great number of historical and mythological figures also to be whalemen: Perseus, who slew the Leviathan and saved Andromeda; Hercules, whose feats very well might have included animals "from the deep"; and St. George, the protector of England, whose "dragon" some accounts believe actually to be a whale, or an ocean-monster. Ishmael reports that he is proud to number himself a sailor among these "ranks."

Ishmael has viewed whales and whaling through the lenses of science, art, and philosophy. Now he views it through the lens of mythology, both Greek and Christian. In doing so he elevates skillful whalers to a heroic status, and further denigrates those like Derick and the crew of the Virgin who dishonor whaling through their bumbling efforts.

CHAPTER 83: JONAH HISTORICALLY REGARDED

Ishmael addresses the Biblical story of Jonah, pointing out some contemporary criticisms of the veracity of the tale. First, if the whale is a right whale, as is claimed to be the case, then Jonah could not live in his stomach, only in his mouth. To this, others counter that perhaps Jonah "took refuge in a dead whale," not necessarily a live one. The criticism of the tale Ishmael finds most convincing, however, is the idea that the whale was able to swim a vast distance—hundreds of miles—and regurgitate Jonah on a foreign shore in only three days. Ishmael has trouble believing this part of the account, but he notes that some groups in Turkey, an "enlightened" place, take the story for fact, and have devoted a temple to it.

A return to the story of Jonah. Like Father Mapple, Ishmael wishes to examine this story—one of the most famous in the Bible—from a scientific, 19th-century perspective. Ishmael's attempt to read the Bible in light of contemporary attitudes was common of the time period, as scholars throughout the west also hoped to find evidence of Noah's Ark in Turkey, or of Jesus' tomb in Jerusalem. Again this is an example of different sorts of knowledge not agreeing in their views of whales, of whales somehow slipping through the fingers of these different ways of seeing them. At the same time, this chapter is also an example of the ways that readers can miss the significance or meaning of a story by focusing too thoroughly on details, whether pragmatic or theological.

CHAPTER 84: PITCHPOLING

Stubb, the most skilled of the headmen of the whaleboats, tracks another whale from his whale-boat and kills it by "pitchpoling," a method Ishmael describes in this chapter. In it, Stubb takes a smaller, shorter harpoon, rests it with the tip upward on his palm, and launches it "in a lofty arch" like a javelin into the sky—the spear then lands in the whale, stabbing it deeply. After repeated efforts, Stubb has so thoroughly stabbed the whale that it expires and stop its "run," which has dragged the whaleboat a great distance along the surface of the water.

Another of the techniques a whaler might use in order to subdue a particularly ornery whale. Stubb, again, is a notable practitioner of pitchpoling, which is very similar to javelin-throwing, and which has an equally grand and classical charm to it. Again, Ishmael seeks to describe whale-hunting as the grand enterprise he believes it to be.

CHAPTER 85: THE FOUNTAIN

Ishmael notes that the whale can hold its breath for over an hour, and that air is taken into the whale's body only through the blowhole, or "spiracle." Ishmael also describes the scientific debate about the nature of the process by which water is expelled from this blowhole: namely, some believe that it is only a harmless mist, but others claim that the mist is "acrid," that it can "burn the face" of a sailor or blind anyone who comes too close. Ishmael states that, although he has observed whales spouting many times, and the process seems a simple one, it is often the most simple processes that become the most difficult to understand with scientific certainty.

The whale's spout has, until this point in the novel, not been mentioned, although it is one of the most recognizable features of a whale. And even this feature is a source of uncertainty, with people having very different ideas of the nature—and danger—and what emerges from the blowhole. Ishmael's comment about the simple processes being difficult to understand scientifically matches with his general outlook in the novel and the way that nearly everything functions in Moby Dick, with myriad possible and conflicting interpretations always existing, like a mist, around nearly all events.

CHAPTER 86: THE TAIL

Ishmael attempts to describe the large and powerful tail of the sperm whale, stating that its grace and beauty go hand in hand with its enormous size—sometimes over twenty feet in length. But Ishmael finds that he doesn't have the words "adequate" to describe this particular body part, which he finds the most "sublime" feature of a whale's anatomy. And Ishmael despairs that, if he cannot describe the tail of the whale, he might not in fact be able to describe its "face," or certainly not what the whale appears to be thinking—its motivations, its desires. Ishmael closes the chapter on this note of uncertainty.

The "sublime" is of key importance to Ishmael, and to the novel as a whole. Sublimity is a difficult concept to define, but it appears, here, to describe a stage of aesthetic appreciation beyond simple beauty, something so magisterial that it awes because it is beyond human comprehension. Although sperm whales can be beautiful, their power, their hunger, their head-shapes, and even the way they swim appear to have a specific gravity, or forcefulness. This impression of great strength contributes to the whale's sublime character—its power over human beings.

CHAPTER 87: THE GRAND ARMADA

Ishmael remarks that the Pequod is passing the coasts of Java, known to be rich in whales and also in pirates, who occasionally board American and English ships. A large pod of whales, called by Ishmael a "grand armada," is seen, and immediately Ahab orders the men to pursue the pod, noting after a few minutes that the Pequod itself is being pursued by Malays who might want to take the whales or overtake the Pequod itself.

An interesting arrangement, wherein the Pequod is pursuing a large number of whales, and is being pursued by a group of sailors (again, Asian sailors, whose motives Ishmael seems always to distrust). Ishmael makes clear that, in life, one may very easily be both a hunter and one who is hunted.

But the Pequod is a quick ship and outgains the Malay pirates. Soon the Pequod lowers its boats to hunt the whales, which stop running and congregate in a "galley," or a large stationary group. Ishmael watches as Queequeg spears several whales at the same time and uses a "drugg," or set of wooden spars, to bind several whales together at once. Ishmael notices that many of the whales are pregnant females, or have just given birth to tiny infant whales, still connected to their mothers via their umbilical cords.

With the revelation that some of the whales are pregnant and others are mothers of newborns the sense of the whaler's actions changes and their whale-killing, which before seemed heroic, now seems like committing a massacre. Further, the way the whales form a protective circle suggests a real relationship between them, and so while Ishmael continues to laud the actions of the whalers it is not quite as clear that Melville is doing the same.

But the whales can only be hooked to the boat for so long before one whale, in agony at the deep wound it has received from another of the Pequod's harpoons, begins to rouse the armada, and to cause the large group of whales to trash around and imperil the three whaleboats. Queequeg leaps down from his harpoon location and picks up his oar again; Ishmael's whaleboat barely escapes between two whales and squeezes out of the pod. Ishmael notes, with resignation, that "the more whales seen, the fewer caught," as the Pequod manages to take only one whale from this large galley, despite wounding a great number.

An important lesson in the novel, one that is echoed in Greek mythology as well, and in the fables of Aesop. In all these stories, when a character attempts to get greedy, and to capture more animals, or berries, or prizes than he or she is able to carry, all these objects of the hunt fall away, thus leaving the hero with nothing. If one sets one's sights on a simple goal, one has a chance to achieve it; but if one tries to do too much, one risks losing all that one has worked for.

CHAPTER 88: SCHOOLS AND SCHOOLMASTERS

Ishmael tells the reader that one encounters two groups or pods of whales on the high seas. The first school is that of young female whales, accompanied by an older male called by Ishmael the Turk, but known also as the schoolmaster. This "Turk" commands his "harem" of young women, but is typically overtaken later by a younger Lothario, who defeats the "Turk" in a duel over the right to "lie with" the females. The second type of school is that of all young male sperm whales, who run together "as do collegians from Yale or Harvard." Ishmael states that it can be very dangerous to get caught in this latter school, since their "play" often involves serious violence, and can result in scars worn by the whales for the rest of their lives.

Here Ishmael describes an alpha whale as a "Turk," which he used previously to describe Ahab, who, as "Sultan" of the ship, again indicating that Ahab and the whale share something, some indefinable strength or influential power. At the same time, Ishmael's descriptions of the whales in human terms—comparing them to harems or groups of young Ivy-League students, further establishes the sense that the whales while mysterious are also not just dumb brutes. That these animals—which the whalers are killing—have a kind of personhood to them.

CHAPTER 89: FAST-FISH AND LOOSE-FISH

Ishmael explores whale fishing and its relation to the law. In particular, Ishmael describes the doctrine of the "fast fish" versus the "loose fish." Any whale that has been harpooned and tied to a ship is the property of that ship's crew, and cannot be taken from that crew—to do so would be theft. But on the high seas, if a ship loses its line on a whale, and lets it drift away—even if that ship caught the fish—the fish is a "loose" one, and can be claimed by anyone. Ishmael says that this policy might be a difficult one for some to see as fair, but he notes that many things in life follow this philosophy. For example, if a man leaves his wife, that wife is free to marry another man—and the colonies snapped up by many nations were "loose" until claimed by colonial powers, like England and France. Ishmael then states that the reader himself is both a fast and a loose fish—bound to some conventions in life, and free of others.

Ishmael turns to another lens of human intellect to define and discuss whales: the law. Ishmael believes that the legal distinction he describes to be of chief importance in life as well as in the law. Man's strivings, to Ishmael consist always of attempting to grasp things that elude man. These "things" might include money, prestige, or power—they might also include the white whale itself, which eludes constantly Ahab's grasp. Man's attempt to "make fast" that which is "loose" is a feature of the human condition, as is man's failure ever to finally, totally "secure" that which it desires. Here, then, Ishmael views the laws of fast and loose fish to be a reflection of this philosophical distinction between security and chaos. In addition, Ishmael takes these laws of whaling—which might seem ridiculous or inconsequential to non-whalers—and shows how they are identical to very real circumstances. And yet, were those colonies truly "loose"? Only to the colonial powers conquering them. Likewise, is a whale truly "loose"? Or does it belong to itself?

CHAPTER 90: HEADS OR TAILS

Ishmael tells another story to illustrate the unfairness of the "fast and loose" system in whaling. Near Cinque Ports, in the South Pacific, a group of English whalers tracked and killed a whale before dragging it to shore. There, they were informed by the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, an English official, that the whale belonged to the Duke of Wellington, who presided over that island. Although the men caught the fish, the fish itself was "fast" because the Duke had the right to the head of any whales caught in that vicinity. In fact, Ishmael notes, the king in royal English charters had the right to the head of certain whales, and the queen to their tails, since whale-tails could be used to make certain decorative dresses in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Ishmael notes that, although these laws seem comically and deeply unfair, they are merely an extension of a more general principle of legal unfairness, which allows the few to take the well-earned gains of the many.

Here Ishmael uses the laws of fast and loose fish to critique the law itself—on land or at see—to show how the supposedly pure "law" is in fact warped by all sorts of ridiculous historical conventions based on who does and does not already have wealth and power. This is interesting also as previous chapters have begun to make the whales seem more people-like, and whaling therefore as being more murderous and exploitative. Here Ishmael dissects the way the law allows the powerful few to steal from the ordinary many. The novel also seems to suggest that whaling involves the powerful men slaughtering the less powerful whales.

CHAPTER 91: THE PEQUOD MEETS THE ROSE-BUD

A French ship called the Rose-Bud pulls up near the Pequod—it is consumed by an overwhelming stench, derived from two whales tied alongside it. The first whale is "blasted," or brought up from the deep after having been stabbed some days before, and that whale is worthless—its oil will be of terrible quality. But the second whale, smaller, is "dried," having had some kind of fever or other affliction. Stubb sees that this second whale has value for its "ambergris," a thick, soap-like substance that comes from dried whale oil, and knows also that the Frenchmen on the Rose-Bud do not recognize this whale's value.

One of the ironies of this conversation, of course, is that a ship called the "Rose-Bud" smells terribly. This is another of the subtle instances of humor in the novel. As has been seen, Melville is keen to include humor in the book, perhaps in his efforts to include every *aspect of human experience in the novel. But in common pop-cultural depictions of Moby Dick, this humorous dimension often does not get discussed.*

Stubb therefore mounts the Rose-Bud for a gam. A crewman of the Rose-Bud, a man from Guersney who speaks French and English, hates the captain and vows to help Stubb to defraud his boss. Stubb tells the Frenchmen to pull away from both whales immediately, since they are diseased and will kill the sailors on board with their fever. The captain thanks Stubb for his "honesty," and Stubb offers that the Pequod will even pull away the smaller, dried whale just to help. The Pequod does so, with Stubb back aboard, and Stubb finds six handfuls of ambergris inside—an amount that will earn the ship a large amount of money when they are back in port. The Rose-Bud, for its part, disappears, feeling lucky to have avoided a "plague."

Stubb's abilities are once again on display. Although in this case, Stubb is not simply using his skills in the whale-boat—he is instead using them in the field of human relations. Stubb's conduct may be considered, at best, ungentlemanly, and, at worst, almost criminal, as he is stealing something very valuable from the Rose-Bud. But such is the nature of Stubb's personality—he seems not to care about the consequences, and enthusiastically does all he can do to enrich himself and his fellow crew-members.

CHAPTER 92: AMBERGRIS

Ishmael notes that ambergris, a substance prized for its fragrance and used in perfumes the world over, is in fact derived "from the bowels of a sick whale." Ishmael wonders if some parts of polite society would be shocked to know this, but he states that it makes sense to find something so "incorrupt" as this ambergris inside the body of a decaying animal—this, after all, is the way of life, and is also noted by Paul in the New Testament—that faith might be found in the wounded or lamed body of a faithful person. Ishmael also notes that, although it is a prevalent rumor, it is not in fact true that whales smell under most circumstances. Indeed, Ishmael counters that whales are mostly odorless, as is their oil—and this derives from the overall health of the whale, who spends its time swimming through the water, getting exercise, and bathing itself in the salt seas.

Ambergris is, quite simply, a crystalized version of the whale's sperm oil, but this crystal form has a particularly strong smell, and was considered one of the great aromatic spices in the world. In the 19th century, these "spices" were of especial importance, since so much of life revolved around the covering-up of foul odors and bad smells—the result of urban living as cities grew rapidly, and as plumbing lagged behind the development of those cities. The ambergris harvested from this "sick" whale can be sold for a high price on the open market. Ishmael, of course, always interpreting, also sees moral and religious lessons in ambergris.

CHAPTER 93: THE CASTAWAY

Ishmael loops back to the story of Pip, a young African American boy from Connecticut, whose dancing and singing were reported upon many chapters previous. Pip was a "ship-boy," not permitted to go into the whaleboats, on account of his lack of strength. But one afternoon, when one of Stubb's oarsmen fell ill, Pip was placed in the whale boat and made to turn an oar. At the first sign of danger, however, Pip became frightened and jumped out of the boat, and though Stubb rescued him and cut away from the whale he was hunting, he vowed never to pick Pip up again.

As an African American boy Pip is one of the weakest characters on the Pequod, notable primarily for the entertainment he provides for others. One would hope that in a society the weakest would be protected by the strong. But the community on board the Pequod is profit driven, and the weakness of the weak—such as Pip's jumping overboard—is a nuisance that the strong, such as Stubb, will not countenance.

But later that afternoon, Pip again become affrighted and jumped out of the boat; this time, Stubb did not pick up Pip, thinking that perhaps the other two whaleboats might do so. But those boats went on hunting for whales, and Pip was left in the open ocean for over an hour before being rescued by the Pequod. After this, Pip became a "holy fool" or an "idiot," accustomed to speaking in tongues and to prophecy. Ishmael notes that Pip will become important as the narrative continues, and that he (Ishmael), too, will be knocked clear of a whaleboat later on, and will be forced to swim in the open sea.

Because of his weakness and the cruelty and neglect of the strong, Pip is left isolated in the vast ocean and goes mad. Yet his madness is of a different sort than Ahab's. Ahab's madness is one of pride, of an overpowering sense of self demanding some sort of vengeance against Moby Dick and the world. Pip's is a madness of a loss of self, of blankness. It is interesting that this sort of madness makes Pip a "holy fool" who speaks in prophecy, as in losing himself Pip seems to become connected to the mysteries of the world, and yet his prophecies (like all prophecies) are totally indecipherable by normal men.

CHAPTER 94: A SQUEEZE OF THE HAND

It is Ishmael's duty to "squeeze" the oil taken from the most recent whale killed by Stubb—because the oil can congeal in the warmth of the southern sun, the sailors must do their best to rub it back into its oily form. While doing so, Ishmael becomes so excited, so sensorialy satisfied, that he wonders whether he couldn't squeeze this whale oil all day—and whether it's the case that angels in heaven also have their hand in sperm whale oil, rubbing it ceaselessly high in heaven. Ishmael goes onto to describe the various other parts that can be taken from the whale—its tail tendons, the bits of the case in which sperm is found—but he reserves special love for the oil, which soothes him greatly. Ishmael also notes that, in squeezing the oil near his fellow-sailors, he is often not sure which is "oil" and which are the sailors' hands, and he reports that he does not mind this confusion between whale-oil and human flesh.

Another strange and important chapter. Again, one might quickly come to the conclusion that Ishmael delights, simply, in touching his fellow-sailors, and that this scene therefore has clear homoerotic overtones, like those scenes involving Queequeg and Ishmael in bed together, earlier in the novel. But, once again, it is hard to separate contemporary understandings of sexuality from the kind of human togetherness to which Melville was accustomed at the time. As above, it seems possible that Melville intended both a sexual and a non-sexual, communion between men in these scene—an ambiguity with which the reader himself must then grapple. Ishmael's speculation about angels squeezing whale oil all day is a connection of the high and the low, the heavenly and the earthly, but it also offers an interesting point: that the true pleasure and joy for men comes from earthly things, not from the pursuit of high or abstract ideals. This idea further explains Ishmael's insistence on explaining the workings of a whaling ship, which might strike many readers as boring: he does so not just to acquaint the reader with whaling, but because he sees in these things the true expression of human dignity and joy.

CHAPTER 95: THE CASSOCK

Ishmael describes the skin of the whale's penis, or "grandissimus," which is used by the mincer (one who grounds down bits of whale blubber) as a kind of cassock, or priest's robe. The mincer pulls the skin off the whale penis and cuts holes in it, wearing it to go about his mincing, and Ishmael believes that the man looks like a kind of jovial, comical Pope, wearing his holy robe taken from a most unholy part of the whale.

An example of bawdy, slapstick humor in the novel. Readers at the time might have been especially offended by the idea that characters in the novel were expressly mocking Christian traditions—although these particular traditions are associated with the Catholic church, and many of the sailors on the vessel appear to be New England protestants.

CHAPTER 96: THE TRY-WORKS

Ishmael describes the ship's try-works, a huge brick oven fastened between the foredeck and the main sail, that is used for the burning down into oil of parts of the whale, its blubber and sinews, and other features that cannot be used and sold for profit. One night, after the lighting of the try-works, Ishmael is on tiller-duty, watching the three "pagan" harpooneers standing before it, frying and burning down whale blubber. Ishmael believes that the try-works represent the dark, burning heart of Ahab himself, and of the quest to find Moby-Dick. Ishmael falls into a dream-state, and wakes up with his back to the ship, looking out over the vast ocean. Ishmael then rouses himself, shakes off the strange moment's dream, and continues steering the ship.

The try works, like many aspects of the whale-ship, has two functions—one real, and one symbolic. In this case, the try works can be used to melt down whale blubber and to produce more whale-oil—part of the ship's mandate on the open seas. But the try works also seems a window into the "heart" of Ahab—the fiery, monomaniacal frenzy that seizes him, and causes him to continue to hunt for Moby Dick, even as it appears possible that the whale might never be found in all the extensive oceans of the earth.

CHAPTER 97: THE LAMP

Ishmael describes how sailors on other, non-whaling ships often do not have enough oil even to light a very small lamp near their beds—these sailors live lives on the boats of almost "total darkness." But on a whale-ship, there is so much whale oil that sailors can pick out the finest oil from what comes out of the try-works, and can use it to light themselves as though they used "Aladdin's lamp." Ishmael considers this one of the great privileges of sailing on a whale-ship.

Ishmael once again makes an effort to show that whaling, and that shipping on a whaling vessel, is superior to shipping out as a merchant marine, or another kind of sailor. Ishmael clearly delights in reminding himself that whaling is the most noble of man's occupations on the high seas.

CHAPTER 98: STOWING DOWN AND CLEARING UP

Ishmael notes, in the closing of this section of the novel dealing with the ins and outs of the "processing" of the whale's body, that, after the try-works has burned down the remainder of the whale's corpse, and after the sperm oil has been stored in casks and placed below decks, the decks themselves are rinsed completely, and the ship is cleaned so totally that one might never know a whale was slaughtered nearby. But Ishmael states that, often as not, after this has been completed, and the men on the ship have been working uninterrupted for about four days, someone up in the masthead calls out that another whale has been spotted—and the whole pattern starts again. Ishmael believes that this is like life itself—whenever one believes one is done with a task, the task renews itself, and the "old routine" continues.

Ishmael also enjoys describing to the reader the many activities and excitements of living on a whaling vessel. One of these derives from the fact that the whale-ship must constantly be readied for its next task, and because space is at a premium, this means that the decks of the whale-ship must be transformed, from butchery to baking oven and back again, before a new whale can be hunted, brought in, and stripped of its skin. Ishmael—always attentive to and impressed with the work that men do—appreciate the abilities of those on the ship's crew, who are capable of transforming the ship at a moment's notice.

CHAPTER 99: THE DOUBLOON

In this rather strange chapter, an unnamed narrator (perhaps Ishmael, although he does not announce himself) observes as various members of the ship's crew inspect the gold doubloon (made in Quito, and inscribed with various patterns and island scenes) that Ahab nailed to the main-mast on the day he challenged the Pequod to find and kill Moby Dick. Ahab himself sees in the doubloon "infernal" signs—marks of the devil and of Ahab himself—Ahab sees himself in all things around him. Starbuck sees the doubloon as a sign of cosmic goodness and of God's mercy; Stubb reads the Zodiac on the coin and sees a series of inside, sexually-based jokes. Stubb then spots Queequeg on the deck, but he is not looking at the doubloon—he is only studying his pronouns in an English grammar book. And Pip, last of the crew, understands the doubloon to spell the crew's demise, once Moby Dick is found.

Another of the book's fugues, although here it is not clear whether Ishmael himself is observing this activity, or whether it is told from the perspective of a different, omniscient narrator. Or, perhaps, Ishmael is simply making up what he thinks goes through the minds of his fellow-sailors. Melville uses this chapter to show that a symbol might be interpreted in different ways by different men. Here, then, the symbol of the gold doubloon assumes different importance depending on who is viewing it. This relates, once more, to the book's theme of "subjectivity," or the way in which experiences tend to vary depending on the viewpoint of the person observing that experience.

CHAPTER 100: LEG AND ARM

Ahab spots another whaling ship, this time an English one called the Samuel Enderby, and pulls up alongside it. When Ahab notes that the captain of this ship, named Boomer, has a white ivory arm and has seen the White Whale, Ahab immediately gathers Fedallah and has him and the "Manilla men" row him to the "Sammy," which Ahab then boards as best he can, given his ivory leg. Ahab wants to hear Boomer's story about the White Whale. In contrast to Ahab, Boomer seems in fairly high spirits, despite having lost this arm and not having caught Moby Dick.

Ahab is overjoyed to find someone who has actually seen Moby Dick. This chapter is very much a study in contrasts, as Boomer is far more at peace with his disability, and with the manner by which it came, then Ahab is. For Boomer as for Starbuck, a whale is simply an animal that cannot have feelings or desires—the whale will eat a human because that is what whales do instinctively. Thus Boomer holds no grudge against Moby Dick.

Boomer tells Ahab that the Sammy pulled up alongside Moby Dick along the Line (the equator), and noting that the White Whale was large and full of sperm oil, they did their best to lance it. But Boomer was not able to hold Moby Dick on his line, and fell out of his boat—his own harpoon then tore into the flesh of his arm, and though Moby Dick did not bite it off, the White Whale was the cause of the deep wound, which necessitated that the ship doctor cut off Boomer's arm. Ahab asks if Boomer knows where Moby Dick is now, but Boomer has no information for Ahab, and wonders why someone would seek out a whale that is clearly so dangerous to man. But Ahab, in a huff, leaves Boomer, who is confused as to Ahab's anger, stating that the whale is just a whale, and that there is no reason to hunt it as though one holds a grudge against it.

Boomer is another of the novel's foils to Ahab. One wonders what the novel would be like if Ishmael were to have shipped out on the Sammy instead of on the Pequod. Of course, a good deal of the drama of the novel would be lost, since Ahab's monomania derives from his belief that Moby Dick "stands for" something, and that to defeat Moby Dick is to fight against man's fate in general. Boomer, on the other hand, is content to view whaling as a violent and dangerous occupation, one by which a man can lose a body part—this is simply the job that Boomer signed up for.

CHAPTER 101: THE DECANTER

In another aside, Ishmael discusses the hospitality he once later received on the "Sammy," long after his time with Ahab—it was off the "Patagonian coast," and the crew of the Sammy was so generous with beef and alcohol that Ishmael remembers it to this day. During the course of his "researches" into whaling history, Ishmael has found that Dutch and English whalers used to bring along, in the 1700s, enormous quantities of meat, bread, and beer, perhaps to make the sailors' lives easier, or perhaps because the profits from whaling were so large. Ishmael laments the fact that the Pequod was run not as a "party ship" but instead as a vessel singularly devoted to the pursuit of the White Whale.

Once again, Ishmael references a time after the events of Moby Dick are completed, when he has occasion to come into contact with other sailing vessels, far better stocked than the Pequod. In general, it appears that the Pequod has been prepared with a kind of Puritanical value-system—very little alcohol, very little good food. Perhaps this has to do with Bildad and Peleg's religious views, or perhaps with Ahab's single-minded desire to hunt the whale, and to do nothing else aboard the ship.

CHAPTER 102: A BOWER IN THE ARSACIDES

In a brief and strange chapter, Ishmael states that he has had occasion to measure the exact dimensions of a whale's skeleton, because he once passed a "holiday" among the Tranque people of the Arsacides islands, and especially among their king, Tranquo, on whose shores a whale was once captured, and its skeleton preserved. Although some in the Tranque tribe argued that Ishmael should not be allowed to measure the dimensions of their "god," Ishmael nevertheless managed to secret away exactly those dimensions of the sperm whale's skeleton, which he includes in the following chapter.

Ishmael has tried to analyze the whale by resorting to stories of it in religion and by seeing it as symbolic of certain religious ideas. The Tranque people, though, literally worship the whale that has washed up to their shores. And the Tranque insist that, being a god, the whale not be measured, that it not be bound by measurements but instead that it keep the mystery that is a part of its holiness. To know its size, the Tranque fear, would diminish it, make it something known rather than something that is beyond knowing.

CHAPTER 103: MEASUREMENT OF THE WHALE'S SKELETON

Ishmael notes that the Tranque sperm whale's skeleton measured about 72 feet in length, and that this skeleton did not really do justice to the actual bulk of the whale, since a layer of blubber and skin would cover this skeleton. Ishmael states that, in some sense, the skeleton shows only the shadow of the greatness and sublimity of the whale itself. And once again returning to the topic of the whale's spine, Ishmael says that the largest whale vertebra was about three feet wide—the shortest, so small that it was stolen by some of the priest's children and used as a "toy."

Ishmael does precisely measure the whale skeleton, and what is amazing is that he then insists that the whale maintains its mystery because it is that which he can't measure—the whale in its blubber and skin that is the true whale. As always, Ishmael's attempts to define or understand the whale leaves him understanding just a "shadow" of the whale.

CHAPTER 104: THE FOSSIL WHALE

Ishmael lays out some fossil evidence for the existence of whales in far-flung locales, including the "Lombard region" of Germany and the state of Alabama in the US, where a whale was uncovered in the 19th century and believed to be a monster from the Old Testament. Ishmael states that this conception of the whale's monstrosity is not far off; he adds that, in other jobs he has worked as a "digger" and a "miner," and has come into contact with a good deal of fossilized bones of all types of animals. This, he believes, gives him some credential as a "geologist," and therefore allows him to speak on this subject of the whale's fossil ancestors.

Having investigated the skeleton of a whale and finding that doing so, once again, leaves him not truly understanding the true sublimity of the whale, Ishmael now tries to place the whale skeleton into a geologic context. But again there is mystery rather than answers, as whales have been found in places where there is no ocean, and when found was believed not even to be a whale but rather a figure of mystery: a biblical monster.

CHAPTER 105: DOES THE WHALE'S MAGNITUDE DIMINISH?—WILL HE PERISH?

Ishmael entertains two questions in this chapter. First, he wonders if whales have increased or decreased in size since antiquity. To this, he has no easy answer, since on the one hand, he notes that many animals, like humans, have grown larger as the years have progressed. But he also notes ancient Roman accounts of whales that would have them being roughly 300 feet long, compared to about 100 feet for the largest contemporary sperm whales. Second, Ishmael considers whether whaling practices could cause the species to go extinct. Although he says it is reasonable to worry about just such a matter, he believes that the rate of whale-hunting is not high enough to jeopardize seriously the number of whales in the world—and that the sperm whale will "outlive" many of the rest of the species currently alive on the planet (including, perhaps, humans).

Ishmael enters this chapter with a legitimate scientific question, and is unable to answer it one way or another. Some accounts show that whales have gotten larger—others, that whales have decreased in size. Even evidence can't be trusted. Ishmael's consideration of whether whaling could lead to extinction of whales is interesting both in that he would contemplate such a possibility and because his answer turned out to be so very wrong.

CHAPTER 106: AHAB'S LEG

When Ahab leaves the deck of the Samuel Enderby, and half-jumps back onto the deck of the Pequod, he accidentally splinters his leg, forcing him to ask the ship's carpenter to make a new one out of the remaining jaw-bone of one of the recently captured sperm whales. Ishmael reveals what he learned later about Ahab: that his unwillingness to see anyone at the beginning of the voyage was derived not just from his quest for the white whale, but from his embarrassment at a previous injury sustained while wearing his false leg. In that injury, the leg slipped and injured Ahab in the groin—and Ahab began cursing the ivory leg as an extension of the cruel animal, Moby Dick, who took away Ahab's real leg in the first place.

It is interesting to note that Moby Dick took Ahab's leg and Ahab then built new false legs from whales he had killed. The novel is filled with these sorts of cycles or resonances. The injury that Ahab suffered to his "groin" is also of interest, as there is a hint here that part of Ahab's motivation for his mad quest against Moby Dick stems from the loss—both figuratively and, possibly, literally—of his virility.

CHAPTER 107: THE CARPENTER

Ishmael introduces the ship's carpenter to the reader by saying that he was a man of many skills, for the carpenter of a whaling vessel must be good at all sorts of repairs. And this carpenter, indeed, views life as but a series of carpentry-like tasks—he believes, for example, that fixing a man's teeth is really no different from fixing the ivory of a whale's bone. Ishmael also notes that the carpenter has traveled his entire life, and there has an "uncompromised," almost simple nature. He goes about his work not so much from expertise as from a kind of "intuition" that he feels in his "fingertips."

The carpenter, like Stubb and Queequeg, is another member of the ship's crew whose skills are so obvious, so all-encompassing, that Ishmael merely wishes to express them to the reader. The carpenter views the world entirely through the lens of carpentry—he has to a larger extent become his role, and in so doing has found not what you would call joy or peace but an authentic natural existence. You might describe the carpenter as being a carpenter in the same way that a whale is a whale. Both simply are those things, because neither are plagued by the need to interpret, understand, or conquer the world as most of the other humans on board the Pequod are.

CHAPTER 108: AHAB AND THE CARPENTER

Ahab and the carpenter have a dialogue in the form of a play. In the first part of the chapter, the carpenter speaks aloud to himself, narrating the fashioning of Ahab's new ivory leg. Ahab then overhears him, and the two get into a conversation. The carpenter asks Ahab if it's true that "dismasted" men still feel their phantom limbs once they're gone—Ahab says it is true, and makes several allusions to Prometheus, saying the carpenter is like the Greek Titan who stole fire from the gods and gave it to man. At the end of the chapter, the carpenter remarks aloud to himself that Ahab is a "queer" or strange man.

Once again, Ahab is compared to Prometheus—only this time, he himself is doing the comparing. Ahab in this case is saying that the carpenter is like Prometheus in that he is giving Ahab a new kind of strength or tool and has stolen that tool from those who would rule over him (i.e. the whales). The carpenter's sense that Ahab is a "queer" man may stem from his sense of Ahab's obsessive quest, but more likely it stems from the carpenter's bemusement with Ahab's literary comparison's and interpretations. As noted regarding the previous chapter, the carpenter is just a carpenter—he does not see himself as "stealing fire from the gods" in making Ahab's leg, or even comprehend such thinking. He sees himself as just making a leg.

CHAPTER 109: AHAB AND STARBUCK IN THE CABIN

Starbuck discovers, while rinsing the decks of the Pequod, that some of the oil casks in the hold are leaking. Starbuck goes to Ahab to inform him of this, and Starbuck advises that they stop and inspect the casks to find and plug the leak. But Ahab says that it's not necessary, that the ship will carry on to Japan to find the White Whale, and that the oil isn't important. Ahab then orders Starbuck away. But Starbuck, who does not dare openly defy Ahab, nevertheless tells him to "beware himself" ("Ahab beware Ahab.") Starbuck leaves, and Ahab realizes that Starbuck might be right—that Ahab is his is own enemy. Ahab remarks that Starbuck is not courageous enough to defy him and mutiny, but Ahab nevertheless orders to hold up the vessel and inspect the leaks, as Starbuck requested.

Ahab's initial response that the leaking oil doesn't matter is astonishing in that the entire purpose of a whaling ship is to collect whale oil and then sell it. For Ahab to ignore leaking whale oil is essentially to admit that he is not on this voyage for commercial reasons at all. Starbuck's comment that "Ahab beware Ahab" is moral or almost religious . He is saying that Ahab's monomania will lead to his own destruction. What is amazing is that Ahab sees that Starbuck is right , that he is his own worst enemy, but he responds not by giving up his monomania but by deciding that in order to most fully pursue his monomania he must act like a man who care about the financial aspect of this whaling expedition in order to hide the fact that he doesn't.. While Ahab has rightly sized up Starbuck as a man who recognizes Ahab's goals but will not stand against him—a stance that Ahab views simultaneously as loyalty and as cowardice on Starbuck's part—he realizes that he won't be able to command the loyalty of the crew unless they feel that the whaling voyage has the prospect of enriching them as they hope and expect.

CHAPTER 110: QUEEQUEG IN HIS COFFIN

Queequeg helps to empty out the hold of the ship, and in doing so sweats so much "he comes down with a fever." Queequeg lies sick in his hammock for several days, wasting away, until he calls for the carpenter to make him a wooden canoe as a casket. Queequeg had observed whalers being placed in canoes in Nantucket and on the island of his birth, and he likes this idea better than the typical burial at sea, which involves being thrown over the side of the boat in your own hammock, as "food for sharks."

Queequeg's illness does not derive from any aspect of whaling—from an adventure aboard the boat—but from an illness he might have just as easily contracted on land. Queequeg takes his illness in stride, does not protest against it. He tries to direct how his death will be spent, wanting a kind of boat for himself rather than the indignity of being eaten, but does nothing to try to stop death from coming.

The carpenter makes Queequeg a canoe exactly to his shape, and Queequeg decides to lie in it, living out his last feverish days in his own coffin. Queequeg also has his idol, harpoon, and some food and water placed in the coffin for his "journey." As Queequeg appears to be dying, Pip comes and dances around his canoe, to him and speaks in strange, prophetic words, calling Queequeg a "general" and saying that the rest of the ship ought to "march around him," and asking Queequeg to find Pip's lost, sane self in heaven. After a few minutes, Queequeg realizes that he has "more to do" while on the Pequod—more activity and life left in him—and tells the crew that he can no longer be sick, as he has too much to do on earth.

Pip's strange words that the dying Queequeg is the ship's general implies the entire ship will die. Pip also describes his own former self as having died. And yet Queequeg does not die. Instead he decides, simply decides, to "become well". Again there is an echo here of Lazarus, who was brought back to life by the will of Jesus. Here, though, the heathen Queequeg wills his own self back to life, and so Queequeg, like Tashtego, has a kind of rebirth from death. Queequeg, like Ahab, appears indestructible—that is, until the final destruction of the vessel.

Ishmael doubts that it is possible for a man to decide he is finished being sick, but Queequeg says this is exactly so. He leaves his coffin and goes up to the top of the ship, where he eats for several days and then "announces" he is ready for service in the whaleboat once more. Queequeg now uses his former casket as a chest, and also begins to copy the tattoos on his body onto the coffin. Ishmael tells the reader that Queequeg is a "riddle to unfold," and a "wondrous work in one volume."

Ishmael again uses "book" comparisons to describe a character in the novel. Before, Ishmael explicitly compared whales to different styles of books; here, Ishmael notes that Queequeg himself is a book, one that, as one reads it, becomes ever more mysterious and captivating. Further, Queequeg translates the "book" of his life, embodied in his tattoos, onto his former coffin. Queequeg's coffin will, of course, play a role a role at the end of the novel, when Ishmael uses it as a life-buoy to save himself after everyone else on board has been destroyed by Moby Dick. Ishmael survives to write his book, Moby Dick, *but Queequeg also lives on through his book, the one he transposes onto his coffin.*

CHAPTER 111: THE PACIFIC

The Pequod passes the Bashee isles and heads into the Pacific Ocean, which Ishmael remarks upon for its calm and "serenity." Ishmael notes that Ahab stands looking out at the Pacific, but does not seem to notice its calmness—instead, Ahab believes that the White Whale is to be found in that ocean, and he calls out to the crew that Moby Dick "spouts thick blood," and lies ahead of them.

What Ahab sees is determined not by the external world but by his internal world. He looks at a calm ocean, but sees only the tempest within. In the previous chapter Queequeg wrote his "book" on his coffin. Ahab, meanwhile, is also writing a book, which holds Moby Dick and him at its center, with everyone else a minor character.

CHAPTER 112: THE BLACKSMITH

This chapter takes the form of a very short tale regarding Perth, the ship's blacksmith. Perth's life has been mostly a story of "ruin," as Ishmael puts it: Perth lost feeling in both feet owing to frostbite, during a snowstorm; and after marrying and having two children, his house was robbed, and Perth fell into a depression so deep he was unable to continue working as a smith in the house's basement. His wife and two children each died from sadness and lack of material comfort, and Perth was forced to find a new life, and source of income, aboard whaling vessels: thus he is a member of the Pequod's crew.

A short fugue chapter, in which, in this case, Ishmael relates the sad life of the ship's blacksmith, called Perth. Ishmael inserts this story, perhaps, to show the many different routes a man might take to land on a whaling vessel. For some, the vessel presents an adventure and an opportunity. For others, the whaling ship is a last resort and a refuge—a place where, after life is ruined, one might still make a living and attempt to start anew.

CHAPTER 113: THE FORGE

Ahab decides that he wants to ask the blacksmith to forge him a new harpoon, for use in catching the white whale, whom Ahab now calls 'the white fiend.' Ahab throws down before the blacksmith a set of old tacks used in the hoofs of "racing horses," saying that there is no stronger metal to be used in the making of the harpoon.

Ahab now sees Moby Dick as a kind of devil, an interesting fact because other characters have seen both Ahab and Fedallah, whom Ahab has brought expressly to kill Moby Dick, as being devilish too.

The blacksmith begins the work on the implement, but Ahab interrupts him, saying the harpoon is not perfectly smooth, and asking to do the smoothing himself. Ahab also notes that Perth can smooth out any flaw but one—the "flaw or wrinkle" in Ahab's own brow and mind, caused by his hunt for the White Whale. Once the harpoon has been completed, Ahab asks the three harpooners if they will be pricked by its barbs to "baptize" it, and they agree. Ahab takes away his new steel weapon, ready to use it in the hunt for Moby Dick.

Ahab's comment about the un-smoothable "flaw" in his mind indicates his awareness of the wrongness of his monomania, and to some degree suggests that Ahab is as much in thrall to that monomania as are all the members of his crew. The baptism of the harpoon in the blood of the harpooners is a perversion of the Christian rite of baptism—rather than a baptism in water celebrating life and rebirth through Christ, the harpoon is baptized in blood to consecrate it as a tool of death. The strange forging and baptism of the harpoon only heightens the tension toward the conflict between Ahab and Moby Dick. But Ishmael continues "putting off" this confrontation, by still inserting other "fugue" chapters, and descriptions of further preparations aboard the ship, as it approaches the seas off Japan.

CHAPTER 114: THE GILDER

In this peaceful chapter, Ishmael describes the calms of the ocean off Japan, where local whaling boats go after smaller prey. Ishmael notes that all on the ship, including Starbuck, Stubb, and even Ahab himself, appear touched by the "golden" light and glow of the day, although Ahab also infuses this golden feeling with the deep melancholy of his "monomaniac" spirit. Stubb comments that it is so beautiful, he feels he has always been as happy as he is at that moment.

Another fugue chapter, in which the light of the Pacific is made to seem especially peaceful. It's notable, though, that Ahab's monomania is so intense, it serves to darken the sunlight—rather than the sunlight brightening Ahab's disposition, as it does the other sailors'. Note how the alternation between dramatic and peaceful chapters in the novel mimics the realities of whaling, which involves lots of waiting punctuated by brief periods of intense danger and activity.

CHAPTER 115: THE PEQUOD MEETS THE BACHELOR

The Pequod comes across the Bachelor, a Nantucket whaling ship that is filled, completely brimming, with sperm oil, for it has had a successful whale hunt. The mood on the Bachelor is uniformly jolly, and when Ahab stops the captain during a brief gam and asks whether he has seen Moby Dick, the unnamed captain of the Bachelor replies that he "doesn't believe that the whale exists." Ahab grumbles and takes the Pequod away, against the wind and deeper into the Pacific, while the Bachelor readies itself for a pleasant return voyage to Nantucket, and a large payout for its sperm oil.

Ahab sees Moby Dick as a devil to be pursued above all other things. The Captain Bower in Chapter 100 saw Moby Dick as just another whale. This captain takes a different view: that Moby Dick is a myth, a kind of construct of all the scary experiences sailors have had with whales. And while within the context of Moby Dick this view is false—Moby Dick is a real whale that the Pequod finds and confronts—there is a sense is *a myth: although Moby Dick exists, the stories that surround Moby Dick are largely concocted by sailors, as tales to tell. For Ahab, the story of Moby Dick—that he must exact revenge against a force or devil that wronged him—is more powerful than the physical reality of the whale itself.*

CHAPTER 116: THE DYING WHALE

Ishmael reports that the good luck of the Bachelor appeared to rub off on the Pequod, which spotted and killed four whales the next day. Ahab himself killed one of them, and from his whale boat Ishmael notes that Ahab looked out at the setting sun, and, noting that the sperm whale looked to that sun before dying, began rhapsodizing about the sperm whale's "worship of fire," and how the sperm whale then goes back into the sea to die. Ahab finds this sight greatly moving, and though it does not make him any happier, it does cause him to approach his hunt for Moby Dick with even greater energy and resolve.

Another instance wherein light is described, this time at the moment when the whale perishes. Ahab's belief that the whale worships fire is not fully explained—is he saying the whale worships what is the opposite of its experience (i.e. fire rather than the water of the ocean), is he suggesting that whales worship fire because they are devilish and connected to the fires of hell? Or because whale oil is used to make light? Or is there a connection here to the idea of Prometheus again, the bringer of fire?

CHAPTER 117: THE WHALE WATCH

Fedallah and Ahab stay awake that night, watching the dying whale as the boat is hooked to it, and waiting until the next day, when they can drag it back to the Pequod. Ahab falls briefly asleep and tells Fedallah he has had a dream of his own death, and Fedallah reminds Ahab of a prophecy that has not yet been told to the reader: that before Ahab will be allowed to die, he will see "two hearses," the first one "not made by human hand," and the second "made of wood from America." Fedallah also tells Ahab that "hemp" will cause his demise. Ahab takes this to mean that he will be hanged for some unnamed crime, but Fedallah does not corroborate this interpretation of the prophecy, and they are "silent" until the next day.

The final of the novel's prophecies. This prophecy, too, will prove in hindsight to be accurate. Yet Ahab's confident interpretation of the prophecy—an interpretation that convinces him of exactly what he wants to believe, that he will survive—turns out not to be correct at all. Prophecy's can be accurate without being helpful, and are as subject to the way men see the world through the lens of themselves as can everything else, whether omen or doubloon.

CHAPTER 118: THE QUADRANT

Ahab takes out his quadrant a few days later, attempting to determine the ship's location, whether it is close to the equator, and whether it is therefore time to search for Moby Dick in earnest—for Ahab is now convinced that Moby Dick will be found along the equator line in the seas near Japan. But, after using the quadrant to orient himself, Ahab realizes that the quadrant "can tell him nothing of where he is," and that he will need to find Moby Dick himself, without the aid of any instrument or "toy." Ahab smashes the quadrant against the deck of the ship, and Starbuck, observing this from the deck, wonders if Ahab won't "burn himself to ashes" in his quest to find the whale. But Stubb believes that Ahab is merely "seeing his quest through" until its bitter end.

Just as Ahab cast his pipe over the side of the boat and into the water, as an indication that he no longer had any time for enjoyment, so too does Ahab throw over the navigational instruments of the ship. This signals that Ahab is no longer concerned with finding land, or with getting home at all. The ship will no longer follow standard navigational tools. Its only course is Ahab's course.—to find Moby Dick. Starbuck, understandably, is alarmed by Ahab's cavalier attitude and believes Ahab may end up destroying himself. Stubb, as usual, is more willing to follow his captain's orders.

CHAPTER 119: THE CANDLES

A large typhoon hits the Pequod, and the crew prepares the ship by lowering the sails and attempting to ride out the storm. Ahab, on deck with the other mates and the harpooneers, notices that the three masts of the ship have been touched with balls of flame called "corpusants," which occasionally "arise during sea-storms" and cause the top of the masts "to look like candles." Ahab, crazed by this scene, and viewing it as indicative of the nature of his quest to kill the white fiend, mounts on Fedallah's back (who is standing by the main mast) and announce that every man on the ship has agreed to hunt the white whale with him, and that no man can turn back now. Starbuck believes that Ahab and the vessel are "ill-omened," and that they should sail out of the storm and back home, but Ahab says this will not be possible, and the "half-mutinous cries" of the crew subside, as they return to their places, terrified at the mania that has seized Ahab.

Storms aboard ships were often viewed by superstitious sailors as events with terrible implications for the ship itself. Here, the storm appears to presage the final confrontation with the whale. The storm also hammers home the belief of many on the ship—increasing by the day—that Ahab and Fedallah have made some kind of pact with the devil, or that, perhaps, Fedallah is the devil himself. Although the lights atop the mast are a scientifically-explainable event, the crew chooses to believe that these "candles" are an omen of the ill luck the ship is about to experience, as the final approach to Moby Dick's swimming-ground is made. And yet Ahab's almost inhuman passion and monomania overcome both Starbuck's caution and the fear and distrust of the other sailors on the ship.

CHAPTER 120: THE DECK TOWARDS THE END OF THE FIRST NIGHT WATCH

Starbuck asks, in the night, if the anchors shouldn't be further fixed, in order to keep the boat afloat in the storm, but Ahab tells Starbuck to "strike nothing," and instead orders the mate to ride out the storm with the boat as is. Starbuck fears that this could mean the death of all the men aboard.

As in throwing away the quadrant, Ahab here expresses again to Starbuck that the fate of the crew is of no importance to him, nor the safety of the ship. Ahab seems to believe that fate will bring him to Moby Dick, and wants nothing to stand in the way of or thwart that fate. Starbuck previously feared that Ahab was going to destroy himself. Now he starts to fear that Ahab will destroy everyone onboard the Pequod. Just as the conflict between Ahab and Moby Dick pushes toward a crescendo, so does the conflict between Starbuck and Ahab.

CHAPTER 121: MIDNIGHT. –THE FORECASTLE BULWARKS

Stubb and Flask bring in the anchors upon Ahab's order, and Stubb and Flask remark to one another that it seems "the anchors won't be used again" on the voyage, implying that Ahab now will pursue his quest without cease. Flask tells Stubb he is worried that devils and evil spirits have taken over the ship, but Stubb, still joking even in this time of danger, remarks to him that the devils would be "soaked" by all the spray of the sea.

This is the third time in the novel that the mates are discussing the possible "devilish possession" of their captain (who conceives of himself as chasing the devilish Moby Dick). Stubb's joking response to Flask's worries indicate his careless attitude. He doesn't really care who's running the ship, or how crazy or dangerous the orders are, as long as he gets to kill whales.

CHAPTER 122: MIDNIGHT ALOFT. – THUNDER AND LIGHTNING

Tashtego—in this, the novel's shortest chapter—tells the thunder to stop thundering, and asks the night sky for a glass of rum.

While the Captain and officers of the Pequod engage in moral disagreements and pursue ambitious ideals of vengeance or worry about their responsibilities to the ship's crew, Tashtego here represents the more pragmatic viewpoint of that crew. He just wishes the storm would stop, and that he could have some rum.

CHAPTER 123: THE MUSKET

Starbuck and Stubb manage to retie and hoist some of the sails, and the ship begins to move in its normal direction, roughly eastward, despite the storm. Starbuck goes down to Ahab's cabin to inform him that the ship is now moving, but outside Ahab's door, Starbuck sees a loaded musket, and debates openly whether he shouldn't simply shoot the captain and take over command of the ship. Although Starbuck knows that to kill is evil, he wonders whether it is not ethically preferable to kill Ahab and save the rest of the crew from certain doom. But, at the last moment, Starbuck lowers the "death tube" of the musket and puts it back—he does not have the heart, or the mind, to kill Ahab while the man sleeps. Starbuck tells Stubb to go down and wake Ahab with the news of the ship's eastward progress.

In this chapter the conflict between Starbuck and Ahab comes to a head. It is significant that it does so while Ahab is sleeping, as it reveals that the true conflict here is not between Ahab and Starbuck but between Starbuck and himself. Starbuck is a moral man, and he reasons about his possible murder of Ahab and mutiny in morals terms—weighing the life of one man versus the lives of many. Yet within that moral reasoning is also a question of conviction or willingness to act boldly, and Starbuck's moralizing ultimately comes to be connected with a lack of will, a lack of exactly that over-riding sense of self that allows Ahab to discard social and moral conventions and which makes him so powerful. It is also worth noting the parallels between this scene and two scenes in separate Shakespeare plays. IN the first, Macbeth questions whether he can kill the sleeping Duncan. He ultimately does, with devastating effects. In the other, Hamlet contemplates killing the praying Claudius. He ultimately doesn't, with devastating effects. So there is also an element of fate at play here, and it may very well be that no matter what Starbuck decided in this moment it would turn out badly. But as with everything in Moby Dick, *there's no way to know.*

CHAPTER 124: THE NEEDLE

Ahab awakes the next morning to find that the compass needles of the ship have been turned around by the electrical energy of the storm, and that the Pequod is going west, instead of east along the equator.

Another means of steering the ship has gone by the wayside, indicating that the ship travels Ahab's course, or perhaps fate's course, toward its showdown with Moby.

CHAPTER 125: THE LOG AND LINE

Ishmael observes that, when the quadrant was working, Ahab did not feel it necessary to use the "log and line," or a bob attached to a rope that is thrown out of the boat at set intervals, as a way of measuring the ship's progress and speed over time. Now, though, Ahab orders two crewmembers to throw out the bob, even though it is nearly broken from the heat and of the long voyage. The crewmembers say this to Ahab, who tells them to throw it over anyway, and when the bob breaks, Ahab realizes that he has broken most of his means of locating the ship (the log, the needle, and the quadrant). Ahab asks Pip to come help him, but Pip responds with nonsense spoken in his customary tones of bizarre sing-song. Ahab comments that Pip has touched his "inmost center", and tells Pip to come with him into his cabin. Pip responds that he and Ahab have between them a "man-rope; something that weak souls may hold by." The crew looks on, feeling that Ahab and Pip are both equally insane.

With the loss of the log and the line, Ahab realizes that all standard means of navigation are now lost to the ship. That Ahab then reaches out to Pip is interesting—in the absence of science he reaches out to prophecy as something that could direct him. But Pip's prophecies and bizarre words are immensely difficult to interpret exactly. Yet at the same time, in their senselessness, they seem to capture the chaos and strandedness of the ship, which is now entirely in the grip of fate and Ahab's monomania. Ahab's tenderness toward Pip is a humanizing moment, as he seems to take Pip almost as a son. The two of them are almost total opposites—white and black; powerful and weak; knowledgeable and innocent; and yet they have a human connection between them (once again characterized by a rope). Yet their connection seems to be one founded on madness.

CHAPTER 126: THE LIFE-BUOY

The Pequod passes an island enshrouded in mist, and the night-watch hears cries that sound a lot like those of men—until the crew realizes that it's only seals. In the night, one of the crewmembers—who happens to be the first who spotted Moby Dick, while up at the top of the main mast—falls overboard in a fit of sleepwalking. The crew throws out the life buoy to try to save him, but he does not grab onto it, and the buoy breaks away from the boat.

Once again the connection and difference between man and nature is emphasized in the familiarity of the voices of the seals. The man who falls overboard is the first member of the crew of the Pequod to die. Despite everything that has befallen the crew, they have all survived, which gives a sense that maybe the men are protected in some way. That the man who died was the first to spot Moby Dick, of course, could be taken as a bad omen.

Starbuck orders that the carpenter use Queequeg's coffin as the new life buoy, covering over its seams with "pitch" and making it water-tight. The carpenter complains that crew members are mad and are ruining his good work, but he proceeds with the task, as ordered.

But Starbuck ignores the omen, if he even notices it. The use of Queequeg's coffin as the life buoy will be significant later. It also re-emphasizes the connection between life and death that has been made throughout Moby Dick, as a coffin is now being used as a means of saving lives.

CHAPTER 127: THE DECK

Ahab has a short conversation with the carpenter as he seals the coffin. Pip, following behind asks both the carpenter and Ahab, whether it isn't strange to help a man to live, by making him an ivory leg, and then to make a life buoy out of something that normally holds dead bodies. The carpenter continues with his work, though he believes that Pip and Ahab are mad. Ahab, in a monologue at the end of the chapter, asks himself whether a casket isn't always a "life preserver" for the immortal soul, but immediately stops in this line of thinking, telling himself that he must return to his hunt for the white whale. He calls to Pip, who has now taken to following Ahab around the vessel.

Here, Ahab makes explicit the idea that a coffin might be viewed as a life-preserver anyway—a means of keeping man safe as he continues in his journey into the next world. Once again, Ahab and Melville have decided to make explicit the symbolism of the novel. This, as a consequence, makes the novel feel more real, since the whale, the life-buoy, and other objects are perceived as symbols by the characters themselves. Thus the characters seem to have the same understanding of their surroundings that the reader does—making the characters seem more like the reader himself or herself. At the same time, the novel has again and again explored interpretations only to then undermine them. So Ahab's real-ness in his identification of symbols also serves to question the interpretations of the readers of those same symbols. The carpenter, meanwhile, thinks everyone wasting time with all this interpreting is crazy.

CHAPTER 128: THE PEQUOD MEETS THE RACHEL

The Pequod comes in contact with the Rachel, a boat that reports, through its Captain Gardiner, that they have seen Moby Dick, and that, the day before, they lowered boats to capture some whales and saw Moby Dick alongside. A last boat, containing the captain's young son, was sent to battle Moby Dick, and though it hooked him, the boat was dragged some distance to the horizon and lost. Gardiner and the rest of the crew of the Rachel did all they could to find the boat and the captain's son, but saw nothing.

In marked contrast to Ahab's emotions regarding his own family—with whom he has made no attempt to communicate throughout the course of the novel—Gardiner feels it is absolutely necessary to do everything he can to locate his son. Indeed, he believes that a fellow man will recognize this emergency and do all he can to help find the boy.

Gardiner asks if Ahab will join with him and his crew in seeking out his lost whale boat, in the hopes of finding the abandoned boy. But Ahab tells Gardiner he will not do it, despite Gardiner's protestations that Ahab himself has a small child. Ahab claims he is already losing time in talking with Gardiner rather than searching for Moby Dick. Gardiner, horrified, boards his own ship and sails away, and Ishmael comments that the Rachel, like the Biblical character Rachel, appears to be in mourning for its "lost child," the captain's son.

But, of course, Gardiner does not understand the overwhelming monomania of Ahab's quest. Gardiner's shock at Ahab's heartlessness is a signal of Ahab's lost humanity. He puts his quest for the whale above the life of a boy, or even above the hope that the boy might be alive. In the Bible, Rachel is the mother of Joseph, whom his brother's betray and send into slavery in Egypt. So she loses and mourns for her son.

CHAPTER 129: THE CABIN

Ahab tells Pip that Pip must leave him—that they are embarking on the portion of the journey that will require Ahab to fight the White Whale. Pip responds that although he was once abandoned by Stubb during a whaling mission, he, now, will not abandon Ahab. Ahab walks away from Pip, and Pip begins a strange monologue with himself, asking "if anyone has seen Pip," and saying he will be rooted near Ahab's cabin for the remainder of the voyage.

After abandoning Gardiner's son, Ahab now (kindly, but still) abandons Pip. It is interesting to note the differences between the madnesses of Pip and Ahab. Pip, a black powerless child, goes mad when he is overcome by his insignificance within the larger world. Ahab, a powerful white man, becomes overcome by his own sense of self and importance, his sense that he has been singled out as the man who must kill Moby Dick.

CHAPTER 130: THE HAT

Ishmael states that the crew has become silent, awaiting the final encounter with Moby Dick. Fedallah seems never to sleep, and neither does Ahab, whose hat is pulled down so low of his eyes that no one can tell if those eyes are open or closed. Ahab tells the mates that he does not trust them to sight the whale correctly, since they might avoid the whale and therefore seek to end the voyage prematurely—thus Ahab has himself hoisted up the main mast in order to spot Moby Dick himself. When Ahab reaches the zenith, however, a sea-hawk flies by and takes off his hat, dumping it into the sea far away—and some crewmembers take this for an ill omen of the encounter with the white whale.

Another omen, this time one that all crewmembers can easily interpret. If the hat is a symbol for one's own head, and if the head is the most important part of the body, then to lose one's hat is to lose one's head, and perhaps one's life. It is no coincidence that Ahab will be killed, soon, by a rope around his neck—his head will be cut off from the rest of his body, and he will be flung into the ocean deep to drown, in keeping with Fedallah's prophecy. A prophecy that Ahab misinterpreted. Also note that Ahab at this point is no longer trying to fool anyone, telling the mates that he will sight the whale because he doesn't trust them to actually do it. Yet his monomania compels the crew to continue to follow him.

CHAPTER 131: THE PEQUOD MEETS THE DELIGHT

Ishmael states that it is ironic the Pequod should encounter a ship called Delight that is so burdened with woe, the next day. Ahab asks that captain if he has seen the whale, and the captain says he has, and no man can kill it—he has lost "five of his strongest mates" to it the previous day. Just as the captain is dumping the body of the fifth overboard, in its hammock, Ahab has the Pequod turn away, hoping to avoid the terrible splash the body makes against the waves—but the crew hears this sound regardless. The crewmembers of the Delight, meanwhile, comment to each other on the Pequod's use of a coffin as a life buoy.

This final gam before the confrontation with the white whale ratchets up the stakes—Moby Dick is presented as deadly and unconquerable, while Ahab is relentless. Ahab's effort to avoid hearing the sound of the corpse hitting the water may be an indication that even he fears and wants to avoid death, or that he knows his men do and that they are only barely following him. To the crewmen of the Delight, the symbolism of the coffin as lifebuoy on a ship off to hunt Moby Dick is clear.

CHAPTER 132: THE SYMPHONY

Ahab, high on his watch, turns to Starbuck after many hours, and begins a long harangue that appears, at first, to indicate that Ahab has regrets about chasing the whale. He says that, forty years ago, he began whaling, and he has only spent "three years on land" since then. He has barely seen his "young wife and child." And yet he continues with the chase. Although Starbuck tries to use this as an opening to convince Ahab to come down and bring the ship home, Ahab cannot be swayed, and he looks out again at the sea, wondering aloud about fate, about who causes him to hunt Moby Dick—himself, God, or another power. Ahab then looks down to find that Starbuck has left Ahab to be alone with his ravings.

Starbuck uses this interaction as a final opportunity to try to convince Ahab to come to his senses. It is notable here that Ahab at least listens to Starbuck, realizing the two people in his family he has abandoned on shore and wondering whether he is even in control of his own actions—is he making decisions or is it some external power, whether fate or his own madness? But, regardless, Ahab is too far into his quest to abandon it now, and Starbuck seems to understand that. Instead, Starbuck wishes only to voice his opposition to Ahab's plan, perhaps as a means of clearing his own (Starbuck's) conscience, before the final encounter with the whale.

CHAPTER 133: THE CHASE. – FIRST DAY

Finally, after countless days of searching, Ahab sights Moby Dick's spout from the top of the main mast of the Pequod. Although Tashtego and several others claim they saw the whale at about the same time, Ahab claims the gold doubloon for himself, saying that "it was always to be his," that no one else should rightfully claim it, as Moby Dick is his prey. Ahab leaves Starbuck in command of the Pequod and takes to his own whaleboat, with Fedallah as the harpooneer, and the crew of stowed-away Chinese sailors.

It comes as no surprise that Ahab is the one to spot Moby Dick. Perhaps this is because Ahab was motivated by the idea of keeping his gold to himself, but it is more likely that he is uninterested in the financial value of the coin than in its symbolic *value. Ahab sees himself and Moby Dick as the central characters in this story, and under that logic the doubloon must be his. The cautious Starbuck is left behind as Ahab now goes to confront the white whale himself.*

Stubb and Flask also take out whaleboats, and each rows in furious pursuit of Moby Dick. Ishmael says that Moby Dick appeared so beautiful as to resemble a god from Greek myth or the Bible—indeed, Moby Dick appeared more beautiful than a god. Ahab's boat approaches the whale first, and Ahab grabs his harpoon from Fedallah—the one made for him by Perth—and attempts to ram it down Moby Dick's throat, as the whale opens its jaws wide. But Ahab cannot reach the whale to stab it, and after diving for a time, Moby Dick rises again, bites Ahab's whale-boat in two, and sends Ahab flying into the water, face-first, as the rest of the crew cling to the boat as best they can.

Now the action-sequences of the novel begin. Some critics might object that the novel's action and its climax are concentrated at the very end of the text, with little room saved for "denouement," or unraveling after the climax has passed. But Ishmael appears to have wanted to arrange the narrative in this way, perhaps because it allows the reader to experience the horrible power of Moby Dick and then to end the novel on this note—in awe of the whale and his strength.

One of the other whaleboats picks up Ahab and the rest of the crew, and no one is hurt by the whale, who now begins spouting at regular intervals. Ahab and his crew help the other crew of the rescue boat to row back to the Pequod, and once there, Ahab resumes his watch, saying that whoever sights Moby Dick on the day he is killed will truly get the doubloon—and if Ahab does so, he will give ten times that money to all the crew. Ahab also sees Starbuck worrying about the whale, and Stubb laughing about Moby Dick, and condemns both, saying they represent the two "poles" of humanity, and that Ahab "stands alone among millions of men" as the only one sensible and courageous enough to catch the whale.

The first day of the hunt ends in a stalemate, with both Moby Dick and Ahab alive. Ahab's comment about Starbuck and Stubb are important. Ahab recognizes that these two mates represent two options for how a man can live his life—with a crippling excess of caution or seriousness, or with a frivolous lack of either that leads to a lack of purpose. True to his monomania, Ahab sees himself as the sole person to stand between these two poles, to have the seriousness of purpose without the crippling paralysis of being caught within morals or conventions that allow him to truly act, to truly kill and catch the White Whale that has come to symbolize the unknown, the uncaring, the truth of existence which is that there is no truth or meaning in existence. Ahab thinks he himself can confront that white leviathan and define it through death.

CHAPTER 134: THE CHASE. – SECOND DAY

Some crew members believe they see Moby Dick spouting, but it is only one unrepeated spout, and the mates warn that Moby Dick will spout regularly, if it is truly the White Whale. Finally, the call is raised aboard the decks—many crew-members at once—that Moby Dick is straight ahead, and Starbuck is once again left in command of the Pequod, as Ahab, Stubb, and Flask lower into their boats. The three boats chase Moby Dick, with Ahab attempting to meet the fish "head-to-head," and each boat gets a harpoon into the whale's skin. But Moby Dick begins spinning round and round, tangling the boats in their own harpoon-lines.

Ahab and his men pierce Moby Dick's skin with their harpoons, but Moby Dick uses those lines against the men (recalling Ishmael's descriptions earlier in the novel of the strength and dangers posed by lines

Ahab cuts his boat free with his much-loved harpoon, fashioned by Perth, but the other two boats are not so lucky, and are smashed against Moby Dick's side—their crews get drenched and must swim to safety, clinging to bits of the broken vessels. Ahab, however, stays in his boat, only to find that Moby Dick is coming up from below, and he "smashes his forehead against the bottom" of Ahab's boat, causing that crew to spill once more into the ocean, and Ahab to cling to one half of the broken vessel and to lose his harpoon.

Ahab must abandon his harpoon, the one he believed to be powerful enough to kill Moby Dick. This, again, is a bad omen, making it seem that Moby Dick will not be killed after all, but that the whale instead will be the master of Ahab and the rest of the crew. Ahab has now survived two different falls out of his boat, despite his false leg.

The Pequod manages to scoop up all the sailors, mates, and Ahab, who are swimming in the nearby waters, as Moby Dick glides quickly away. But Ahab realizes that Fedallah is missing—that he was trapped under Moby Dick when the whaleboats were jammed against the whale's body by their harpoon-lines.

Ahab is horrified by the news that Fedallah has been lost. Ahab sees Fedallah is central to his efforts to kill the whale.

Ahab mourns his friend and comrade in battle, and wonders if this doesn't spell doom for his mission. Starbuck, once Ahab is back on board, pleads with his captain to abandon the chase, saying that his boat has now been destroyed twice, and that Moby Dick will kill him and perhaps the rest of the crew. Ahab also shows that his new-made ivory leg has been broken, "once again," by the whale—this is more evidence, to Starbuck, that Ahab's mission is an impossible one. But Ahab says that he and Starbuck were always meant to have this philosophical battle, that "'twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled." Ahab also announces that, like any drowning person, Moby Dick will surface one more time, only to be slain after his third and final surfacing. The crew sleeps for the night, and Ahab dozes with his face eastward, awaiting morning and the final day of the chase.

With Fedallah dead, Ahab's harpoon lost, his boat twice broken, his leg cracked one more by Moby Dick, it seems obvious to all reasonable people that to go out and face Moby Dick for a third time would be to invite death for himself and perhaps everyone. And Ahab himself wonders now if he will lose this battle. But Ahab also is not a reasonable person. Unlike Starbuck, he is on a quest to which he has given himself completely. Theirs is a philosophical disagreement that has no solution, between those counseling reason and those who don't see reason as a primary concern. Ahab seems genuinely to believe that his struggle with the White Whale is a version of man's same struggle that has been playing out since the dawn of time; man's fight with nature, with God, with his own terrible fate, which attempts at every moment to destroy man. Although the crew, at this juncture in the novel, is exhausted by a two-day-long whale-hunt, Ahab seems only to have grown more vigorous during this long struggle; he cannot sleep, but can only wait as the whale comes back for a third and final day. Meanwhile, the number three has long been significant in biblical and other stories, with the most notable antecedent being Biblical—Jesus died and took three days before he rose again.

CHAPTER 135: THE CHASE. – THIRD DAY

The next day dawns, and though the whale has not been spotted the previous night, Ahab knows it is close by. Then, after a few minutes, Ahab himself finds the whale, and the boats are lowered once again, with Starbuck manning the Pequod for the third time. Ahab says goodbye to the ship and shakes Starbuck's hand, telling his first mate that he thanks him for his service, and saying also that some "ships never return to their harbors." Starbuck watches Ahab leave in his whaleboat, telling him to be careful of the sharks that are circling the Pequod, and wonders about Ahab's wife and child—if the captain will ever see them again.

On the first two days Ahab seemed to set forth after Moby Dick with hope of killing him. Now he seems to head out with a sense of his impending doom. Ahab no longer cares at all for the obligations of his command, or his family, or life—he has devoted himself entirely to killing Moby Dick, or even just facing Moby Dick, an action that will give his life meaning, and the prospect of death will not stop him from doing so. Starbuck's advice that he watch out for the sharks seems a final indication of his cautiousness, as he warns a man going to a showdown with Moby Dick about some mindless sharks.

The three boats set off once more, but two of them, manned by Stubb and Flask, come close to the whale and are again broken to bits (these being replacement boats, quickly readied from the previous day). The three harpooners and Stubb and Flask swim with bits of debris back to the Pequod, and quickly try to make the boats ready and water-tight, to continue to attack Moby Dick. Meanwhile, Ahab sees a horrific sight: Fedallah's body is trapped against the White Whale's, for he was caught in one of the harpoon lines and drowned when Moby Dick went into a dive.

The horror of Fedallah drowned alive, stuck to Moby Dick only heightens the sense of the whale's dread and possibly malevolent power. Moby Dick himself, is the "first hearse" mentioned in Fedallah's prophecy, and is a hearse "not made by human hands," as the whale God's creation. If this part of Fedallah's prophecy is correct, then, Ahab seems to have reason to believe that the rest of what he predicted will come to pass. Therefore Ahab awaits the "second hearse," which will be made of wood.

Ahab realizes this is the first hearse of Fedallah's prophecy, and wonders what the second will be. Ahab nevertheless orders the crew to once again fly toward Moby Dick, who has appeared to "slacken" in his pace, perhaps because he is tired and wounded after multiple stabs and three days' chase. But after Ahab throws another "dart" into Moby Dick's side, the whale thrashes and causes some of the crew to be tipped from Ahab's boat.

Ahab continues to be able to wound the whale, despite all the thrashing and the tiredness of three days in the whale-boat. As before, Ahab's power seems only to grow in these scenes, as though the presence of Moby Dick has given him a shot of energy that will not dissipate.

Ahab recovers, orders the crew back into the boat, and realizes that Moby Dick has turned away from attacking the small whaling dinghy, and has instead focused its attentions on the Pequod, seeking to ram into that vessel. Ahab realizes, to his eternal dismay, the second part of Fedallah's prophecy: that the Pequod itself is the "second hearse," made of American wood, and that all the sailors on it—who have been hard at work preparing the whale-boats once more for battle—will go down with the ship. Starbuck, Flask, and Stubb each see Moby Dick approaching to ram them—and Starbuck prays for forgiveness earnestly, from heaven, while Flask and Stubb wonder what is to become of them and the ship.

Now the second part of the prophecy is revealed, and fate seems to cling tighter around Ahab and his crew. Ahab;s monomania has doomed his crew. Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask show three men's different reactions to certain death—praying on the one side, a kind of shocked astonishment on the other. And all the while it is left unclear whether Moby Dick actually understands what is happening, or is simply a monstrous animal, doing what large animals do—eating, and attempting to protect itself.

That next instant, Ahab realizes he has one final shot with his harpoon at the whale, and urges the crew onward, toward Moby Dick. Ahab throws the harpoon and strikes the whale, but does not notice that the line is running out quickly, and accidentally steps into its way—the harpoon-line wraps around his neck (the "hemp" of the prophecy) and pulls Ahab into the deep, where he drowns, half hanged by his own line. Moby Dick rams the Pequod and causes it to splinter utterly—the Pequod sinks into the Pacific Ocean. As the boat is sinking, Tashtego remains atop the main mast, hammering to attach a flag to the spar at the top of the mast. And Ishmael notes that, before Tashtego goes down with the ship, he hammers into a bird which has flown between his tool and the main-mast. Ishmael states this is like, in the Biblical story, Satan "dragging a living part of heaven" along on the descent "to Hell."

Ahab's struggle and death can be seen as a metaphor for that of all men: contending, with imperfect strength and knowledge, against forces that are too big to comprehend or ever hope to defeat (nature, fate, death). Tashtego, who earlier was "reborn" in Chapter 78, now dies. He has gone through the cycle of life on the ship. And his death is similarly metaphoric, as he hammers into place the flag that will identify the ship—to defiantly claim a unique place for him and the ship in the world and in existence—even as the ship is going down, as existence slides soundlessly into the water. And with the accidental killing of the bird the Pequod goes down with a final Biblical interpretation.

EPILOGUE

Ishmael writes, in the Epilogue, that all this could be reported because "one did survive the wreck," and it was he, Ishmael. Ishmael "took the place of Fedallah" in Ahab's boat, and Ishmael survived . The "vortex" created by the sinking Pequod and which caused all the rest of the crew to drown had fizzled by the time Ishmael reached its "center," and at this point, Queequeg's coffin splashes up from the depths, allowing Ishmael to grab it and float. Ishmael then notes, recognizing the irony of the situation, that he was picked up also by the Rachel, which had returned "after a night and a day." He says, to end the book, that, in this way, "Rachel in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan."

Of course, for any story to survive it needs a witness who survives it. Ishmael is that witness, and as the solitary witness his name makes more sense. Ishmael—son of Abraham and the slave Hagar—was eventually cast out by his father when his legitimate son Isaac was born. So too has Ishmael lost his society, his community. And so the Rachel, still looking for its "son," and found an "orphan" instead. And through Ishmael and his story, his dead compatriots live on. Just as Ishmael himself is given life by the coffin that is covered in the tattoos that tell Queequeg's story, so too does Ishmael's story gives a kind of heroic immortality to the sailors of the Pequod.

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