

Melville's Moby Dick — A Summary

(by Mark Bridger)

First things first:

Etymology, supplied by a late consumptive usher to a grammar school; names of the whale in 13 different languages.

Extracts, supplied by a sub-sub-librarian, a member of “that hopeless, sallow tribe which no wine of this world will ever warm.” Melville does sympathize and promises that his friends who precede him to heaven will make “refugees of long-pampered Gabriel, Michael and Raphael” against his coming. Among the quotes: ’ “My God!. Mr. Chace, what is the matter” I answered, “we have been stove by a whale.” ’ (Melville always misspells the name of Owen Chase, the mate of the Essex)

Chapter i Loomings

“Call me Ishmael.” “Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; ... whenever ... it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street and methodically knocking people’s hats off – then I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can.”

Even in the biggest cities (Manhattan) or in the midst of the plains, people are attracted to water and the sea. “When I go to sea, I go as a simple sailor, right before the mast, plumb down into the forecabin, aloft there to the royal masthead.” The biggest contrast is between a schoolmaster who lords it over his students, and a common sailor who must take orders from old sea-captains; but “Who ain’t a slave?” And, passengers have to PAY: “The act of paying is perhaps the most uncomfortable infliction that the two orchard thieves entailed upon us. But being paid, – what will compare with it?”

But why whaling? “Chief was the overwhelming idea of the great whale himself...Then the wild and distant seas where he rolled his island bulk.”

Chapter ii The Carpet Bag

Ishmael stuffs a shirt or two in his carpet-bag, and leaves Manhatta for New Bedford, arriving on a December Saturday too late for the packet to Nantucket. After rejecting two inns as too expensive, and a third which turned out to be a “negro church”, he finds “The Spouter-Inn: – Peter Coffin.” (The Coffins, like the Starbucks, Folgers and Macys, are one of the founding families of Nantucket.)

Chapter iii The Spouter-Inn

The first sight is a large, dark, hard to discern oil painting of a dismasted ship in a storm, with a whale apparently about to leap over it and impale itself on the mast heads. The opposite wall contains clubs, spears, harpoons and lances. Several young seamen are comparing “skrimshander”.

One seaman gets Ishmael’s attention: tall, swarthy and muscular, his name is Bulkington; his eyes seemed to reflect unhappy memories, and he is subdued amidst the general noise. He appears to be a Southerner. He presently slips away; after a while his absence is noted with a cry of “Where’s Bulkington?”

Ishmael is asked to share a bed with a harpooneer (not present), and is invited to supper (meat, potatoes and dumplings). He has misgivings about sharing a bed with a harpooneer (also called a “boatsteerer”); however, the bench he is offered is too uncomfortable. There’s a great “who’s on first” dialogue as the host tries to explain to Ishmael that the harpooneer is in town trying to sell his head. It’s the last of a lot (of human heads) bought by the harpooneer in New Zealand and sold ashore.

After some difficulty, Ishmael falls asleep in the harpooneer’s bed, but is awakened by a light as the strangely tattooed “cannibal” returns. He is a dark purplish color, with large blackish looking squares on his cheeks; no hair on his head but a scalp-knot. As he undresses and stows the unsold head, Ishmael sees that he is tatoood all over his body. The harpooneer makes a burnt offering to his small black idol, smokes his tomahawk/pipe, and hops into bed with Ishmael. After a scene, they turn to sleep: “Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian.”

Chapter iv The Counterpane

Ishmael wakes to find Queequeg’s arm clasping him. It reminds him of a time when he was sent to bed by his stepmother for some mischief. Seemingly waking from a dream, he felt a supernatural hand in his as his arm lay draped over the counterpane; this feeling is vividly recalled by the pressure of Queequeg’s arm.

Queequeg dresses in a peculiar way. He puts on his hat first, then, with his trousers still off, climbs under the bed to don his boots in privacy. He shaves with his harpoon head, which he carries out “like a marshal’s baton.”

Chapter v Breakfast

The bar-room fills with (mostly) whalemens: “a brown and brawny company, with bosky beards; an unshorn, shaggy set, all wearing monkey jackets for morning gowns.” Ishmael is surprised that the company eats in reserved almost shy silence, with no sea yarns being spun. Queequeg eschews the coffee and hot rolls, but uses his harpoon head to spear rare beefsteaks.

Chapter vi The Street

Ishmael takes a walk in New Bedford. The streets are filled with interesting and foreign looking characters: “actual cannibals stand chatting at street corners; savages outright; many of whom yet carry on their bones unholy flesh.” But also men from Vermont and New Hampshire; dandies and bumpkins and bumpkin dandies. “In New Bedford, fathers, they say, give whales for dowers to their daughters, and portion off their nieces with a few porpoises a-piece.”

Chapter vii The Chapel

This is a Sunday visit to the New Bedford Whaleman’s Chapel. On the wall are marble tablets with black borders, each in memory of a whaleman lost at sea. Queequeg shows up also. Ishmael muses. How hard it is for the relatives of those lost at sea, with no grave or stone or ashes for remembrance; “how it is that we still refuse to be comforted for those who we nevertheless maintain are dwelling in unspeakable bliss?” Ishmael shrugs

off fears of death: “Methinks my body is but the lees of my better being. In fact take my body who will, take it I say, it is not me. And therefore three cheers for Nantucket; and come a stove boat and stove body when they will, for stave my soul, Jove himself cannot.”

Chapter viii The Pulpit

Father Mapple, the famed chaplain, enters. The pulpit, though lofty, has no stairs, but is attained via a vertical ladder with red worsted man-ropes for support, the vertical parts of the ladder being of rope, with the steps only of wood. Father Mapple draws up the ladder after him. Ishmael takes this to symbolize the chaplain’s isolation from the worldly for the time of his sermon. The rest of the pulpit is made to resemble a ship’s bow, with the bible resting on a beak of scroll work.

In addition to the pulpit and the plaques, the chapel also has a painting of a ship in a storm, threatened by rocks and breakers; unlike the painting in the Spouter Inn, the ship is watched over by a glowing angel.

“Yes, the world’s a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete; and the pulpit is its prow.”

Chapter ix The Sermon

An opening hymn compares the threat of hell with a whale’s open maw...

The subject of the sermon is, fittingly, Jonah, who has refused God’s bidding. Father Mapple fills in the story with modern descriptions of the geography and appearance of the characters: the Captain, the crew and Jonah. The Captain, while recognizing criminals, overlooks the evidence except in the penniless: “sin that pays its way can travel freely, and without a passport; whereas Virtue, if a pauper, is stopped at all frontiers.”

Jonah, in his room, watches the swinging lamp, which keeps true level, belying the false level of the tossing ship; he likens the lamp to his conscience.

The terrors of the storm are described; lots are drawn and Jonah draws the guilty one; he admits his sin, but the mariners are pitiful; he asks to be thrown overboard, after which the weather calms; he has yet to beg forgiveness. In the whale, Jonah truly repents; he does not weep and beg deliverance, for he knows his punishment is just; Jonah is delivered. Mapple hints that he himself is a great sinner: “Yea, woe to him who, as the great Pilot Paul has it, while preaching to others is himself a castaway....Delight is to him, whom all the waves of the billows of the seas of the boisterous mob can never shake from this sure Keel of the Ages.”

Chapter x A Bosom Friend

Ishmael sees Queequeg as the noble savage: “Queequeg was George Washington cannibalistically developed.” Queequeg has warmed Ishmael’s heart toward the world: “I’ll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy.” They sup and smoke together, and Queequeg gives him his embalmed head and some money; Ishmael decides it will be OK in God’s eye to help Queequeg worship his idol.

Chapter xi Nightgown

Ishmael and Queequeg in bed; warm feelings and Queequeg’s pipe pass around.

Chapter xii Biographical

Queequeg was born in Kikovoko, son of a High Chief and nephew of a High Priest. He was anxious to see the (Christian) world, so contrived to be taken aboard a visiting whaler (sinking his canoe and climbing aboard). He soon grew disillusioned with Christianity, but found himself a job as a harpooner. He vows to accompany Ishmael.

Chapter xiii Wheelbarrow

They rent a wheelbarrow to carry their belongings to the Nantucket packet. The first time Queequeg encountered a wheelbarrow, he lashed his trunk to it and carried all on his shoulders.

On the packet, Queequeg catches a bumpkin making fun of him, and flips the fellow in the air; the captain is angered. Soon the main sail boom breaks its sheet and knocks the bumpkin overboard. After securing the boom, Queequeg dives in and rescues the greenhorn; the captain begs his pardon. (Few whalers, in point of fact, could actually swim.)

Chapter xiv Nantucket

Some Nantucket history/lore: “pieces of wood in Nantucket are carried about like bits of the true cross in Rome...[and] one blade of grass makes an oasis, three blades in a day’s walk a prairie.” (Melville never visited Nantucket until AFTER he had written Moby Dick.)

Chapter xv Chowder

They go to the Try Pots Inn, owned by a cousin of the Spouter- Inn’s host. Its emblem is two black pots suspended from the cross- trees of an old top-mast. The cross-trees seem like a pair of gallows to Ishmael (Coffins as hosts, gravestone plaques as chapel ornaments, and now gallows).

“Clam or Cod?” asks Mrs. Hussey. The chowder is excellent, and served at all meals; unfortunately, Queequeg must check his harpoon before he is allowed to go to bed.

Chapter xvi The Ship

Queequeg has been assured by his idol Yojo that Ishmael must select their ship. Leaving Queequeg to some prayer or fast, Ishmael sees The Devil-dam, the Tit-bit, and the Pequod (Massachusetts Indian tribe). He immediately chooses the Pequod.

While classically built, with “ancient decks ... worn and wrinkled,” she is also decorated with all manner of whale bones and teeth; even the tiller is the jaw bone of a sperm whale.

Near the main-mast is a small tent; in it Ishmael encounters Capt. Peleg, a principal owner. He scoffs at Ishmael’s merchant service. “But what takes thee a whaling?” he asks. “Well, sir, I want to see what whaling is. I want to see the world.”

Peleg tells him of Ahab’s lost leg. “Now, art thou the man to pitch a harpoon down a live whale’s throat and then jump after it? Answer, quick!” “I am sir, if it should be positively indispensable to do so ...” Peleg shows him to Captain Bildad, another owner and another Quaker: “They are the fighting Quakers; they are Quakers with a vengeance,”

muses Ishmael. He also digresses on the confluence of biblical names and speech with courage, intelligence, luck and adventure in many of these men; nevertheless “all mortal greatness is but disease.”

Bildad is quite the puritan; Ishmael wonders how he reconciles his Quaker pacifism with the tuns and tuns of leviathan gore he has spilled. Bildad says “He’ll do.”

Ishmael expects about a 275th lay or part as his wage; Bildad offers a 777th; Peleg fumes and puts Ishmael down for a 330th; Bildad invokes the widows and orphans and their percentage of the voyage; Peleg denounces him and they yell biblical imprecations at each other.

Before finally departing, Ishmael asks to see Ahab; Peleg describes him as out of the ordinary: “Ahab’s above the common; Ahab’s been in colleges, as well as ’mong the cannibals; been used to deeper wonders than the waves.” Apparently an old squaw (Tistig) claimed that Ahab’s name would prove prophetic. Ahab has a young wife and child; but, he’s been moody since he lost his leg on his last voyage.

Chapter xvii The Ramadan

While Ishmael scouts out the whaling vessels, Queequeg is locked in his room observing some religious festival. Toward evening Ishmael is concerned; he thinks Queequeg has had a stroke, while Mrs. Hussey thinks he has done away with himself as had a previous lodger (Stiggs). They break in to find the harpooneer in a meditative state. He doesn’t return to normal until the following morning, when he is warned by Ishmael about the dangers of fasting: “all thoughts born of a fast must necessarily be half-starved. This is the reason why most dyspeptic religionists cherish such melancholy notions about their hereafters.” Queequeg says that his only dyspepsia came after a large cannibalistic victory dinner; in any case, they leave after another large chowder breakfast.

Chapter xviii His Mark

Peleg and Bildad interview Queequeg, and demand he be converted; Ishmael claims he is a member of the “First Congregational Church”, viz: “the great and everlasting First Congregation of this whole worshipping world...” Peleg asks Queequeg if he has ever struck a whale. Queequeg replies by hitting a tiny drop of tar floating in the water across the deck from Peleg, who is so impressed he gets Queequeg to sign (an X) for a 90th lay (most ever given a harpooneer out of Nantucket). (In actuality, harpooners rarely flung their weapons, but thrust them point blank from the whaleboat nearly beached on the animals back.) Bildad gives Queequeg a religious tract, then argues with Peleg, after which Queequeg and Ishmael leave.

Chapter xix The Prophet

Queequeg and Ishmael are accosted by a shabby man after leaving the Pequod; when he finds they have signed on, he asks if they have signed on their souls – to “Old Thunder” (Ahab). He claims the loss of Ahab’s leg was prophesied. The man, Elijah, refers to something that happened to Ahab off Cape Horn long ago, causing him to lie as dead for three days; he refers also to a deadly skirmish with a Spaniard and a silver calabash spat into. Elijah refuses to say more, dogs them for awhile, then disappears.

Chapter xx All Astir

The Pequod is being provisioned. One of the most active fetchers is Bildad's sister, who carries odds and ends such as pickles, quills, and a roll of flannel. Peleg and Bildad are also about, but Ahab has not appeared.

Chapter xxi Going Aboard

At last Queequeg and Ishmael leave their quarters to board for the voyage; Queequeg spots some figures in the morning light. Elijah appears and asks if they have seen "anything looking like men going towards that ship a while ago? ... See if you can find 'em, will ye?" Finally: "Good bye to ye. Shan't see ye again very soon, I guess; unless it's before the Grand Jury." On the Pequod they encounter no one but a deeply asleep rigger. Queequeg sits on him, then says that on his island, great people, due to a shortage of furniture, fatten members of lower orders for ottomans... The smoke from Queequeg's pipe finally awakens the rigger, who tells them that Ahab has boarded the previous night, though he has not appeared outside his cabin. The last of the crew board.

Chapter xxii Merry Christmas

The Pequod sets sail, with Peleg and Bildad as pilots: much psalming by Bildad and cursing by Peleg. It's Christmas day: cold and dark; still no sign of Ahab. P. and B. finally leave; "we gave three heavy-hearted cheers, and blindly plunged like fate into the lone Atlantic."

Chapter xxiii The Lee Shore

Ishmael spots Bulkington whom he had encountered at the Spouter. Freshly returned from a four-year voyage, he now sails on a three-year one on the Pequod. Just as the port, in fair weather, represents safety and comfort to the ship, it represents danger during a storm: "With all her might she crowds all sail off shore; in so doing, fights 'gainst the very winds that fain would blow her homeward ... for refuge's sake forlornly rushing into peril; her only friend her bitterest foe!"

"Know ye, now, Bulkington? Glimpses do ye seem to see of that mortally intolerable truth; that all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous shore?" This chapter is an epitaph for Bulkington. (Some have seen Owen Chase, mate of the stove Essex, as a model for Bulkington; Chase spent most of his active life aboard whaling ships, rarely spending more than a month or two with his family and a succession of wives, one of whom bore a child well after a year into a voyage ...)

Chapter xxiv The Advocate

This is an apologia for the Whale hunter. Why is he not honored? He's a butcher, but so is the honored warrior. Is his trade unclean? We see later that this is not the case. Of course, all the candles and oil lamps burn in his honor. There are also numbers: bounties and worth.

Whalers have advanced the cause of world exploration and commerce: trade with the Pacific, opening of Australia. "If I shall ever deserve any real repute ... I prospectively

ascribe all the honor and the glory to whaling; for a whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard.” (Melville actually sailed on whaleships, and claimed to have met Chase and Capt. Pollard of the Essex.)

Chapter xxv Postscript

Some thoughts on anointing of monarchs; surmise: the oil is sperm oil, thus giving whaling another regal distinction.

Chapter xxvi Knights and Squires

This part concerns the chief mate Starbuck: Quaker native of Nantucket. Thin, his essence condensed; about 30 years old with a young wife and child; suited to all climes and calmly confronting peril; conscientious; superstitious in the sense of discerning “outward portents and inward presentiments”; brave but not a dare-devil: “I will have no man in my boat who is not afraid of a whale.” “I am here in this critical ocean to kill whales for my living, and not to be killed by them for theirs.” He is a professional. Because of this, his courage could melt in the face of certain spiritual terrors which sometimes “menace you from the concentrating brow of an enraged and mighty man.”

We are assured that the narrative will not reveal the complete abasement of Starbuck’s fortitude. The generic nobility of man, the “democratic dignity” radiates from God. The author endeavors to show it in all levels of humanity.

Chapter xxvii Knights And Squires

Stubb, a Cape-Cod-man, is second mate: calm, collected, good-humored, easy and careless. Even in the face of death he would off handedly whistle or sing; perhaps he never even thought of death. His visual characteristic was his pipe, which he possibly put in his mouth before donning his trousers. “Against all mortal tribulations, Stubb’s tobacco smoke might have operated as a sort of disinfecting agent.”

Third mate is Flask, a native of Martha’s Vineyard. Short, stout, ruddy and pugnacious, he views it as his duty to destroy whales. He is blind to their majesty and mystic ways, and seemingly without fear of their power – he views them as magnified mice. “As carpenter’s nails are divided into wrought nails and cut nails; so mankind may be similarly divided. Little Flask (“King-Post”) was one of the wrought ones; made to clinch tight and last long.”

Each mate commands a whale boat, and is accompanied by his harpooneer.

Queequeg is Starbuck’s harpooneer.

Tashtego, Stubb’s harpooneer, is an unmixed Indian from Gay Head (Martha’s Vineyard). He is long, lean, with sable hair, high cheekbones and glittering eyes. His father’s moose-hunting arrows have been replaced by whale-darting harpoons.

Daggoo is a “gigantic, coal-black negro savage” who willingly shipped as a whaler from his native Africa. Six foot five, he towers over Flask.

The author observes that fewer than half of whalers are American; “the native American liberally provides the brains, the rest of the world as generously supplying the muscles,” in Canal and Railroad building as well as Whaling.

Islanders, whether from the Azores, Greenland or the Shetlands seem best suited for whaling (each coming from his own “continent”). Reference is made to little Pip: “called a coward here, hailed a hero there (in heaven)!” – more on him later.

Chapter xxviii Ahab

Ahab has not appeared; Ishmael is vaguely disquieted, partly from Elijah’s words. Yet, the crew, harpooners and mates seem to allay his fears with their calmness.

The bitter New England weather begins to moderate as they head south. One day, there is Ahab on his quarter-deck. “He looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them, or taking away one particle from their compacted aged robustness.” He has a scar, like a lightning burn, running from his graying hair down into his clothing. An old Gay Head Indian had claimed it appeared not before age 40, as a result of some elemental struggle at sea. The old Manxman claimed it ran the whole length of Ahab’s body.

Ahab’s leg is made from Sperm whalebone, polished white. On each side of the quarter-deck is a small hole to steady Ahab’s second leg. His gaze is firm, determinate, fixed and willful. “And not only that, but moody stricken Ahab stood before them (the officers) with a crucifixion in his face; in all the nameless regal overbearing dignity of some mighty woe.”

As the weather clears and warms, Ahab appears more often out of his cabin; “More than once did he put forth the faint blossom of a look, which, in any other man, would have soon flowered out in a smile.”

Chapter xxix Enter Ahab; To Him, Stubb

The warmer climate softens the weather and hearts. Ahab spends more time on deck than in his cabin; he is even careful not to pace overmuch, lest the noise from his leg disturb the sleeping crew 6 inches below him. Stubb half humorously suggests that Ahab wad his leg to muffle the noise. Ahab refers to him as a dog; when Stubb protests, Ahab returns: “Then be called ten times a donkey, and a mule, and an ass, and begone or I’ll clear the world of thee.” Stubb restrains himself, not knowing whether to strike the old man or pray for him: “Damn me, but all things are queer, come to think of ’em. But that’s against my principles. Think not is my eleventh commandment; and sleep when you can, is my twelfth” .

Chapter xxx The Pipe

Ahab sits on the deck and smokes. Then: “What business have I with this pipe? This thing that is meant for serenity to send up mild white vapors among mild white hairs, not among torn iron-gray locks like mine. I’ll smoke no more –” and he throws his lighted pipe in the sea.

Chapter xxxi Queen Mab

Stubb recounts a dream to Flask. Ahab has kicked him with his bone leg; when he tries to kick back, his own leg falls off, and Ahab appears like a pyramid. But a kick from a false leg is not as serious as from a real one: “The living member – that makes the living

insult.” A series of fanciful plays on words ensues, involving an old humpback merman. While Stubb warns Flask to leave Ahab alone, the old man warns all to be on the lookout for whales – particularly a white one (the first reference to Moby Dick).

(Queen Mab is the fairy queen, said to hold sway over men’s dreams.)

Chapter xxxii Cetology

Whales are classified as fishes even though Linnaeus differs, noting their “warm bilocular heart, their lungs, their movable eyelids, their hollow ears, *penem intrantem feminam mammis lactantem.*” Ishmael invokes Jonah...

Definition: “a whale is a spouting fish with a horizontal tail.”

BOOK I (Folio), CHAPTER I. (Sperm Whale): he thinks it’s the largest (and most noble); CHAPTER II. (Right Whale): also known as the Greenland or Black Whale (supposedly the “right” one to catch, as it doesn’t sink when killed); CHAPTER III. (Fin Back): another whalebone whale; CHAPTER IV. (Hump Back); CHAPTER V. (Razor Back); CHAPTER VI. (Sulphur Bottom)

BOOK II (Octavo), CHAPTER I. (Grampus); CHAPTER II. (Black Fish); CHAPTER III. (Narwhale); CHAPTER IV. (Killer) BOOK III (Duodecimo) CHAPTER I. (Huzza Porpoise); CHAPTER II. (Algerine Porpoise); CHAPTER III. (Mealy-mouthed Porpoise).

Chapter xxxiii The Specksynder

In the old Dutch Fishery, command of a whale ship was shared between the captain and the Chief Harpooneer, also known as the Specksynder (lit.: Fat-Cutter). The class distinction on board: the captain and his officers live forward, the harpooneers and sailors live aft. This distinction is but one of many examples whereby one man’s supremacy over his fellows is cemented not so much by natural ability as by “external arts and entrenchments;” but: “Oh, Ahab! what shall be grand in thee, it must needs be plucked at from the skies, and dived for in the deep, and featured in the unbodied air.”

Chapter xxxiv The Cabin-Table

The pecking order: after the doughboy announces dinner, Starbuck waits till he’s sure Ahab is seated, then he himself goes to table. A similar procedure is followed successively by Stubb and Flask (the latter performing a little hornpipe before entering as Abjectus the Slave...)

The mates eat with respect, even awe of Ahab. As youngest, Flask especially respectfully, never even daring to ask or reach for butter; furthermore, he is last seated and first to leave. Ever since becoming an officer he has been hungry.

After the officers dine, the table is cleared and the harpooneers eat – or rather, feast. They are not patient when Dough-Boy fails to produce the food quickly or in enough quantity, pretending to scalp him or prod him with knives or forks.

Ahab considers the cabin his; the officers and harpooneers visitors. “He lived in the world, as the last of the Grisly Bears lived in settled Missouri. And as when Spring and Summer had departed, that wild Logan of the woods, burying himself in the hollow of a tree, lived out the winter there, sucking his own paws; so, in his inclement, howling old

age, Ahab's soul, shut up in the caved trunk of his body, there fed upon the sullen paws of its gloom."

Chapter xxxv The Mast-Head

Whalemen stand Mast-head duty almost from the time of leaving port to the time of return. Ishmael surmises that the Egyptians stood the first mast-head on their pyramids, looking for new stars. Other mast-headers are Napoleon and Washington. In fact, in some places, whales are spotted from "mast-heads" on shore, and their position communicated to men on ships.

The shift is two hours, and very pleasant in good weather. Unfortunately, a southern whaler doesn't have the shelter of the Greenland whaler's "crow's-nest", with its place for instruments, charts, and, perhaps, a bottle...

Ishmael and other meditative sorts can make poor lookouts, as their minds roam from their quarry to matters of philosophy, etc. But danger lurks for the Platonist or Pantheist: "Over Descartian vortices you hover. And perhaps, at mid-day, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek, you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever." (See Chapt. cxxvi.)

Chapter xxxvi The Quarter-Deck

This is a key dramatic chapter.

Ahab orders everyone aft and offers the catechism: "What do ye do when ye see a whale, men?" "Sing out for him!" "And what do ye next, men?" "Lower away, and after him!" "And what tune is it ye pull to, men?" "A dead whale or a stove boat!"

Ahab shows the Spanish ounce of gold (\$16 piece) and nails it to the main-mast; he offers it to whomever raises "a white-headed whale with a wrinkled brow and crooked jaw": Moby Dick (identified by Tashtego, and known to the other harpooners.) Was it not Moby Dick that took off thy leg? "Aye, aye! it was that accursed white whale that razeed me; made a poor pegging lubber of me for ever and a day! Aye, aye! and I'll chase him round Good Hope, and round the Horn, and round the Norway Maelstrom, and round perdition's flames before I give him up. And this is what ye have shipped for, men! to chase that white whale on both sides of land, and over all sides of earth, till he spouts black blood and rolls fin out. What say ye, men, will ye splice hands on it now?" The seamen and harpooners shout aye, but Ahab questions Starbuck further; "I am game for his crooked jaw, and for the jaws of Death too,..., but I came here to hunt whales, not my commander's vengeance. How many barrels will thy vengeance yield thee ... ?" "My vengeance will fetch a great premium here!" "Vengeance on a dumb brute that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous."

"Hark ye yet again, – the little lower layer. All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event ... some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the moldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask ... I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him ... I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do

the other ... but look ye, Starbuck, what is said in heat, that thing unsays itself.” (Ahab tries to mollify Starbuck). Starbuck: “God keep me! – keep us all!”

The crew is given grog; three harpoons are crossed and Ahab grabs them in his hand; the heads are detached and the head sockets filled with the fiery liquor: “Drink, ye harpooners! drink and swear, ye men that man the deathful whaleboat’s bow – Death to Moby Dick!”

Chapter xxxvii Sunset

Ahab muses: “ Oh! time was, when as the sunrise nobly spurred me, so the sunset soothed. No more. This lovely light, it lights not me; all loveliness is anguish to me, since I can ne’er enjoy... They think me mad – Starbuck does; but I’m demoniac, I am madness maddened! ... I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer... The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run. Over unsounded gorges, through the rifled hearts of mountains, under torrents’ beds, unerringly I rush! Naught’s an obstacle, naught’s an angle to the iron way!”

Chapter xxxviii Dusk

Starbuck muses: “My soul is more than matched; she’s overmanned; and by a mad-man! ... I think I see his impious end; but feel that I must help him to it. (but) The hated whale has the round watery world to swim in, as the small gold-fish has its glassy globe... I would up heart, were it not like lead.”

The crew is reveling. “Oh, life! ’tis in an hour like this, with soul beat down and held to knowledge, – as wild, untutored things are forced to feed – Oh, life! ’tis now that I do feel the latent horror in thee!”

Chapter xxxix First Night-Watch

Jolly Stubb has a few words about Starbuck, then “I know not all that may be coming, but be it what it will, I’ll go to it laughing.”

Chapter xl Midnight, Forecastle

The songs are sung and comments made by various members of the crew: harpooners, Pip, sailors from Nantucket, Holland, France, Iceland, Malta, Sicily, Long Island, Azores, China, Isle of Man, Lascar, Tahiti, Portugal, Denmark, England and Belfast. Pip ends it with: “Oh, thou big white God aloft there somewhere in yon darkness, have mercy on this small black boy down here; preserve him from all men that have no bowels to feel fear.”

Chapter xli Moby Dick

From relative obscurity, the fame of the white whale has spread – mixed with misinformation, superstition and exaggeration. The number of actual sightings was probably small, but the accounts spread, and engendered fears among both sperm and right whalemens: “One of the wild suggestings referred to, as at last coming to be linked with the White Whale in the minds of the superstitiously inclined, was the unearthly conceit that Moby Dick was ubiquitous, that he had actually been encountered in opposite latitudes at one and the same instant of time”; some went further, declaring him to be, in fact

immortal. At least, he was judged unusually ferocious. One captain, amidst the wreckage of his boats, attempted to stab Moby Dick with a knife; the White Whale had simply reaped away his leg with his jaw – the captain was Ahab. During convalescence on the voyage home, he suffered the anguish of torn flesh, then the pangs of hatred; then, perhaps, part of his mind descended to madness. By the time of his return, he was able to conceal his feelings, and appeared at least sane to the Nantucketers; in fact, many, including the Pequod’s owners believed his injury and hatred of the White Whale would make him a fiercer whaler, thus increasing the likelihood of their profit. Had they known his only driving force was revenge, he never would have captained the Pequod.

“Here, then, was this gray-headed, ungodly old man, chasing with curses a Job’s whale round the world, at the head of a crew, too, chiefly made up of mongrel renegades, and castaways, and cannibals – morally enfeebled also, by the incompetence of mere unaided virtue or right-mindedness in Starbuck, the invulnerable jollity of indifference and recklessness in Stubb, and the pervading mediocrity in Flask.”

Chapter xlii The Whiteness of the Whale

Generally, white has been associated with light, with the good — the benignity of age, the innocence of the bride. Yet, there “lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood.” Examples: the polar bear, the white shark, the albatross, the albino, the white hoods of Ghent. The White Mountains of New Hampshire generate dread, unlike the peaceful association of the Blue Ridge of Virginia. The sailor, viewing Antarctica, sees “what seems a boundless church-yard grinning upon him with its lean ice monuments and splintered crosses.” (See also Poe’s “The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym”.) Both circumstance and the innate terribleness of pure whiteness is to blame. It is a genetic memory; as the colt fears the buffalo skin without ever having seen a buffalo or felt its horns, so “the muffled rollings of a milky sea; the bleak rustlings of the festooned frosts of mountains; the desolate shiftings of the windrowed snows of prairies; all these, to Ishmael, are as the shaking of that buffalo robe to the frightened colt!”

“Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color ... a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink.” Nature paints all “like the harlot, whose allurements cover nothing but the charnel-house within; ... the mystical cosmetic which produces every one of her hues, the great principle of light, for ever remains white or colorless in itself... would touch all objects ... with its own blank tinge.”

Chapter xliii Hark!

Archy, near the after hatches, hears a noise. His friend, Cabaco, hears nothing.

Chapter xliv The Chart

By the shifting gleams and shadows of his lamp, Ahab traces his course on his wrinkled charts. He knows tides and currents, hence the drifting of the sperm whale’s food. The

whales travel in veins of undeviating exactitude – in width smaller than the compass of a whaler’s masthead; even the solitary whales follow veins. The exact position of a given whale on a given date can, of course, not be determined – only the veins are known – “ere a particular set time or place were attained, when all possibilities would become probabilities, and, as Ahab fondly thought, every possibility the next thing to a certainty” (In Quantum Mechanics they call it “collapsing of the wave function”). “That particular set time and place were conjoined in the one technical phrase – the Season-on-the-Line. For there and then, for several consecutive years, Moby Dick had been periodically descried, lingering in those waters for awhile ...” The Pequod had sailed at the beginning of the Season-on-the-Line, hence Ahab must wait for the next season.

Ahab’s torments and schemes and anguish, instead of being signs of a latent weakness or fright, were rather signs of his intensity of purpose. This intensity became a being unto itself; “the tormented spirit that glares out of bodily eyes, when what seemed Ahab rushed from his room, was for the time but a vacated thing, a formless somnambulistic being... God help thee, old man, thy thoughts have created a creature in thee ... a vulture feeds upon that heart for ever; that vulture the very creature he creates.”

Chapter xlv The Affidavit

Ishmael affirms that on at least three occasions he has seen the same whale struck, and escape, then, after an elapse of 3 or more years, struck and killed by the same harpooneer – who recovered his original weapon from the dead whale.

Furthermore, individual whales could often be recognized by whalers from their particular features. Certain whales, in fact, became fabled: Timor Tom, New Zealand Jack, Morquan, Don Miguel. Captains actually sailed with the intent purpose of killing these creature – which they often did.

Of course, most people have little knowledge of the awesome power of leviathan, or of the disasters and tragedies his strength causes in the fisheries. The Sperm Whale has actually stove in and destroyed ships.

Owen Chase, chief mate of the Essex described how in 1820 that ship, commanded by Captain Pollard of Nantucket, was attacked and sunk by a sperm whale in the Pacific. (Pollard and others survived three months at sea in open boats – finally resorting to cannibalism; Pollard later was shipwrecked in another command, and quit the sea. Carlisle’s novel “The Jonah Man” (Knopf, 1984) is based on Pollard’s life. Other accounts of Pollard, Chase and the Essex are Heffernan’s “Stove by a Whale” (Wesleyan/New England, 1990) and Philbrick’s “In the Heart of the Sea” (Viking, 2000).

Chapter xlvi Surmises

Although preoccupied with the White Whale, Ahab nonetheless continues the business of whaling. In his subtle insanity, Ahab realizes that the crew – his tools in his quest – must be kept from the full terror of his plans: they must be given other things to think about in the time before the sighting of Moby Dick – “they live in the varying outer weather, and they inhale its fickleness – temporary interests and employments should intervene and hold them healthily suspended for the final dash.” Till the final chase of Moby Dick “they must also have food for their more common, daily appetites,” – the romance of Ahab’s

hatred and its inspired blood lust will not sustain them over the long haul. Furthermore, Ahab, having given away the game so early, must protect himself from the moral and legal charge of usurpation – a charge which could be used to justify wresting the ship from his command.

Chapter xlvii The Mat Maker

Ishmael and Queequeg are dreamily weaving a sword-mat to lash to their boat. The chore seems to symbolize the Loom of Time, with Ishmael the shuttle, weaving his destiny in the unalterable threads. “The straight warp of necessity, not to be swerved from its ultimate course – its every alternating vibration, indeed, only tending to that; free will still free to ply her shuttle between given threads; and chance, though restrained in its play within the right lines of necessity, and sideways in its motions directed by free will, though thus prescribed to by both, chance by turns rules either, and has the last featuring blow at events.”

While he muses dreamily, the cry comes from Tashtego in the Mast-head: “There she blows! there! she blows! she blows!”

Ahab appears, “surrounded by five dusky phantoms that seemed fresh formed out of air.”

Chapter xlviii The First Lowering

Ahab’s mystery crew uses what had been considered a spare boat. The man in the helm is tall and swart, with one white tooth evilly protruding from his steel-like lips; he wears a Chinese jacket, with a white turban on his head. Ahab addresses him as Fedallah. Archy recalls telling Cabaco of the noise this phantom crew had made (Chapter xliii).

Stubb exhorts his crew: “Pull, pull, my fine hearts-alive; pull, my children; pull my little ones. Why don’t you break your backbones, my boys ... Why don’t you snap your oars, you rascals? Bite something, you dogs ...” etc. His crew pulls for the sheer joy and humor of his urgings. Starbuck’s boat draws across, and Starbuck: “...Sperm, sperm’s the play! This at least is duty; duty and profit hand in hand!” They are resigned to the mysterious stow-away crew. Ishmael recalls the hintings of Elijah.

On orders from Ahab, the crews pause and look for the submerged whales; Flask stands on Dagoo’s shoulders: “The bearer looked nobler than the rider.”

As Stubb lights his pipe, the whales are spotted; the crews row in pursuit, with the Pequod sailing after. Finally, Starbuck orders Queequeg to stand and “That’s his hump. There, there, give it to him!” he whispers. Queequeg darts his iron. The whale, grazed, escapes, leaving a swamped boat, and a squall setting in. Starbuck, under dark skies, manages to light a waterproof match keg, which Queequeg holds on a pole to light their position.

With dawn, the Pequod appears out of the mist, riding over the swamped boat. All hands are picked up from the water.

Chapter xlix The Hyena

Whaling can breed a sort of free and easy attitude toward life and its dangers – an attitude which views the universe as a vast practical joke. Ishmael asks Queequeg if

incidents such as the one which just occurred are common in whaling; Queequeg gives him to understand that they are. Stubb says: "Certain. I've lowered for whales from a leaking ship in a gale off Cape Horn." Ishmael decides to write his will.

Chapter l Ahab's Boat and Crew. Fedallah

Is it right for Ahab to have his own whaleboat and actually ride it in pursuit of whales? Nobody noticed it when, in the early days of the voyage the boat was modified for Ahab's use. (Whether a captain should endanger his own person in a whale chase was controversial, but most captains did command a whale boat during a chase. In fact, it was common for only the cook and ship's carpenter to remain on board while all others lowered after a pod of whales.)

The crew soon accepted Ahab's stowaways, except for Fedallah: "He was such a creature as civilized, domestic people in the temperate zone only see in their dreams, and that but dimly."

Chapter li The Spirit Spout

The Pequod sails past the Azores, the Cape de Verdes, the Rio de la Plata, and the Carrol Ground off St. Helena. While at the latter, on a moonlit night (whale watch was kept, even at night), Fedallah raises the cry "There she blows." A silvery jet is seen once by each man, but not again. This happens again several days later, and continues until the fair weather turns bitter as the Pequod approaches the Cape of Good Hope – or, rather "Cape Tormentato ... where guilty beings transformed in those fowls and these fish, seemed condemned to swim on everlastingly." Even then, the spirit jet would occasionally be seen. The crew lash themselves to the ship. Throughout, Ahab stands up to the blast.

Chapter lii The Albatross

They spy the whaler Goney (Albatross) returning from a four- year voyage: "this craft was bleached like the skeleton of a stranded walrus. All down her sides, this spectral appearance was traced with long channels of reddened rust, while all her spars and her rigging were like the thick branches of trees furred over with hoar-frost... A wild sight it was to see her long-bearded look-outs..." Ahab asks if they have seen the White Whale, but the other captain, as he is about to reply, drops his trumpet into the sea. Ahab: "Ahoy there! This is the Pequod, bound round the world! Tell them to address all future letters to the Pacific ocean! and this time three years, if I am not at home, tell them to address them to —" [unfinished].

If the world were a plane with endless strange and sweet sights, then there were promise, but "while chasing such over this round globe, they either lead us on in barren mazes or midway leave us whelmed."

Chapter liii The Gam

When whalers meet at sea, they row to visit each other to exchange letters and news of hunting; such a visit is called a "gam" (captains on one ship, chief mates on the other). Unfortunately, the captain travels in a normal whaleboat, with normal crew including the boat steerer or harpooner; consequently, the captain must stand, there being no seat, and hardly anything to grab – sometimes only the nearest oarsman's hair.

Chapter liv The Town-Ho's Story

The Pequod encounters the Town-Ho shortly after the Goney. The whaler is manned almost totally by Polynesians, but its story is communicated by three white men to Tashtego; the story never reaches Ahab's ears. Ishmael relates it in the same way he told it to a group of Spanish friends at the Golden Inn.

Shortly after crossing the Line, the crew of the Town-Ho discover she is taking on water. At first they pump, but the leak seems to increase, so the captain decides to put into port to have the hull repaired. All would have gone well but for the brutality of the Vineyarder mate Radney, and the bitter vengeance of Steelkilt, a "Lakeman" from Buffalo (Lake Erie).

The leak worsens, the crew takes turns at the pumps, and Radney becomes nervous. He takes a dislike for Steelkilt, who is as good-looking as Radney is ugly. As he pumps, Steelkilt teases Radney about his part ownership in the Town-Ho. Radney orders them to pump harder, which they do. After his tiring turn at the pumps, Steelkilt is ordered by Radney to sweep the decks, particularly some pig droppings – an insult to the leader of a pumping crew. Steelkilt refuses, Radney threatens him with a hammer; as the hammer grazes Steelkilt's cheek, he breaks Radney's jaw.

There is a digression on the wildness of life on the Erie Canal. Some of Steelkilt's fellow Canallers join him, while the captain, in a fury, tries to capture him. The captain, fearing a mutiny, demands Steelkilt's surrender; after much arguing, Steelkilt and his comrades are locked in the forecabin. After several days, a few groups surrender; finally, only three – including Steelkilt – are left. By treachery, two deliver Steelkilt to the captain, but all are tied to the rigging. The two are flogged unconscious by the captain; as he is about to flog Steelkilt, the latter hisses something to him, and he throws down his rope. The rope is picked up by Radney, who flogs Steelkilt; all three are then cut down.

Steelkilt seems calm, but he plots his revenge; he is braiding something – it is a cosh, with a heavy steel ball, designed to crush the mate's head. He never does this, since the next day Moby Dick is raised from the mast-head. Steelkilt is bowsman in Radney's boat. After striking the White Whale, the boat is swamped and Radney ends up on the whale's back, only to be quickly grabbed by its jaw and killed – as Steelkilt cuts the line.

When the Town-Ho reaches port, Steelkilt and his companions jump ship. The captain decides to leave the ship anchored off-shore, and sail for Tahiti for reinforcements. He does so, but encounters Steelkilt and company, who have commandeered a war canoe from the natives. Steelkilt demands the captain give him a six day lead for Tahiti. Arriving in Tahiti, Steelkilt and his men ship for France; the captain, arriving ten days later, gets his reinforcements. Steelkilt is heard from no more.

Ishmael claims "I have seen and talked with Steelkilt since the death of Radney."

Chapter lv Of the Monstrous Picture of Whales

Various inaccuracies and blunders in the portrayal of whales are revealed. One of the worst is by Frederick Cuvier (in his *Natural History of Whales*, 1836): "In a word, Frederick Cuvier's Sperm Whale is not a Sperm Whale, but a squash." Why are these representations so bad? First of all, many of the artists have never laid eyes on a whale, and have only other, inaccurate representation to go by. Those who have viewed a skeleton

are equally misinformed, since the skeleton hardly conveys the true shape formed by the muscles, flesh and blubber. In fact, the skeletal side fins look, if anything, like hands. Even the living whale is seen only fractionally, since most of its vast bulk is underwater.

Chapter lvi Of the Less Erroneous Pictures of Whales, and the True Pictures of Whaling Scenes.

Oddly, the best drawings of Leviathan are done by the French, who, it would seem, have less than a tenth of the English, and less than a thousandth of the American experience in whaling. “The French are the lads for painting action,” while “the English and American (whale draughtsmen) seem entirely content with presenting the mechanical outline of things.” The Frenchman he likes best is Garnery and another named “H. Durand.” (Reproductions are found in the Nantucket whaling museum.)

Chapter lvii Of Whales in Paint; in Teeth; in Wood; in Sheet-Iron; in Stone, in Mountains; in Stars

Some of the best artwork is done by the whalers themselves. A crippled beggar (or “kedger”) on the London docks has an accurate scene depicting his own (leg) amputation by a Sperm Whale; other scenes can be found on many pieces of Skrimshander. Some sailors have elaborate Skrimshaw tools, but most use their jackknives. The “savages” seem to have the most patience and diligence for the fine work.

Other whaling scenes exist in the imagination as it takes in rolling hills and the stars.

Chapter lviii Brit

The Pequod sails through meadows of yellow Brit, the minute food of the Right Whale. The whales appear from the masthead as black rocks in a sea of gold – nearly motionless. But analogies with land fail for the sea and its creatures: “by the continual repetition of these very impressions, man has lost the sense of the full awfulness of the sea ... That same ocean rolls now; that same ocean destroyed the wrecked ships of last year. Yea, foolish mortals, Noah’s flood is not yet subsided.”

“But not only is the sea such a foe to man who is an alien to it, but it is also a fiend to its own offspring...sparing not the creature which itself hath spawned.” But there is an analogy for man: “For as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half known life. God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return!”

Chapter lix Squid

The Pequod pushes north-eastward toward Java. Daggoo sees a great white mass from the main-mast head. Thinking it Moby Dick, he raises the cry for the White Whale. Ahab and crew lower, only to find a “vast pulpy mass, furlongs in length and breadth, ... innumerable long arms radiating from its center ... curling and twisting like a nest of anacondas. No perceptible face or front did it have; no conceivable token of either sensation or instinct ... with a low sucking sound it slowly disappeared again.” Starbuck

exclaims: “Almost rather had I seen Moby Dick and fought him, than to have seen thee, thou white ghost.”

The great live squid – possibly the Kraken of myth – is generally considered a bad omen by whalers, even though it is probably the principal food of Sperm Whales.

Chapter lx The Line

This chapter concerns the whaling line, formerly of hemp, now of the best Manila. Just 2/3 of an inch in diameter, it is only lightly tarred and can bear a strain of three tons. The lines, 200 fathoms each, are stored in tubs, carefully layered so as to be free of the slightest kink. The tub is about 3 feet in diameter and proportionally high. Both ends of the rope are exposed, with the lower end having an eye-splice or loop. This can be used to attach a second rope; in no case is it attached to the boat, lest the whale pull all “into the profundity of the sea.”

The tub is stored aft; the line passes around the logger-head then forward, between the men and touching their wrists as they row. At the bow it passes through the leaded chocks (grooves) and is held in place by a pin. Some twenty fathoms are coiled in the bow, then it is attached to the short warp, the rope immediately connected to the harpoon. At any moment in the chase, the harpoon may be darted, and the rope carry a whaler to his doom. “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, everpresent perils of life.”

Chapter lxi Stubb Kills a Whale

The Pequod is in the Indian Ocean, a day after sighting the Squid: “When you see him ’quid, then you quick see him ’parm whale,” prophesies Queequeg. Ishmael and the other two mast-headers spy a whale simultaneously. They lower and with wild screams chase the fleeing Sperm Whale, Stubb’s boat in the van; as they near, Tashtego strikes. Several turns of the rope are taken around the logger-head, and the smoking rope is doused with sea-water. The boat races through the water and Stubb repeatedly throws his lance into the whale, and retrieves the iron by its attached rope; he straightens it and stabs again for the whale’s heart. The sea turns crimson; the whale goes into its death flurry, spouts clotted gore, and dies. “He’s dead, Mr. Stubb,” says Daggoo; “Yes, both pipes smoked out!” says Stubb, scattering dead ashes and “thoughtfully eyeing the vast corpse he had made.”

Chapter lxii The Dart

The harpooner must row with the rest of the whaleboat’s crew, yet he must also have enough strength to throw his dart 25 or 30 feet (though this was rarely done.) So much depends on his strength and accuracy: “the harpooners of this world must start to their feet from out of idleness, and not from out of toil.”

Chapter lxiii The Crotch

The first and second harpoons are stored in notched sticks in the bow; ideally, the second is darted immediately after the first; if not, it must be immediately tossed overboard;

even then, it becomes a slashing danger, especially when there are several whaleboats in the vicinity. (When the whale is fast, the harpooneer retreats to the stern where he assumes his role as “boatsteerer”, while the mate goes forward with his lance, preparing to kill the whale when it tires.)

Chapter lxiv Stubb’s Supper

The newly killed whale is secured to the Pequod for the night: head to stern, tail to bows.

Stubb dines on whale-steak, as do hundreds of sharks, “countersinking” head-sized chunks of flesh from the whale’s smooth sides (they “smackingly feasted on its fatness.”) “While the valiant butchers over the deck-table are thus cannibally carving each other’s live meat with carving-knives all gilded and tasselled, the sharks, also, with their jewel-hilted mouths, are quarrelsomey carving away under the table at the dead meat.”

Stubb teases the black cook, making him address the sharks, which he does, asking them to curb their sharkish nature, since what are angels but sharks so disciplined?

Stubb claims his steak to be overdone; he lectures to the cook, but hardly gets the better of the dialogue; his advice on cooking fish: “Hold the steak in one hand, and show a live coal to it with the other; that done, dish it.”

Chapter lxv The Whale as a Dish

An essay on eating whale: steaks, blubber strips, ship-biscuit dipped in spermaceti, floured brains.

“Go to the meatmarket of a Saturday night and see the crowds of live bipeds staring up at the long rows of dead quadrupeds. Does not that sight take a tooth out of the cannibal’s jaw?” Who is not a cannibal: on judgment day it will be easier on the Fejee cannibal who ate a missionary than on the gourmand who nails a goose to the ground and feeds on its fattened liver. “And with what quill did the Secretary of the Society for the Suppression of Cruelty to Ganders formally indite his circulars?”

Chapter lxvi The Shark Massacre

Queequeg and a fore-castle seaman lower lanterns and kill sharks from the deck with their whaling spades. The sharks feed on their murdered fellows and on their own bowels.

Chapter lxvii Cutting In

“Ex officio professors of Sabbath breaking are all whalemens.”

The cutting tackles are lashed to the mast-head. A hole is cut in the whale and a hook from the tackle inserted. The crew heaves as Starbuck and Stubb cut; at first the Pequod cants over toward the whale, but then the strip begins to peel. It is hoisted higher and higher till its upper end grazes the main top; the prodigious blood-dripping mass swings to a fro while a hole in its base is cut for insertion of the hook from the second tackle. A harpooneer cuts the “blanket piece” from the new strip with a boarding-sword; the blanket piece is lowered into the blubber room where it is coiled. The process is continued until the whale is peeled. (Actually, sometime before, the whale is beheaded – see chapter lxx.)

Chapter lxviii The Blanket

Is the “skin” of the whale the blubber? There is a very thin, isinglass-like substance, but the author rejects this as the true skin. In any case, the skin has markings looking almost like hieroglyphics, and also “rude scratches.” The insulating quality of the blubber is admired.

Chapter lxix The Funeral

The beheaded peeled white body of the whale is finally set adrift, attacked from the sea by sharks and from the air by seabirds. “Beneath the unclouded and mild azure sky, upon the fair face of the pleasant sea, wafted by the joyous breezes, that great mass of death floats on and on, till lost in infinite perspectives.” Perhaps, seen in the distance, it will be mistaken for rocks and dangerous breakers, its ghost becoming “a powerless panic to a world.”

Chapter lxx The Sphynx

In fact, the head is removed by Stubb before the whale is completely stripped. This is no mean feat, done ten or more feet above the rolling body, requiring a cut of a depth of many feet, and demanding the exact division of the spine near its insertion into the skull.

The head is suspended partly out of the water by chains – like a black and hooded sphinx in the desert; Ahab views it and thinks of where it has been and what it has seen: the bodies of long-dead sailors and lovers lost in the deep, or victims of pirates: “O head! thou hast seen enough to split the planets and make an infidel of Abraham, and not one syllable is thine!”

Chapter lxxi The Jeroboam’s Story

The Pequod encounters the Jeroboam of Nantucket under Capt. Mayhew. There is an epidemic aboard. Pulling an oar in the Jeroboam’s boat is a freckled man with long blond hair, wearing a long skirted coat; Stubb recalls him from a story told by the Town-Ho’s crew. He was of a Shaker sect and had shipped as a green hand. Once on board, he claimed to be the archangel Gabriel, and by fantastic quasi-religious stories had awed the ignorant crew into becoming his disciples. He claimed control of the plague which broke out, leaving the captain and officers powerless.

Ahab inquires, as usual, about Moby Dick. Gabriel had warned the crews that the White Whale was, in fact, the Shaker God personified. After a year or so at sea, Moby Dick was raised, and the mate Macey persuaded five crewmen to lower for him. Macey is almost immediately struck by the whale and killed, leaving all else intact. Gabriel’s status as prophet is strengthened.

The Pequod carries a letter to the deceased mate from his wife; it is intercepted by Gabriel while being transferred to the Jeroboam’s boat. Gabriel impales it on a boat knife and sends it back to the Pequod. “Nay, keep it thyself,” cries Gabriel to Ahab; “thou art soon going that way.”

Chapter lxxii The Monkey-Rope

A harpooneer must ride the whale's body as it is being stripped or flensed. Queequeg in this case is attended by Ishmael, who holds him by a rope attached to both their waists. This joining of the fates of two individuals "was the precise situation of every mortal that breathes...If your banker breaks, you snap; if your apothecary by mistake sends you poison in your pills, you die..."

Of course, the sharks are still at their feast while the other harpooneers are at work slaughtering them with their razor-sharp spades – while avoiding Queequeg's legs!

Queequeg return on board, only to be offered a cup of ginger- water for his resuscitation – prescribed by Aunt Charity, who had proscribed stronger spirits. Stubb and Starbuck right this wrong, and the ginger-water is consigned to the waves.

Chapter lxxiii Stubb and Flask Kill a Right Whale; And Then Have a Talk Over Him

Announcement is made, while travelling through a Brit field, that a right whale is to be taken; a spout is soon seen and Stubb and Flask go fasten to it. After a chase which sees the whale pass under the Pequod and around it, the whale is killed by the mates.

Apparently Fedallah has claimed that a ship which has simultaneously a Sperm and Right whale's head can never be capsized. Stubb and Flask discourse on their dislike and fear of Fedallah – Stubb thinks he is the devil and has a pact with Ahab.

Soon the Right whale's head counterbalances the Sperm whale's. "So, when on one side you hoist in Locke's head, you go over that way; but now, on the other side, hoist in Kant's and you come back again; but in very poor plight. Thus, some minds for ever keep trimming boat. Oh, ye foolish! throw all these thunder-heads overboard, and then you will float light and right."

Chapter lxxiv The Sperm Whales's Head – Contrasted View

This is the first part of a contrast of the Sperm and Right Whale. It is clear that the author considers the Sperm Whale to be the nobler of the two; but first a look at their least dissimilar features.

The Whale's eyes, being on opposite sides of the head, present two opposite-sided views of the world, separated by blankness. How does its brain combine and make sense of the images? It's like doing two Euclidean demonstrations simultaneously.

The ears are also strange, with no protruding parts – they are small holes just behind the eyes: the Sperm's is open while the Right's is covered with a thin membrane.

The Sperm Whale's mouth is papered with a glistening white membrane. The lower jaw is capable of being opened at right angles to the upper. This jaw is unhinged by the whalers; the teeth (about 42) are extracted by tackle, and the remaining jaw sawn into slabs like joists.

Chapter lxxv The Right Whale's Head – Contrasted View

If the Sperm's is like a chariot, the Right Whale's head is like a shoe. From above, the f-shaped blow holes suggest an enormous bass-viol; with the barnacle encrustations, a

bird's nest capped oak is also a possibility; but "Look at that hanging lower lip! what a huge sulk and pout is there ... about twenty feet long and five feet deep."

Inside the mouth are the fringed whalebones – about 300 on a side – used by the whale for filtering brit, and by man for umbrellas and corset stays.

The Sperm whale's expression is one of placidity and speculative indifference to death, while the Right whale's expresses a practical resolution in facing death. "This Right Whale I take to have been a Stoic; the Sperm Whale, a Platonian, who might have taken up Spinoza in his latter years."

Chapter lxxvi The Battering-Ram

In its normal swimming position, the front of the Sperm Whale's head "presents an almost wholly vertical plane to the water;" furthermore, the front contains no protruding or delicate organs; finally, it is extremely tough, "the sharpest lance darted by the strongest human arm, impotently rebounds from it." The whale, unlike a fish, has no swim bladder; perhaps its lung-celled honeycombs are connected to the outer air in some pneumatic fashion.

Chapter lxxvii The Great Heidelburgh Tun

The upper part of the Sperm Whale's forehead – perhaps 26 feet long – is likened to the Heidelburgh wine tun, containing the precious limpid liquid. The spermaceti, in life purely fluid, delicately crystallizes on exposure to air. A large whale will yield about 500 gallons, though some is usually lost.

Chapter lxxviii Cistern and Buckets

Tashtego is lowered onto the head; carrying a sharp spade, he finds the place to break into the tun. Using a pole, he guides a bucket into the repository, and the crew hoist it out, filled with Sperm.

Near the end, after about the 80th or 90th bucket, Tashtego slips and falls head first into the whale's head. Just at the moment, two of the hooks holding the head rip free; the bucket is lowered in the hope that Tashtego can seize it; this doesn't work, and the final hook rips out; the head splashes into the sea and begins to sink.

Grabbing the keen boarding sword, Queequeg dives to the rescue. He cuts a hole in the head below the water, reaches in and encounters Tashtego's leg. Avoiding the breach delivery, he rotates the Indian's body and pulls him out headfirst by his long hair: "Midwifery should be taught in the same course with fencing and boxing, riding and rowing."

Had he not been rescued, Tashtego's end would have been only slightly less sweet than that of the Ohio honey-hunter who died embalmed in his quest: "How many, think ye, have likewise fallen into Plato's honey head, and sweetly perished there?"

Chapter lxxix The Prairie

A physiognomical discussion of the Sperm Whale. He has no nose or other appurtenances, but this is compensated for by his immense and noble forehead – betokening genius.

But wherein lies this genius? In his pyramidal silence: “his great genius is declared in his doing nothing particular to prove it.”

“If then, Sir William Jones, who read in thirty languages, could not read the simplest peasant’s face in its profounder and more subtle meanings, how may unlettered Ishmael hope to read the awful Chaldee of the Sperm Whale’s brow?”

Chapter lxxx The Nut

A discourse on the whale’s brain: it’s small and undistinguished, especially when scaled to the size of the animal. The writer thinks that the phrenology of the Sperm Whale should include its spinal column as an adjunct to its brain. Also the hump: “From its relative situation, then, I should call this high hump the organ of firmness or indomitableness ... the great monster is indomitable, you will yet have reason to know.”

Chapter lxxxii The Pequod Meets The Virgin

Captain Derick De Deer of the Jungfrau out of Bremen, comes to the Pequod with a coffee pot asking for sperm oil for light – his ship is empty of whale oil. As it is given to him, whales are raised, including a crippled, sick but large bull. The “German” takes off in his whaleboat; the Pequod also lowers, but De Deer is ahead; however, one of his oarsmen “catches a crab,” and the three Pequod harpooners dart their irons. The whale sounds long and deep. Apparently the whale has no valves in his circulatory system, so a serious wound continues to bleed profusely, especially underwater. Finally he breaches feebly: “For all his old age, and his one arm, and his blind eyes, he must die the death and be murdered, in order to light the gay bridals and other merry-makings of men, and also to illuminate the solemn churches that preach unconditional inoffensiveness by all to all.” Flask pricks a bloated protuberance, and the whale dies in agony. A rotted harpoon is found buried in his body.

Unfortunately, the whale starts to sink, causing the Pequod to list seriously; the whale is cut loose and disappears in the depths. Meanwhile, the Jungfrau spots a plume and takes off after a Fin Back, mistakenly confusing the uncatchable speedster for a Sperm Whale: “Oh! many are the Fin-Backs, and many are the Dericks, my friend.”

Chapter lxxxiii The Honor and Glory of Whaling

The writer adds to the canon of whaling the names of 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?”

Chapter lxxxiiii Jonah Historically Regarded

Could the Jonah story have happened? Perhaps he just stayed in the whale’s mouth, or maybe it was a dead whale, or maybe just a ship called “The Whale”. Why split hairs: it was, after all a miracle – take it or leave it.

Chapter lxxxv Pitchpoling

Whaler’s often grease the bottoms of their boats – for speed; Queequeg does his.

Tashtego gets a single iron in a whale; Stubb then uses his lance to pitchpole: the lance is balanced point upward, then thrown in a high arc into the whale. Repeated several times, the technique finally results in the whale's death flurry.

Chapter lxxxv The Fountain

The whale has lungs and so must breath air; the Sperm Whale's mouth is usually 8 feet or so below water line, so he must breath through the spiracle on top of his head. His singular efficiency in oxygenation – involving a “Cretan labyrinth of vermicelli-like vessels” – allows him to spend an hour or so below the surface. The Sperm whale “only breathes about one seventh or Sunday of his time.” He can not smell and he can not talk – but what is there for him to smell – roses or violets? – or what to say?

Is the spout water or water vapor? Undetermined. Yet it seems intensely acrid and irritating to the human skin; the author thinks it a mist. Some tongue-in-cheek philosophy follows.

Chapter lxxxvi The Tail

The muscular nature of the tail and its flukes is described. “Real strength never impairs beauty or harmony, but it often bestows it; and in everything imposingly beautiful, strength has much to do with the magic” – see the portrayal of God by Michelangelo.

The tail seems to have three functions: as a fin for horizontal motion; as a mace in battle – only with man, contemptuously, since he uses his head and jaw when fighting with other whales; as an organ of sense – woe to the sailor whom it senses in the water; as an instrument of play when he slaps it loudly against the water in lobtailing; finally, as a symbol of grandness when he raises it to heaven as he sounds – peaking his flukes.

Chapter lxxxvii The Grand Armada

The Pequod enters the straits of Sunda, which divide Sumatra from Java, heading for the Philippines and the far coast of Japan. No stop is made: the holds remain filled with food and “Clear old prime Nantucket water” – preferred by the crew to brackish fluid from local streams. At around noon they raise a whole herd of Sperm Whales – thousands of spoutings in a vast semicircular array. At the same time they spy the spray of possibly marauding Malay boats: the chaser becoming simultaneously the chased. After a long and tiring chase, during which the Malays are greatly outdistanced, the whales slow and swim aimlessly. “Best, therefore, withhold any amazement at the strangely galled whales before us, for there is no folly of the beasts of the earth which is not infinitely outdone by the madness of men.”

The whalers resort to druggs: floats made from blocks of wood attached to lines. These are connected to harpoons, and the whales left to pull against the resistance of the massive blocks, to be killed at a later time. Near the center of the herd, the wild activity decreased, much as at the center of a storm; Ishmael's boat is surrounded by hulking bodies, all exit paths blocked: “We must watch for a breach in the living wall that hemmed us in.” Young whales swim up with curiosity, and are patted and scratched by Queequeg and Starbuck. They see below them the forms of mothers and their nursing young – even one with an umbilical cord attached. They also see leviathan “amours of the deep ... more hominum.”

A whale appears floundering around, entangled in harpoon lines and a tethered cutting spade, darted so as to hamstring him. His thrashing torments serve to further injure him and his fellows with the dislodged but still rope-entangled spade. This serves as the catalyst to cause the whole herd to converge on its center, and the whales tumble up like great masses of block-ice breaking up in the Hudson river.

But “the more whales, the less fish”: only one drugg-ed whale is killed; another, killed previously, is marked with a waif-pole – a stick with a pennant used to mark position and possession of a dead whale.

Chapter lxxxviii Schools and Schoolmasters

Vast herds of whales are rare; more often encountered is a school of from 20 to 30, usually of all females or young males or bulls. The females are often shepherded by a full-grown male “Ottoman” guarding his harem. This often leads to fierce and deadly fights between males; they interlock their jaws, causing “furrowed heads, broken teeth, scalloped fins, ... dislocated mouths,” and even death – all for “love.”

The “Lord Whale has no taste for the nursery, however much for the bower; and so, being a great traveller, he leaves his anonymous babies all over the world.” As he ages, he reforms and basks in indolence, “warning each young Leviathan from his amorous errors.” He is also known as a “Schoolmaster.”

The herds of young whales are less placid and “no prudent underwriter would insure them any more than he would a riotous lad at Yale or Harvard.” These “forty-barrel” bulls eventually seek out a harem of their own.

Chapter lxxxix Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish

Disputes as to ownership of a captured whale are not uncommon. The American principle is summarized as follows:

I. A Fast-Fish belongs to the party fast to it.

II. A Loose-Fish is fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it.

A Fast-Fish is one which is connected to a boat by any medium at all controllable by the occupants: cable, wire or cobweb; or bearing a waif pole, provided it is clear the body can be retrieved at the convenience of the party waifing it.

A famous case in England is recounted where a whale is struck by one party, who can not control it – eventually having to forsake their lines and boat. Another party takes the whale in sight of the first, and proceeds to appropriate whale, lines and boat. The decision is to return the boat, since it was abandoned to save the lives of the crew; the rest accrues to the second party – the fish, being Loose, having gained possession of the lines, only to become the Fast property of the defendants.

Possession is half of the law, regardless of the way it was obtained. The souls and sinews of the Russian serfs and Republican slaves are Fast-Fish, as is the widow’s last mite to the rapacious landlord; as is the “Archbishop of Savesoul’s income of 100,000 seized from the scant bread and cheese of hundreds of thousands of broken-backed laborers (all sure of heaven without any of Savesoul’s help).” As is Ireland to John Bull or Texas to “Brother Jonathan.”

What are Loose-Fish? America to the Spanish in 1492; Poland to the Czar; Greece to the Turks; India to England; Mexico to the U.S.

Other Loose-Fish: the Rights and Liberties of Man, as well as his mind and opinions and religions. “What is the great globe itself but a Loose-Fish? And what are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish too?”

Chapter xc Heads or Tails

The Law of England grants to the King the head and to the Queen the tail of any whale taken on the coast. A Recent case involved some sailors of Dover or Sandwich who took a whale after a hard chase; the local gentleman, Blackstone under his arms, claims it for the Lord Warden – a Duke who has been granted royal claim from the King. What right has the King? “Says Plowdon, the whale so caught belongs to the King and Queen, ’because of its superior excellence.’ And by the soundest commentators, this has ever been held a cogent argument in such matters.”

As with the whale, so with the Sturgeon: the King is granted the dense and elastic head – symbolically based perhaps on a humorous congeniality?

Chapter xci The Pequod Meets the Rose-Bud

There is an unpleasant smell on the sea; a French ship is seen, with a dead and bloated whale alongside; in fact, a second, smellier and shriveled whale is also secured on the other side of the ship. The French are the object of some derision from Stubb, but he surmises that the second whale may be the source of ambergris. The name of the ship is the “Bouton de Rose” and Stubb mischievously asks a crew member (from Guernsey) why he is holding his nose; “I wish it was broken, or that I didn’t have any nose at all! But what are you holding yours for?”; Stubb replies whimsically: “Oh, nothing! It’s a wax nose; I have to hold it on...throw us a bunch of posies, will ye, Bouton-de-Rose?”

Stubb and the crewman decide to tease the captain who speaks no English; Stubb says what he pleases (mostly insults) and the crewman translates so as to convince the captain that the whales are unhealthy. The crewman just wants relief from the stench; Stubb wants the ambergris. For example:

Stubb: “I’m quite certain that he’s no more fit to command a whale-ship than a St. Jago monkey. In fact, tell him from me he’s a baboon.”

Guernsey-man: “He vows and declares, Monsieur, that the other whale, the dried one, is far more deadly than the blasted one; in fine, Monsieur, he conjures us, as we value our lives, to cut loose from these fish.”

The stratagem succeeds; the French captain cuts loose from the dried-out whale and sails off; wily Stubb retrieves six handfuls of ambergris (worth a gold guinea an ounce) after surgery on the whale with his boat-spade.

Chapter xcii Ambergris

Ambergris is soft, fragrant, waxy, of a hue between yellow and ash – much prized for perfume. Apparently it is formed as a result of a digestive disorder in the whale.

The rest of the chapter is spent explaining why whaling is – erroneously – thought to be a foul-smelling business. The Sperm Whale is likened, finally, to the myrrh anointed elephant led out of an Indian town to honor Alexander the Great.

Chapter xciii The Castaway

“In outer aspect, Pip and Dough-Boy made a match, like a black pony and a white one ... But while Dough-Boy was by nature dull and torpid in his intellects, Pip, though over tender-hearted, was at bottom very bright, with that pleasant, genial jolly brightness peculiar to his tribe; a tribe, which ever enjoy all holidays and festivities with finer, freer relish than any other race. For blacks, the year’s calendar would show naught but three hundred sixty-five Fourth of Julys and New Year’s Days.”

Pip temporarily replaces an injured crewman in Stubb’s boat. On one lowering, a whale is fastened; in the excitement, Pip jumps overboard where he is entangled in the line; when the line becomes taut, Pip starts to strangle: “Damn him, cut!” roars Stubb, and Tashtego cuts the rope freeing Pip – and the whale. “Stick to the boat, Pip, or by the Lord, I won’t pick you up if you jump... a whale would sell for thirty times what you would, Pip, in Alabama.”

Unfortunately, in a similar circumstance, Pip jumps again from the boat. Stubb leaves him – in fairness, believing that another boat would rescue him. The others, however, become fast to whales, and Pip eventually is out of sight of everything but the waves. Eventually, by chance, he is rescued by the Pequod itself, but, apparently, “The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul. Not drowned entirely, though, Rather carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes...He saw God’s foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad.”

Chapter xciv A Squeeze of the Hand

Ishmael has the enviable chore of squeezing out the crystallized lumps of spermaceti. The gentle softness and violet aroma soothe his mind and mellow him till he squeezes the hands of his fellow workers with infinite love for his fellows: “In thoughts of the visions of the night, I saw long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti.”

The rest of the chapter describes various pieces of the whale made ready for the try-pots. In the blubber room, pieces of the blanket strip, called horse-pieces, are cut – as well as the occasional spade-man’s toe!

Chapter xcv The Cassock

A huge, black, conical part of the whale – “longer than a Kentuckian is tall, nigh a foot in diameter at the base” is appropriated by the mincer. Its outer pelt is stripped and turned inside out, and hung from the rigging to dry. Several feet are then removed, and slits for arms are cut. “The mincer now stands before you invested in the full canonicals of his calling”: the whale’s penis becomes his protective coat as he minces the horse-pieces for the try- works: “what a candidate for an arch-bishoprick, what a lad for Pope were this mincer!”

Chapter xcvi The Try-Works

The Try-Works is an almost solid mass of brick and mortar, placed between fore and mid-masts over specially strengthened timbers. Removing the covering battens exposes the highly polished try-pots (2). Here Ishmael claims to have first been struck by the

brachistochrone properties of the cycloid...[physical property of the cycloid curve, first proved by Newton].

Beneath the try-pots are the furnaces, insulated from the deck by a jacket containing water. The first fire is started using wood shavings saved by the carpenter; thereafter, the fire is fed from the shriveled pieces of rendered blubber.

At night, the fires glow and the heathen crew scurries and dances, feeding the pots: “then the rushing Pequod, freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander’s soul.”

While staring at the try-pots and holding the tiller, Ishmael, on watch, hallucinates or dreams that “whatever swift, rushing thing I stood on was not so much bound to any haven ahead as rushing from all havens astern.” He wakes to find himself turned around and nearly turning the Pequod into the wind.

Don’t gaze too long into the artificial light of the fire, for it will distort the reality seen in sunlight. Yet the sun also discloses sorrows, and we can’t ignore them: “All is vanity. ALL.” Anyone who can’t see this is not true to reality. Quoting Solomon: “the man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain (i.e. even while living) in the congregation of the dead.”

“There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness. And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces. And even if he for ever flies within the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains; so that even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle is still higher than other birds upon the plain, even though they soar.” [Presumably this refers to enlightened sorrow such as Solomon’s.]

Chapter xcvi The Lamp

Unlike sailers in merchant ships, whalers can be profligate with their lamps. Although these are sometimes but old bottles, the oil is in its purest form – “sweet as early grass butter in April.”

Chapter xcvi Stowing Down and Clearing Up

The oil, still warm, is poured into six-barrel casks, which are hooped by the sailers, now “ex officio” coopers, and stowed in below decks. The ship, once running with blood and gore, is now cleaned to a polish. A potent lye is made from the whale’s ashes, and all is scrubbed. The whalers, “with elated step, they pace the planks in two and threes, and humorously discourse of parlors, sofas, carpets, and fine cambrics; ... To hint to such musked mariners of oil, and bone, and blubber, were little short of audacity ... Away, and bring us napkins!”

But, at any moment, the cry of “There she blows” may ring from the mast-head, and the whole labor must be repeated – but his is life’s old routine. “Oh! the metempsychosis! Oh! Pythagoras, that in bright Greece, two thousand years ago, did die, so good, so wise, so mild: I sailed with thee along the Peruvian coast last voyage – and, foolish as I am, taught thee, a green simple boy, how to splice a rope!”

Chapter xcix The Doubloon

Here various personalities are contrasted by the way they view the gold doubloon nailed to the mast. The coin itself has scenes of “palms, alpacas, and volcanoes; sun’s disks and stars; ecliptics, horns-of-plenty, and rich banner waving.” It is stamped REPUBLICA DEL ECUADOR: QUITO.

Ahab sees the mountains and towers, and sees in them Ahab “the courageous, the undaunted...Born in throes, ’tis fit that man should live in pains and die in pangs! ... Here’s stout stuff for woe to work on. So be it then.”

Starbuck sees the mountains as the trinity, offering hope for those in the dark valley of death. But “the great sun is no fixture; ... we would fain snatch some sweet solace from him [but] we gaze for him in vain! This coin speaks wisely,..., but sadly to me...Truth shake me falsely.”

Stubb tries to interpret the zodiacal signs using his almanack. His conclusions are earthy: the lecherous Ram begets us; the Bull bumps us first; the Twins are Virtue and Vice; we try for Virtue, but the Crab draws us back; the Lion lies in our path; we escape and hail our first Virgin love, whom we marry; however, the Scales find happiness wanting; we are stung by the Scorpion and the arrows of the Archer; the Ram tosses us, and we drown in the flood of the Water-bearer; we sleep with the Fishes.

Flask sees nothing but a lump of gold – enough to buy 960 cigars. “Shall I call that wise or foolish, now; if it be really wise it has a foolish look to it; yet, if it be really foolish, then has it a sort of wiseish look to it.”

The old Manxman rambles about signs.

Pip talks the nonsense of the Shakespearian fool: “And so they’ll say in the resurrection, when they come to fish up this old mast, and find a doubloon lodged in it, with bedded oysters for the shaggy bark. Oh, the gold! the precious, precious gold! – the green miser’ll hoard ye soon! ...hey, hey, hey, Jenny, Jenny! and get your hoe-cake done!”

Chapter c Leg and Arm The Pequod, of Nantucket, Meets the Samuel Enderby, of London

Ahab visits the Samuel Enderby – he’s hoisted aboard by the massive blubber-hook. The English captain has lost an arm to Moby Dick. He was fastened to a whale when Moby Dick tried to bite the line; the boat ran onto him and the other whale was lost. He jumped into the mate’s boat and threw an iron into the white whale, which then stove his boat. He grabbed the iron in the whale, but was washed off, only to be impaled on “the barb of that cursed second iron towing along.” He was freed when the head tore the length of his arm, leaving a wound which eventually required amputation. There is some kidding between Dr. Bunker, who performed the amputation, and Captain Boomer. Ahab asks if Boomer crossed the White Whale’s wake again; “Twice”; “But could not fasten?”; “Didn’t want to try to: ain’t one limb enough?” Ahab doesn’t think so. Fedallah rows him back to the Pequod; Captain Boomer’s hails are unreturned.

Chapter ci The Decanter

First a brief history of the Enderby & Sons, London. They extended the whale hunt, previously pursued in the Atlantic by the Coffins and Maceys of Nantucket, to the Pacific

and thence worldwide. Their boats opened the South Sea and the Japanese Whaling Ground.

Many years after Ahab, Ishmael had a gam on the Samuel Enderby: a jolly time ending with a sudden squall and sail reefing by not-so-sober hands.

“The English were preceded in the whale fishery by the Hollanders, Zealanders, and Danes; from whom they derived many terms still extant in the fishery; and what is yet more, their fat old fashions, touching plenty to eat and drink.” Some details of the larders of whale-ships is presented. Much cheese, gin, beer and bread is consumed: “if you can get nothing better out of the world, get a good dinner out of it, at least.”

Chapter cii A Bower in the Arsacides

Ishmael gained his exact knowledge of the “bones of the leviathan” through the help of his friend Tranquo, king of Tranque, one of the Arsacides. There he examined the whitened bones of a Sperm Whale, found dead and stranded years previous. The island is lush with carpets of green, and the air is humming. “The weaver-god, he weaves; and by that weaving is he deafened, that he hears no mortal voice.” Only when we can step outside do we hear the thousand voices which make up the humming. Amidst all this life and natural beauty hangs the whale’s skeleton. Ishmael measures.

Chapter ciii Measurement of the Whale’s Skeleton

First, an estimate: “I say, a Sperm Whale of the largest magnitude, between eighty-five and ninety feet in length, and something less than forty feet in its fullest circumference, such a whale will weigh at least 90 tons.”

The whale on Tranque had a skeleton 72 feet in length, suggesting a living whale of 90 feet. The skeleton hardly does justice to the original living creature. “Only in the heart of quickest perils; only when within the eddyings of his angry flukes; only on the profound unbounded sea, can the fully invested whale be truly and livingly found out.”

Chapter civ The Fossil Whale

Ishmael proceeds to describe the whale now in “an archaeological, fossiliferous and antediluvian” perspective; his credentials: work as a digger of ditches, canals and wells, wine-vaults, cellars and cisterns of all sorts.

Skeletons of whales have been found nearly everywhere: at the base of the Alps, in England and France, in Mississippi, and in Alabama. In the antediluvian times, “the whole world was the whale’s” and its time “must needs exist after all humane ages are over.”

Chapter cv Does the Whale’s Magnitude Diminish? – Will He Perish?

Comparing modern whales with their fossilized ancestors, the progression has been one of increasing size. Nevertheless, has the increased hunt endangered his numbers? After all, the bison was hunted into near extinction. But compare the numbers taken: “Forty men in one ship hunting Sperm Whale for forty-eight months think they have done extremely well and thank God, if at last they carry home the oil of forty fish,” whereas a comparable crew of buffalo hunters would have slain forty thousand of those beasts.

While whales seem to be encountered less frequently, it is because they now band together, for protection, in large herds. Furthermore, they have a far larger pasture than other creatures – even extending to the Polar seas. The elephant, Ishmael argues, has been killed often in great numbers, yet is as plentiful as cattle in temperate climes.

Finally, the whale has a very long lifespan – perhaps a century or more. Can we imagine the graveyards “yielding up the live bodies of all the men, women, and children who were alive seventy-five years ago; and adding this countless host to the present human population of the globe.”

“Wherefore, for all these things, we account the whale immortal in his species, however perishable in his individuality.”

Chapter cvi Ahab’s Leg

In leaving the Enderby, Ahab damages his bone leg, and further splinters it upon arriving on the Pequod. He muses that miseries seem to beget miseries. In fact, joy, even in its highest form, has a certain limitation and pettiness, while “at bottom, all heart-woes [have] a mystic significance, and , in some men, an archangelic grandeur” – so thinks Ahab. [In “Anna Karenina” Tolstoy also muses, similarly, on happiness.] “The gods themselves are not forever glad.” In any case, Ahab orders the carpenter to make him a new leg.

Chapter cvii The Carpenter

The Pequod’s carpenter is an unusual man, versed in all standard ship’s handicrafts as well as “all manner of conflicting aptitudes, both useful and capricious.” The stage upon which he acts is his vice-bench, usually lashed athwartships near the try works (when no whale is being processed). The carpenter shaves misfitting belaying pins, makes bird cages, concocts lotions, paints decorations, and extracts teeth. This flexibility might seem to imply unusual intelligence. “But not precisely so. For nothing was this man more remarkable, than for a certain impersonal stolidity ... one with the general stolidity discernible in the whole visible world; which ... ignores you, though you dig foundations for cathedrals.” For the carpenter, teeth are bits of ivory, heads but top-block and men capstans. He works not by reason or intellect, “but merely by a kind of deaf and dumb, spontaneous literal process...His brain, if he had ever had one, must have early oozed along into the muscles of his fingers.” In a way, he is like a Swiss army knife, containing many blades, awls and files: “if his superiors wanted to use the carpenter for a screwdriver, all they had to do was to open that part of him, and the screw was fast: or if for tweezers, take him up by the legs, and there they were.” Of course, the carpenter has at least something which passes for a soul, and a certain grizzled sense of humor.

Chapter cviii Ahab and the Carpenter The Deck – First Night Watch

The Carpenter sneezes and complains as he works on Ahab’s leg; Ahab approaches: “Ha! that’s the heel; we are in luck; here he comes, or it’s somebody else, that’s certain.”

Ahab teases the carpenter, who seems to miss the point or the fact that he is being teased. “What art thou sneezing about?” “Bone is rather dusty, sir.” “Take the hint, then; and when thou art dead, never bury thyself under living peoples’s noses.”

Ahab complains about a phantom limb. “How dost thou know that some entire, living, thinking thing may not be invisibly and uninterpenetratingly standing precisely where thou now standest...And if I still feel the smart of my crushed leg, though it be now so long dissolved; then, why mayst not thou, carpenter, feel the fiery pains of hell for ever, and without a body?” “Good Lord!, Truly, sir, if it comes to that, I must calculate over again; I think I didn’t carry a small figure, sir.” “Oh, Life! Here I am, proud as Greek god, and yet standing debtor to this blockhead for a bone to stand on!”

The carpenter: “Then, a short, little old body like me, should never undertake to wade out into deep waters with tall, heron-built captains; the water chucks you under the chin pretty quick...And here’s the heron’s leg!”

Chapter cix Ahab and Starbuck in the Cabin

The Pequod is approaching Formosa from the South and West. When pumping the ship, leaked oil is discovered in the hold. Starbuck reports the leak to Ahab, and suggests that they “up Burtons” [Burtons = light marine tackle]. Ahab refuses and argues with Starbuck, finally ordering him back up to the deck. When Starbuck still remonstrates, he seizes a musket: “There is one God that is Lord over the earth, and one Captain that is lord over the Pequod. – On deck!” Starbuck retreats, warning Ahab to beware not of Starbuck, but of Ahab.

“Thou art but too good a fellow, Starbuck. Furl the t’gallant-sails and close-reef the top-sails, for and aft; back the main-yard; up Burtons, and break out the main-hold.”

Chapter cx Queequeg in his Coffin

The crew starts to unload the holds, down to their dark depths – looking for the leaking oil. During the process, Queequeg catches a severe fever, loses weight, and is given up by all – including himself – for dead. He orders the carpenter to make him a coffin-canoe to carry him to the land of the dead; the carpenter takes his measurements and builds the thing from some tropical wood.

Queequeg moves into his coffin with his harpoon, a paddle, some water and biscuit and a small bag of earth. He crosses his arms around Yojo and tests the lid. Satisfied, he returns to his hammock. With all this preparation concluded, Queequeg begins to recover. He claims that, having remembered some chore ashore he forgot to do, he has decided to live: “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.”

Upon recovery, Queequeg makes his coffin into a sea chest, carving intricate and unintelligible patterns in it: “Oh, devilish tantalization of the gods!” (Ahab).

Chapter cxi The Pacific

The Pequod passes the Bashee isles and enters the Pacific, which “zones the world’s whole bulk about; makes all coasts one bay to it.” Ahab smells from one nostril the sweet musk of the isles, from the other the salt air of the sea which hides the White Whale.

Chapter cxii The Blacksmith

Perth, the blacksmith whose portable forge is now lashed to the foremast, is a sad, begrimed and blistered figure, limping from the old loss of part of his feet to (ironically) frostbite. Hephaestos (a.k.a. Vulcan), the blacksmith and Aphrodite's husband in Greek mythology, was also lame.

In his youth Perth had a young wife and children, but a robbery sent him down the road of decline. While death claimed some older brother, he was spared to witness the rot of his own life. His business diminished and his family succumbed to disease. Instead of being reaped by death, he put to sea...

Chapter cxiii The Forge

Ahab comes on Perth at his forge, and inquires how he can work in fire without a scorch; Perth replies: "Because I am scorched all over, Captain Ahab, I am past scorching; not easily can'st thou scorch a scar." Ahab: "Do the heavens yet hate thee, that thou can't not go mad?"

Ahab has decided on a special harpoon for his vengeance; he himself makes the shank from fused horseshoe nail, and provides the steel, from his own razors, to Perth for the barb. When the barb is attached, Ahab has it tempered in the blood of the three pagan harpooners, and baptizes it: "Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!" He departs with his harpoon to Pip's mocking laugh.

Chapter cxiv The Gilder

The Pequod, in the Japanese seas, enters a period of peaceful idyllic weather and scenery – a briny pastoral. "Would to God these blessed calms would last. But the mingled, mingling threads of life are woven by warp and woof: calms crossed by storms, a storm for every calm. There is no steady unretracing progress in this life; we do not advance through fixed gradations, and at the last one pause: – through infancy's unconscious spell, boyhood's thoughtless faith, adolescence' doubt (the common doom), then scepticism, then disbelief, resting at last in manhood's pondering repose of If.. But once gone through, we trace the round again; and are infants, boys, and men, and Ifs eternally... the secret of our paternity lies in [our unwedded mother's] grave, and we must there to learn it."

Chapter cxv The Pequod Meets the Bachelor

The Bachelor, with holds full of precious oil, crew bedecked, and banners flying is heading back for Nantucket. The captain invites Ahab to visit and, with revelry, relieve his black mood. Ahab asks about the White Whale, but the Bachelor has no news: "Thou art a full ship and homeward bound, thou sayst; well, then, call me an empty ship, and outward bound."

"Thus, while one ship went cheerily before the breeze, the other stubbornly fought against it." Ahab, watching the Bachelor, removes a vial of Nantucket sand from his pocket, and stares at it.

Chapter cxvi The Dying Whale

The day after meeting the Bachelor, four whales are slain. The dying whale turns toward the setting sun, as if to have it intercede to preserve its life, but “in vain, oh whale, dost thou seek intercedings with yon all-quickenning sun, that only calls forth life, but gives it not again.”

Chapter cxvii The Whale Watch

Ahab has dreamed of hearses, and Fedallah, the “Parsee” prophesies.

“Have I not said, old man, that neither hearse nor coffin can be thine?”

“Ere thou couldst die on this voyage, two hearses must verily be seen by thee on the sea; the first not made by mortal hands; and the visible wood of the last one must be grown in America.”

“Though it come to the last, I shall still go before thee thy pilot.”

“Hemp only can kill thee.”

Chapter cxviii The Quadrant

As they near the equator, Ahab shoots the sun with his quadrant; to the sun: “Thou sea-mark! thou high and mighty Pilot! thou tellest me truly where I am – but canst thou cast the least hint where I shall be? ... Science! Curse thee, thou vain toy; and cursed be all things that cast man’s eyes aloft to that heaven, whose live vividness but scorches him ... Curse thee, thou quadrant ... dead- reckoning, by log and by line; these shall conduct me.” (He tramples his navigational instruments.)

Starbuck says: “Old man of oceans! of all this fiery life of thine, what will at length remain but one little heap of ashes!”; Stubb replies: “Aye, but sea-coal ashes – not your common charcoal... Ahab, but thou actest right; live in the game, and die in it!”

Chapter cxix The Candles

A typhoon strikes, tearing off the Pequod’s sails. Stubb sings and Starbuck observes that the gale would take them straight back to Nantucket. While they talk, St. Elmo’s fire, or the “corpusants,” appears on the tips of the yard-arms; Stubb: “The corpusants have mercy on us all!” Starbuck: “It was not the same in the song.” Stubb explains that the corpusants are a good omen, they burn like candles wicking sperm from a full hold.

Ahab speaks. “Oh! thou clear spirit of clear fire, whom on these seas I as Persian once did worship, till in the sacramental act so burned by thee, that to this hour I bear the scar; I now know thee, thou clear spirit, and I now know that thy right worship is defiance ... while I earthly live, the queenly personality lives in me, and feels her royal rights ... Come in thy lowest form of love, and I will kneel and kiss thee,; but at thy highest, come as mere supernal power; and though thou launchest navies of full-freighted worlds, there’s that in here that still remains indifferent. Oh, thou clear spirit, of thy fire thou madest me, and like a true child of fire, I breathe it back to thee... Light though thou be, thou leapest out of darkness; but I am darkness leaping out of light, leaping out of thee!” He goes on in dramatic fashion...

Ahab’s harpoon head spews fire from the stove whaleboat in which it rests; Starbuck declares it is an omen against the voyage, and urges return; the crew panics. Then Ahab

takes the harpoon: “All your oaths to hunt the White Whale are as binding as mine...look ye here; thus I blow out the last fear!” and he extinguishes the flame.

“As in the hurricane that sweeps the plain, men fly the neighborhood of some lone, gigantic elm, whose very height and strength but render it so much the more unsafe, because so much the more a mark for thunderbolts; so at those last words of Ahab’s many of the mariners did run from him in a terror of dismay.”

Chapter cxx The Deck Towards the End of the First Night Watch

Starbuck urges Ahab to take certain prudent measures; Ahab replies that “the wind rises, but it has not got up to my table-lands yet...By masts and keels! he takes me for the hunch-backed skipper of some coasting smack.” The winds roar aloft – “the colic is a noisy malady. Oh, take medicine, take medicine!”

Chapter cxxi Midnight – The Forecastle Bulwarks

Stubb and Flask converse as they pass lashings over the anchors during the storm. Flask suggests that ships under Ahab’s command should pay extra on their insurance, as if they were loaded with powder and matches. Practical Stubb points out that with the current spray, nothing could ignite, so that the “Marine Insurance companies” have already provided hydrants. He also explains: “What’s the mighty difference between holding a mast’s lightning rod in the storm, and standing close by a mast that hasn’t got any lightning-rod at all in a storm? ... no harm can come to the holder of the rod, unless the mast is first struck.” He claims that neither Ahab nor the crew were in any more danger than “the crews in ten thousand ships now sailing the seas.”

Chapter cxxii Midnight Aloft – Thunder and Lightning

Tashtego: “We don’t want thunder; we want rum...”

Chapter cxxiii The Musket

During the storm the helmsman had been tossed about, and the compass needles whirled on their pivots. The weather, however, abates and new sails are bent and reefed; the wind comes around stern, and Starbuck goes below to appraise Ahab of the improving situation.

Starbuck sees hanging the very musket Ahab once pointed at him (Chapter CIX), and toys with the idea of either killing Ahab (“Is heaven a murderer when its lightning strikes a would-be murderer in his bed ... ? ... A touch, and Starbuck may survive to hug his wife and child again.”) or imprisoning him (“What! hope to wrest this old man’s living power from his own living hands? Only a fool would try it ... I could not endure the sight; could not possibly fly his howlings ... ”)

Ahab calls out in his sleep: “Stern all! Oh, Moby Dick, I clutch thy heart at last!”, and Starbuck retreats.

Chapter cxxiv The Needle

Ahab, on deck, notices something, and demands the ship’s heading from the helmsman. “East-sou-east, sir”; Ahab strikes him: “Thou liest, heading East at this hour in the morning, and the sun astern?”

It turns out that the electrical storm has reversed the polarity of the compass. Ahab magnetizes a sail-makers needle and puts it in the compass. "Look ye, for yourselves, if Ahab be not lord of the level loadstone! The sun is East, and the compass swears it!"

"In his fiery eyes of scorn and triumph, you then saw Ahab in all his fatal pride."

Chapter cxxv The Log and Line

With his quadrant gone, Ahab decides to use the ship's log as an aid to navigation. The old Manx sailor warns that its rope is rotted; Ahab disagrees, but the rope parts. Ahab orders the carpenter to make another; Pip appears: "Jerk him, Tahiti! Jerk him off; we haul in no cowards here ... A hatchet! a hatchet! cut it off – we haul in no cowards here." Ahab offers the mad Pip his cabin and his hand; Pip: "What's this? here's velvet shark-skin. Ah, now, had poor Pip but felt so kind a thing as this, perhaps he had ne'er been lost!... Oh, sir, let old Perth now come and rivet these two hands together; the black one with the white, for I will not let this go." Ahab: "Oh, boy, nor will I thee, unless I should thereby drag thee to worse horrors than are here. ... see the omniscient gods oblivious of suffering man; and man, though idiotic, and knowing not what he does, yet full of the sweet things of love and gratitude. Come!, I feel prouder leading thee by thy black hand, than though I grasped an Emperor's!"

The Manxman has the final word: "There go two daft ones now: One daft with strength, the other daft with weakness."

Chapter cxxvi The Life-Buoy

As the Pequod nears the equator, one early morning in the dark a wild sobbing is heard. The Manxman declares it to be the voices of newly drowned men at sea; it turns out to be the cries of seals from nearby rocks. At sunrise, however, a sailor falls from the mast-head into the sea; the life-buoy – a wooden cask – is thrown, but no form surfaces to grasp it. The buoy finally becomes water-logged and sinks. "And thus the first man of the Pequod that mounted the mast to look out for the White Whale, on the White Whale's own peculiar ground; that man was swallowed up in the deep."

The life-buoy is to be replaced by Queequeg's coffin; the carpenter is ordered to the chore. He soliloquizes and decides: "I'll have me thirty separate, Turk's-headed life-lines, each three feet long hanging all round to the coffin. Then, if the hull go down, there'll be thirty lively fellows all fighting for one coffin, a sight not seen very often beneath the sun! Come hammer, caulking-iron, pitch-pot, and marling-spike! Let's to it."

Chapter cxxvii The Deck

The Carpenter is joined by Ahab and Pip. Ahab: "Then tell me; art thou not an arrant, all-grasping, inter-meddling, monopolizing, heathenish old scamp, to be one day making legs, and the next day coffins to clap them in, and yet again life-buoys out of those same coffins? Thou art as unprincipled as the gods, and as much of a jack- of-all-trades."

Ahab (to himself): "What things real are there, but imponderable thoughts? Here now's the very dreaded symbol of grim death, by a mere hap, made the expressive sign of the help and hope of most endangered life... Can it be that in some spiritual sense the coffin is, after all, but an immortality-preserver! ... So far gone am I in the dark side of earth, that its other side, the theoretic bright one, seems but uncertain twilight to me."

Chapter cxxviii The Pequod Meets The Rachel

The Rachel is searching for a whale-boat containing its captain's son. The boat had fastened to the White Whale the previous day, and Moby Dick vanished in the distance, carrying the boat. The captain offers to charter the Pequod for 48 hours to search. "He's drowned with the rest on 'em, last night," is the conclusion of the old Manx sailer, "I heard; all of ye heard their spirits."

In fact, the captain had brought two sons on the voyage, both in boats. He had the agonizing decision as to which boat to rescue, but followed the standard procedure of rescuing the majority; the missing, youngest son is twelve years old.

Ahab, of course refuses, even though the captain reminds him that he, too, has a young son. Captain Gardiner returns to the Rachel, which continues its zig-zag search. "She was Rachel, weeping for her children, because they were not."

Chapter cxxix The Cabin

Ahab brings Pip down to his cabin, and warns him that he must not follow Ahab. Pip hears Ahab's bone leg on the decks above: "Oh, master! master! I am indeed downhearted when you walk over me. But here I'll stay, though this stern strikes rocks; and they bulge through; and oysters come to join me."

Chapter cxxx The Hat

The Pequod enters the actual waters where Ahab had lost his leg to Moby Dick. "As the unsetting polar star, which through the live-long, arctic, six months' night sustains its piercing, steady, central gaze; so Ahab's purpose now fixedly gleamed down upon the constant midnight of the gloomy crew." All hands become serious with Ahab's eyes on them and on all things. Ahab takes but two meals a day, and does not shave; "in the Parsee Ahab saw his forethrown shadow, in Ahab the Parsee his abandoned substance." Ahab determines that he will have first sight of the White Whale; to this end he arranges a special basket to carry him up to the main-mast head; Starbuck is entrusted to watch over the rope securing him aloft. While in his perch one day, a sea hawk circles him; Ahab is oblivious of the bird until it swoops down and flies off with his hat. Unlike Tarquin whose hat is stolen then returned as an omen that he will become king of Rome, Ahab watches his hat fall, a tiny dot, from a vast height into the sea.

Chapter cxxxii The Pequod Meets The Delight

The Delight displays, contrary to its name, the shattered remains of a whale boat, recently wrecked by Moby Dick. The captain is burying one of five men killed, the rest have been lost. As the Pequod passes, he spies the coffin-life buoy: "In vain, oh ye strangers, ye fly our sad burial; ye but turn us your taffrail to show us your coffin!"

Chapter cxxxiii The Symphony

A Clear beautiful day: "Hither, and thither, on high, glided the snow-white wings of small unspeckled birds; these were the gentle thoughts of the feminine air; but to and fro in the deeps, far down in the bottomless blue, rushed mighty leviathans, sword-fish, and sharks; and these were the strong, troubled, murderous thinkings of the masculine sea..."

And at the girdling line of the horizon – denoted the fond, throbbing trust, the loving alarms, with which the poor bride gave her bosom away. Tied up and twisted; gnarled and knotted with wrinkles; haggardly firm and unyielding; his eyes glowing like coals, that still glow in the ashes of run; untottering Ahab stood forth in the clearness of the morn...”

“That glad, happy air, that winsome sky, did at last stroke and caress him ... From beneath his slouched hat Ahab dropped a tear into the sea; nor did all the Pacific contain such wealth as that one wee drop.” Forty years ago, on such a day, Ahab struck his first whale. He recounts to Starbuck his hard life as seaman and captain, and the time spent away from his young wife: “the madness, the frenzy, the boiling blood and the smoking brow, with which, for a thousand lowerings old Ahab has furiously, foamingly chased his prey – more a demon than a man! – aye, aye! what a forty years’ fool – fool – old fool, has old Ahab been...God! God! God! – crack my heart! – stave my brain! mockery!... Close! stand close to me Starbuck; let me look into a human eye; it is better than to gaze into the sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God...I see my wife and my child in thine eye. No, no; stay on board, on board! – lower not when I do; when branded Ahab gives chase to Moby Dick. That hazard shall not be thine. No, no! not with the far away home I see in that eye!” Starbuck urges him to turn for home. Ahab ponders the fate that drives him on: “By heaven, man, we are turned round and round in this world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike... Who’s to doom, when the judge himself is dragged to the bar? But it is a mild, mild wind, and a mild looking sky; and the air smells now, as if it blew from a faraway meadow ... the mowers are sleeping among the new- mown hay... Sleep? Aye, and rust amid greenness; as last year’s scythes flung down, and left in the half-cut swaths – Starbuck!” But the mate, in despair, had stolen away.

Chapter cxxxiii The Chase – First Day

That night they smell the characteristic odor of the sperm whale; Ahab slightly alters their course. The next day, while being hoisted to his perch, Ahab raises the cry: “There she blows! – there she blows! A hump like a snow-hill! It is Moby Dick!”

All the boats but Starbuck’s are lowered. The White Whale swims gently, joyously, majestically, seemingly oblivious of their approach. Then he sounds, and the boats await his reappearance. “The birds! – the birds!” cries Tashtego. Far below, in the clear sea, Ahab sees a white spot enlarge into the jaws of the whale. He spins the boat to point the bows toward the whale, but the whale craftily turns on its back and comes up with its jaw around them. Almost inside the huge mouth, Ahab can not dart Perth’s harpoon, but can only try futilely to disengage the whale’s teeth. Finally, the boat is bitten in two, and all are tossed into the sea.

The Pequod arrives to drive off the whale which had been circling the swamped crew. All are retrieved, though Ahab is temporarily exhausted, “lying all crushed in the bottom of Stubb’s boat.” Stubb tries to joke; Starbuck counts the wreck as a bad omen; Ahab: “Begone! Ye two are the opposite poles of one thing... ye two are all mankind; and Ahab stands alone among the millions of the peopled earth, nor gods nor men his neighbors!”

Chapter cxxxiv The Chase – Second Day

Skillful whalers can estimate the speed and direction of a whale, so that it can be located even after a day or night has passed; so Ahab steers after Moby Dick. As one, the

men and the ship: oak, maple, pine, iron, pitch and hemp pursue the prey. First a spout is seen from the mast-head, then nothing, then the whale breaches.

This time, instead of swimming in calm majesty, Moby Dick swims right at the three boats. Irons are darted, the whale circles and thrashes, the lines tangle and the boats are pulled toward Moby Dick by the snarl. Ahab reaches skillfully into the mass of rope and sharp steel, and severs all lines but his own. At that instant the whale smashes the two loose boats with its flukes; it then comes up, forehead first, under Ahab's boat and sends it into the air and over into the sea. The whale then smashes, carefully, any bit of wood it can detect floating nearby, then swims off.

Starbuck helps Ahab, since the old man's ivory leg has been snapped off, leaving just a splinter: "Aye aye, Starbuck, 'tis sweet to lean sometimes, be the leaner who he will; and would old Ahab had leaned oftener than he has."

But, looking around, Ahab finds the Parsee has been lost in the tangle of rope, along with Ahab's special harpoon, still embedded in Moby Dick. Ahab undoubtedly remembers the prophesy; Starbuck urges, for a final time, abandoning the hopeless chase.

"Ahab is for ever Ahab, man. This whole act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled. Fool! I am the Fates' lieutenant; I act under orders... Ye see an old man cut down to the stump; leaning on a shivered lance; propped up on a lonely foot. 'Tis Ahab – his body's part; but Ahab's soul's a centipede, that moves upon a hundred legs." Ahab declares that, as drowning things rise twice before sinking the third time, so will Moby Dick find his doom the next day.

They follow the whale, still in sight at dusk; a new leg is made for Ahab.

Chapter cxxxv The Chase – Third Day

Another lovely day dawns; the whale is not yet in sight, and Ahab soliloquizes "...Ahab never thinks; he only feels, feels, feels; that's tingling enough for mortal man! To think's audacity. God only has that right and privilege." He feels the wind, but calls it vile, yet noble, cowardly, yet heroic. "Would now the wind but had a body; but all the things that most exasperate and outrage mortal man, all these things are bodiless, but only bodiless as objects, not as agents. There's a most special, a most cunning, oh, a most malicious difference!"

The whale is spotted. As Ahab's boat is lowered he speaks to Starbuck: "Some men die at ebb tide; some at low water; some at the full of the flood; – and I feel now like a billow that's all one crested comb, Starbuck. I am old; – shake hands with me man."

"Oh, my captain, my captain! – noble heart – go not – go not! –see, it's a brave man that weeps; how great the agony of the persuasion then!"

"Lower away..."

The White Whale has sounded, but then surfaces nearby, draped with ropes and irons. In his anger, Moby Dick quickly capsizes the two mates' boats. The crews see, wrapped to his flank, the torn body of the Parsee, his gaping eyes turned toward Ahab. This is the hearse, and the Parsee has preceded Ahab. Ahab's boat is so far untouched, and the whale seems to be retreating. Ahab raises a sail to chase, and passes the Pequod. He sees the crews regrouping on deck. He calls out to Tashtego to nail a fresh flag to the main mast, the old one being gone. The whale seems to slow, and Ahab's crew row, while the

sharks tear chunks from their oars. They overtake the whale, and Ahab throws his iron into it. The whale immediately smashes a hole in the boat, then heads for the Pequod! “Oars! oars! Slope downwards to thy depths, O sea, that ere it be for ever too late, Ahab may slide this last, last time upon his mark! I see: the ship! the ship! Dash on, my men! Will ye not save my ship?”

Starbuck: “Oh, all ye sweet powers of air, now hug me close! Let not Starbuck die, if die he must, in a woman’s fainting fit... Is this the end of all my bursting prayers? all my life-long fidelities? ... My God, stand by me now!”

Stubb: “I grin at thee, thou grinning whale! ... And now poor Stubb goes to bed upon a mattress that is all too soft... For me, off shoes and jacket to it; let Stubb die in his drawers! A most mouldy and over salted death, though; – cherries! cherries! Oh, Flask, for one red cherry ere we die!”

Flask: “Cherries? I only wish that we were where they grow. Oh, Stubb, I hope my poor mother’s drawn my part-pay ere this; if not, few coppers will now come to her, for the voyage is up.”

The ship is struck full in the starboard bow, and the waters pour in. Ahab sees all: “death-glorious ship! must ye then perish and without me? ... Oh, now I feel my topmost greatness lies in my topmost grief... Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell’s heart I stab at thee; for hate’s sake I spit my last breath at thee. Sink all coffins and all hearses to one common pool! and since neither can be mine, let me then tow to pieces, while still chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale! Thus, I give up the spear!”

Ahab darts his lance into the whale; the rope shoots out, and jams. As Ahab clears it, a loop catches him around the neck, and without a sound he is carried out of the boat. The eye-splice at the end of the rope leaves the tub and disappears into the sea.

Meanwhile the Pequod is circling and sinking. Soon, all that is visible is the top of the main mast spar, with the flag still being nailed by the still unsunken arm of Tashtego. At that instant, a sky-hawk dives and is caught between the hammer and the flag, and “went down with his ship, which, like Satan, would not sink to hell till she had dragged a living part of heaven along with her, and helmeted herself with it.”

“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.”

Epilogue

Ishmael, on the periphery, is sucked toward the vortex. As the Pequod disappears, Queequeg’s coffin surfaces and becomes Ishmael’s life buoy. The sea creatures leave him unmolested, until, after a day and a half, he is picked up by the Rachel, “that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan.”

FINIS