

# MOBY DICK

OR

## THE WHALE

*By*

HERMAN MELVILLE

*With an Introduction by*  
VIOLA MEYNELL



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## INTRODUCTION

*Moby Dick* is a dramatic story, with movement and suspense and human passion, but more than half its pages are given to an exact account of the parts of the whale and of the process of whale-hunting. And if one concludes at the end of it that Herman Melville is one of the greatest of all imaginative writers, it is as much for each page of scientifically accurate description as for any other part of it. There has never been such imaginative description of fact. The infinite detail of the whale, its measurements, its blubber, its oil, its lashless eyes, its riddled brow—these are the reality with which the wild spirit of thought is interlocked. It is the opposite school from that which prefers to dispense with reality as a start for imagination, and can find it more easily in fairies and fantasies and imps and gnomes than in these ropes and buckets. That taste would rather not stop to measure and examine a whale when it can have a fairy whom fancy can make any size, and whose robe may be of rainbow colours. Is that profusion imagination? Or does imagination not rather spring from some great restriction such as the whiteness of this whale—whiteness ‘which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood.’

*Moby Dick* is the high-water mark of Herman Melville’s achievement. Its narrative and record of fact are superior to those of the earlier works, *Typee* and *Omoo*; and on its inventive side it is superior, at any rate to ordinary understanding, to the later books, *Mardi* and *Pierre, or the Ambiguities*, and others. It will not surprise readers of *Moby Dick* to think that after it was written its writer passed from them, in a sense. Already in this book one is carried to the comprehensible limits of marvellous imagination. There the mere reader and follower can stay in safety, transfigured with the great gifts that have been added to him, even while not being of the nature that conceived them. But the nature that conceived them has its course still to run. Herman Melville has here

endowed human nature with writing that I believe to be absolutely unsurpassed. To read it and absorb it is the crown of one's reading life,—but from the laws of mind that made it the reader is still apart and immune. It is the wildest farthest kind of genius. Herman Melville could not have been so great as this if he had not been going on beyond greatness as we know it. Many deep divers may fail to reach a spot marked at a great depth, and when one of them reaches it at last it is because he sinks on beyond it to return no more. In the works that followed this, he is called transcendentalist and metaphysician, writing of 'exotic philosophies, with an echo of gargantuan laughter.'

Replying to Nathaniel Hawthorne's praise of *Moby Dick*, he wrote in a letter to him: 'Lord, when shall we be done growing? As long as we have anything more to do, we have done nothing. So, now let us add *Moby Dick* to our blessing, and step from that. Leviathan is not the biggest fish;—I have heard of Krakens.' And it was to Hawthorne that he said in another letter, while he was still writing *Moby Dick*: 'I have come to regard this matter of Fame as the most transparent of all vanities. I read Solomon more and more, and every time see deeper and deeper and unspeakable meanings in him. I did not think of Fame a year ago as I do now. My development has been all within a few years past. I am like one of those seeds taken out of the Egyptian pyramids, which, after being three thousand years a seed, and nothing but a seed, being planted in English soil it developed itself, grew to greenness, and then fell to mould. So I. Until I was twenty-five I had no development at all. From my twenty-fifth year I date my life. Three weeks have scarcely passed at any time between then and now, that I have not unfolded within myself. But I feel that I am now come to the inmost leaf of the bulb, and that shortly the flower must fall to the mould.'

Herman Melville was about thirty-two when he wrote *Moby Dick*. He was born in New York in 1819, of mixed Dutch and English stock. When he was eighteen he went to sea as a cabin-boy on a vessel trading to Liverpool.

Returning to America, he became an usher in a school, but he soon took to the sea again on a whaling-vessel. Later, on a man-of-war, he knew yet another life at sea, and the book called *White Jacket* was founded on that experience. Leaving the sea, he married and lived on shore in New York and near Pittsville until his death in 1891. He is the master of all other sea-writers, one of whom, Mr. Masefield, has said that *Moby Dick* speaks the whose secret of the sea. Marlowe and Sir Thomas Browne and Borrow have been named for comparison with him; and among those to write in his praise were Hawthorne, his friend and neighbour, and Stevenson. Barrie confessedly owes Captain Hook to him. His fame may still be restricted, but it is intense, for to know him is to be partly made of him for ever. Among his other books the reader is chiefly recommended to read *White Jacket*.

The nature of *Moby Dick* may perhaps not be seen in its first few chapters.

• VIOLA MEYNELL

MOBY DICK

*OR*

THE WHALE

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# ETYMOLOGY

(SUPPLIED BY A LATE CONSUMPTIVE USHER  
TO A GRAMMAR SCHOOL)

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

# ETYMOLOGY

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

*Hackluyt.*

'Whale. \* \* \* Sw. and Dan. *hval*. This animal is named from roundness or rolling; for in Dan. *hvalt* is arched or vaulted.'

*Webster's Dictionary.*

'Whale. \* \* \* It is more immediately from the Dut. and Ger. *Wallen*; A.S. *Walw-ian*, to roll, to wallow.'

*Richardson's Dictionary.*

𐤆𐤊

*Hebrew*

κητος

*Greek*

CETUS

*Latin*

WHÆL

*Anglo-Saxon*

HVALT

*Danish*

WAL

*Dutch*

HWAL

*Swedish*

WHALE

*Icelandic*

WHALE

*English*

BALEINE

*French*

BALLENA

*Spanish*

PEKEE-NUEE-NUEE

*Fejee*

PEHEE-NUEE-NUEE

*Erromangoan*

# EXTRACTS

(SUPPLIED BY A SUB-SUB-LIBRARIAN)

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

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



## EXTRACTS

‘And God created great whales.’

*Genesis.*

‘Leviathan maketh a path to shine after him;  
One would think the deep to be hoary.’

*Job.*

‘Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up  
Jonah.’

*Jonah.*

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

*Psalms.*

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

*Isaiah.*

‘And what thing soever besides cometh within the chaos of  
this monster’s mouth, be it beast, boat, or stone, down it goes  
all incontinently that foul great swallow of his, and perisheth  
in the bottomless gulf of his paunch.’

*Holland’s Plutarch’s Morals.*

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

*Holland’s Pliny.*

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

*Tooke’s Lucian. ‘The True History.’*

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

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

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

*MONTAIGNE.—Apology for Raimond Sebond.*

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

*Rabelais.*

'This whale's liver was two cart-loads.'

*Stowe's Annals.*

'The great Leviathan that maketh the seas to see the like boiling pan.'

*Lord Bacon's Version of the Psalms.*

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

*Ibid. 'History of Life and Death.'*

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

*King Henry.*

'Very like a whale.'

*Hamlet.*

'Which to secure, no skill of leach's art  
Mote him availle, but to returne againe  
To his wound's worker, that with lowly dart,  
Dinting his breast, had bred his restless paine,  
Like as the wounded whale to shore flies thro' the maine.'

*The Fairie Queen.*

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

*Sir William Davenant. Preface to Gondibert.*

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

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

'Like Spencer's Talus with his modern flail  
He threatens ruin with his ponderous tail.

\* \* \* \*

Their fixed jav'lines in his side he wears,  
And on his back a grove of pikes appears.'

*Waller's Battle of the Summer Islands*

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

*Opening sentence of Hobbes's Leviathan.*

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

*Pilgrim's Progress.*

‘That sea beast  
Leviathan, which God of all his works  
Created hugest that swim the ocean stream.’

*Paradise Lost.*

——‘There Leviathan,  
Hugest of living creatures, in the deep  
Stretched like a promontory sleeps or swims,  
And seems a moving land; and at his gills  
Draws in, and at his breath spouts out a sea.’

*Ibid.*

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

*Fuller's Profane and Holy State.*

‘So close behind some promontory lie  
The huge Leviathans to attend their prey,  
And give no chace, but swallow in the fry,  
Which through their gaping jaws mistake the way.’

*Dryden's Annus Mirabilis.*

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

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

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

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

*Harris Coll.*

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

*Schouten's Sixth Circumnavigation.*

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

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

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

\* \* \*

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

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

*A Voyage to Greenland, A. D. 1671.*

*Harris Coll.*

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

*Sibbald's Fife and Kinross.*

'Myself have agreed to try whether I can master and kill this Sperma-ceti whale, for I could never hear of any of that sort that was killed by any man, such is his fierceness and swiftness.'

*Richard Strafford's Letter from the Bermudas.*

*Phil. Trans. A. D. 1668.*

'Whales in the sea  
God's voice obey.'

*N. E. Primer.*

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

*Captain Cowley's Voyage round the Globe. A. D. 1729.*

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

*Ulloa's South America.*

'To fifty chosen sylphs of special note,  
We trust the important charge, the petticoat.  
Oft have we known that seven-fold fence to fail,  
Tho' stuffed with hoops and armed with ribs of whale.

*Rape of the Lock.*

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

*Goldsmith, Nat. Hist.*

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

*Goldsmith to Johnson.*

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

*Cook's Voyages.*

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

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

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

*Thomas Jefferson's Whale Memorial to the French minister in 1778.*

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

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

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

*Edmund Burke. (somewhere.)*

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

*Blackstone.*

'Soon to the sport of death the crews repair:  
Rodmond unerring o'er his head suspends  
The barbed steel, and every turn attends.'

*Falconer's Shipwreck.*

'Bright shone the roofs, the domes, the spires,  
And rockets blew self driven,  
To hang their momentary fire  
Around the vault of heaven.'

'So fire with water to compare,  
The ocean serves on high,  
Up-spouted by a whale in air,  
To express unwieldy joy.'

*Cowper, on the Queen's Visit to London.*

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

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

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

*Paley's Theology.*

'The whale is a mammiferous animal without hind feet.'

*Baron Cuvier.*

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

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

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

*Montgomery's World before the Flood.*

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

*Charles Lamb's Triumph of the Whale.*

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

*Obed Macy's History of Nantucket.*

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

*Hawthorne's Twice Told Tales.*

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

*Ibid.*

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

*Cooper's Pilot.*

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

*Eckermann's Conversations with Goethe.*

'“My God! Mr. Chace, what is the matter?” I answered, “we have been stoye by a whale.”’

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

A mariner sat in the shrouds one night,  
The wind was piping free;  
Now bright, now dimmed, was the moonlight pale,  
And the phosphor gleamed in the wake of the whale,  
As it floundered in the sea.'

*Elizabeth Oakes Smith.*

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

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

*Scoresby.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 13. 'There she blows,' was sung out from the mast-head.

'Where away?' demanded the captain.

'Three points off the lee bow, sir.'

'Raise up your wheel. Steady!'

'Steady, sir.'

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

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

'Sing out! sing out every time!'

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

'How far off?'

'Two miles and a half.'

'Thunder and lightning! so near! Call all hands!'

*J. Ross Browne's Etchings  
of a Whaling Cruize. 1846.*

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

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



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

*Missionary Journal of Tyerman and Bennett.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*McCulloch's Commercial Dictionary.*

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

*From 'Something' unpublished.*

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

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