

Penguin Popular Classics

MOBY DICK

HERMAN MELVILLE



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HERMAN MELVILLE (1819-91). One of America's greatest authors, Melville is best remembered as the creator of *Moby Dick*, a novel since acclaimed as a triumph of nineteenth-century American fiction.

Herman Melville was born in New York City in 1819 to a family with both English and Dutch ancestry. The family was financially and socially secure during Melville's childhood, but his father, a cultivated gentleman, suffered from severe financial problems and was forced into bankruptcy in 1830. He died shortly after, insane from overwork and nervous collapse, leaving his wife with eight children and very little money. Herman's education did not go much beyond his fifteenth birthday and he had a number of jobs - bank clerk, salesman in his brother's fur and cap store, farm-hand and teacher - before joining a ship bound for Liverpool as a cabin boy in 1839. The voyage proved to be both romantic and harrowing and was later described in his novel *Redburn*. The trip also ingrained in him a love for the sea, and his eighteen-month trip on a whaling ship bound for the South Seas in 1841 provided much of the factual detail found in *Moby Dick*. In July 1842 he deserted the ship in the Marquesan Islands and lived for a month among the savages. Boarding an Australian trading ship he again jumped ship when the crew mutinied, and he was later imprisoned in Tahiti for his part in the desertion. Finding his way back to America in 1844, he returned as an ordinary seaman on the frigate *United States*, which sailed to Boston. The books he wrote based on these wild times, like *Typee* and *White-Jacket*, won him immediate success and a wide readership. Marrying in 1847, he then moved with his wife in 1850 to a farm in Massachusetts that was to be his home for thirteen years. During this time he became close friends with his neighbour and contemporary man of letters, Nathaniel Hawthorne, to whom *Moby Dick* is inscribed. Melville's popularity began to wane with the publication of *Moby Dick*, as his complex themes and

elaborate prose alienated readers who were anticipating more of the earlier adventure stories. Apart from a collection of short stories published in 1856 and his novel *The Confidence Man* (1857), Melville wrote no further prose. A visit to the Holy Land in 1857 inspired a long, involved poem concerned with his search for religious faith, and a diary of his trip appeared as *Journal up the Straits*. By 1860 Melville's great creative period was over and he tried to earn a living as a lecturer. He moved to New York City during the Civil War and three years later in 1866 was appointed a deputy inspector in the Customs House. He continued in this post for nineteen years, many of them spent in complete obscurity. He died in 1891, leaving some unfinished manuscripts which were discovered only by chance in the 1920s, when a renewed enthusiasm for Melville's work re-evaluated his long-obscured literary reputation.

Moby Dick, or *The Whale*, was written between the early spring of 1850 and the following autumn. Part adventure story and part allegory, Ahab's obsessive pursuit of the whale, a creature as vast and dangerous as the sea itself, remains one of the greatest works of imagination in literary history.

Readers may also find the following books of interest: M. Bowen, *The Long Encounter: Self Experience in the Writings of Herman Melville* (1980); Watson Branch, *Herman Melville: The Critical Heritage* (1985); James Duban, *Melville's Later Fiction* (1983); E. H. Miller, *Melville* (1975); Lewis Mumford, *Herman Melville: A Study of His Life* (1963); Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (1983); John Seelye, *Melville's Ironic Diagram* (1970).

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*In Token
of My Admiration for His Genius
This Book Is Inscribed
to
Nathaniel Hawthorne*

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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.

“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

תָּר,	Hebrew.
χῆτος,	Greek.
CETUS,	Latin.
WHCEL	Anglo-Saxon.
HVALT,	Danish.
WAL,	Dutch.
HWAL,	Swedish.
WHALE,	Icelandic.
WHALE,	English.
BALEINE,	French.
BALLENA,	Spanish.
PEKEE-NUEE-NUEE,	Fegee.
PEHEE-NUEE-NUEE,	Erromangoan.

EXTRACTS

(SUPPLIED BY A SUB-SUB-LIBRARIAN)

It will be seen that this mere painstaking burrower and grubworm 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!

“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 horsewhales, 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 a patient Job."

RABELAIS.

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

STOWE'S ANNALS.

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

LORD BACON'S VERSION OF THE PSALMS.

"Touching that monstrous bulk of the whale or 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'lins in his side he wears,
And on his back a grove of pikes appears."

WALLER'S BATTLE OF THE SUMMER IS-
LANDS.

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

OPENING OF HOBBS'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 harpooners 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. HIS.

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

GOLDSMITH TO JOHNSON.