



Moby Dick or The whale

Herman Melville

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Moby-Dick; or, The Whale (1851) is a novel by Herman Melville, in which Ishmael narrates the monomaniacal quest of Ahab, captain of the whaler Pequod, for revenge on the albino sperm whale Moby Dick, which on a previous voyage destroyed Ahab's ship and severed his leg at the knee. A commercial failure and out of print at the time of the author's death in 1891, its reputation grew immensely during the twentieth century. According to D.H. Lawrence, it is "one of the strangest and most wonderful books in the world," and "the greatest book of the sea ever written." Dedicated to Nathaniel Hawthorne, "in token of my admiration for his genius," Moby-Dick is considered a Great American Novel and an outstanding work of the Romantic Period in America, a period also known as the American Renaissance. "Call me Ishmael," is one of world literature's most famous opening sentences.

The product of a year and a half of writing, the book draws on Melville's own whaling experience, on his reading in whaling literature, and on literary inspirations such as Shakespeare and the Bible. The detailed and realistic descriptions of whale hunting and the process of extracting whale oil, as well as life aboard ship among a culturally diverse crew, are mixed with exploration of class and social status, good and evil, and the existence of God. In addition to narrative prose, Melville uses a wide range of styles and literary devices ranging from songs, poetry and catalogs to Shakespearean stage directions, soliloquies, and asides.

The author changed the title at the very last moment in September 1851, and so the work first appeared as *The Whale* in London in October 1851, and then under its definitive title *Moby-Dick* in New York in November. The British edition of five hundred copies was not reprinted during the author's life, the American of almost three thousand was reprinted three times at approximately 250 copies, the last reprinting in 1871. These figures are exaggerated because three hundred copies were destroyed in a fire at Harper's; only 3,200 copies were actually sold during the author's life.

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