



Moby-Dick

ECL 522: American Lit 1800-1860

Professor Jessica Pressman

Fall 2025

Day 10: Chapters 4-12

ADMIN

- If you miss class, slides don't capture conversation.. so get notes and chat with a peer.
- **Short essay**— assignment due Sunday, 10/19
- Blogs/thesis: foreshadowing is a formal device, not an argument/interpretation

ADMIN

- No class on Thursday— start thinking about midterm essay (due 10/19)
- To help... Tuesday brainstorming

Discussion

- places to dive in??

From your blogs— The Nantucketer

- YOUSUF “The Nantucketer, he alone resides and rests on the sea, he alone, in Bible language, goes down to it in ships; to and from ploughing it as his own special plantation. There is his home; there lies his business, which Noah’s flood would not interrupt, though it overwhelmed all the millions in China.” (70) In this passage from *Moby-Dick*, Melville describes the Nantucketer as uniquely at home on the sea...Ultimately, the passage elevates the Nantucketer into a figure of both human ingenuity and hubris, embodying the larger themes of risk, conquest, and survival that drive the novel.

From your blogs— critique of Christianity

- KIT: Christianity is painted as opportunistic, almost parasitic in the way that it prays on the fears, doubts, and hopes of the sailors and their families in New Bedford. “...few are the moody fisherman, shortly bound for the Indian Ocean or Pacific, who fail to make a Sunday visit to the (Whaleman’s Chapel). I am sure that I did not” (39). Each person is compelled to attend the weekly sermon, one way or another, and not even Ishmael is able to avoid it. Yet later, when he is observing Queequeg, he makes another startling statement: “I’ll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy” (57).

From your blogs— Ch. 9: The Sermon

- ASHLEY: The story of Jonah is one that is well known, especially in the 19th century. An account that could stand to have a passing mention and a reader will know what his author is alluding to. Melville begins *Moby Dick* with hints of criticism towards Christianity. So, why does he spend a chapter not only retelling, but expanding on the story of Jonah? ...“Now Jonah’s captain, shipmates, was one whose discernment detects crime in any way, but whose cupidity only exposes it only in the penniless. In this world sin that pays its way can travel freely, and without a passport; whereas a virtue, if a pauper, is stopped at all frontiers.” Another commentary on the joy of money. The autonomy of money. The sin of money. Another commentary that resonates with the corruption of the present.

From your blogs— Q

- **MARLEY:** When talking of Queequeg's manners and desires, Ishmael says that there was something almost "sublime" in it. We often use this word when describing nature's beauty or destruction, not someone's character. I found this fascinating as this is considered a strong word. For something to be "sublime", it can be grand, magnificent, or even awe-inspiring.

From your blogs—Ch. 10: Bosom Friend— Ishmael's conversion

- SOPHIA : One passage I want to examine from the reading this week is at the end of Chapter 10. Melville writes: “How then could I unite with this wild idolator in worshipping his piece of wood? But what is this worship? Thought I. Do you suppose now, Ishmael, that the magnanimous God of heaven and earth—pagans and all included—can possibly be jealous of an insignificant bit of black wood?” ..What I find interesting in this sexually charged paragraph is **the use of a religious idol to represent this relationship**. Ishmael, or whoever the narrator is, feels as if he is betraying his identity as a Christian (his identity as a heterosexual?), and feels worshipping a false idol is wrong.
- ALYSSA N: Throughout chapter three of the novel, we see Ishmael do anything in his power to remove himself from Queequeg path before he ever meets him. However, once the two meet this feeling of understanding begins and really transforms in chapter ten. Ishmael's open mind towards Queequeg was fascinating because of the ways it challenges what is considered acceptable in American society during these times. The men are drastically different, but those factors did not deter Ishmael, they made him curious, “I began to feel myself mysteriously drawn towards him. And those same things that would have repelled most others, they were the very magnets that thus drew me” (Melville 57). ...**Through their relationship, Melville is showing more than just two men becoming friends, he is exploring how people from different backgrounds can care for each other if they allow themselves to open their minds.**

From your blogs—Ch. 10: Bosom Friend

- **ANGIE:** I wonder if, through Ishmael's naïvety and innocence, Melville means to push the boundaries between the prescribed ideals of marriage, between man and woman, by having Ishmael and Queequeg partake in each other's space, friendship, and religions and questioning "But what is Worship – to do the will of god – that is worship. And what is the will of God? – to do to my fellow man what I would have my fellow man do to me– that is the will of God." ...
- **JESMOND:** Heteronormativity is the belief that heterosexuality is the "normal" sexuality, and that romantic relationships are between a man and woman. What Melville is trying to do here is invoke a certain image in the reader that goes against this belief.

From your blogs—Ch. 11: THESIS

- AURORA: In Chapter 11, “Nightgown,” Ishmael muses: “Nothing exists in itself. If you flatter yourself that you are all over comfortable and have been so a long time, then you cannot be said to be comfortable anymore.” (Melville 59) On the surface, this might be a casual observation about lying in bed, but the phrasing suggests something larger to me. Ishmael reveals that human experience is always relational. Comfort only matters when set against discomfort, just as light only has meaning when contrasted with darkness. This small moment becomes a window into Melville’s larger project: a novel that is less about fixed truths than about oppositions and tensions that define how we see the world.

Take Aways/Questions?