

Moby-Dick

ECL 522: American Lit 1800-1860
Professor Jessica Pressman
Fall 2025

Day 18: Chapters 87-96

Halloween!



Discussion

- Where to dive in today... and WHY?

Ch. 87: The Grand Armada





EVAN DAHM - MOBYDICKILLUSTRATED.TUMBLR.COM

Ch. 87: “The Grand Armada”— Whale mothers

“...we glided between two whales into the innermost heart of the shoal, as if from some mountain torrent we had slid into a serene valley lake. Here the storms in the roaring glens between the outermost whales, were heard but not felt. In this central expanse the sea presented that smooth satin-like surface, called a sleek, produced by the subtle moisture thrown off by the whale in his more quiet moods. Yes, we were now in that enchanted calm which they say lurks at the heart of every commotion. And still in the distracted distance we beheld the tumults of the outer concentric circles, and saw successive pods of whales, eight or ten in each, swiftly going round and round, like multiplied spans of horses in a ring; and so closely shoulder to shoulder, that a Titanic circus-rider might easily have over-arched the middle ones, and so have gone round on their backs. “ (422)

Ch. 87: “The Grand Armada”— Whale mothers

“But far beneath this wondrous world upon the surface, another and still stranger world met our eyes as we gazed over the side. For, suspended in those watery vaults, floated the forms of the nursing mothers of the whales, and those that by their enormous girth seemed shortly to become mothers. The lake, as I have hinted, was to a considerable depth exceedingly transparent; and as human infants while suckling will calmly and fixedly gaze away from the breast, as if leading two different lives at the time; and while yet drawing mortal nourishment, be still spiritually feasting upon some unearthly reminiscence;--even so did the young of these whales seem looking up towards us, but not at us, as if we were but a bit of Gulfweed in their new-born sight. Floating on their sides, the mothers also seemed quietly eyeing us.” (423-4)

Ch. 88: Schools and Schoolmasters

Moby Dick on Slavery

- * possible parallel between chasing whales and chasing slaves



Ch. 89: Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2010

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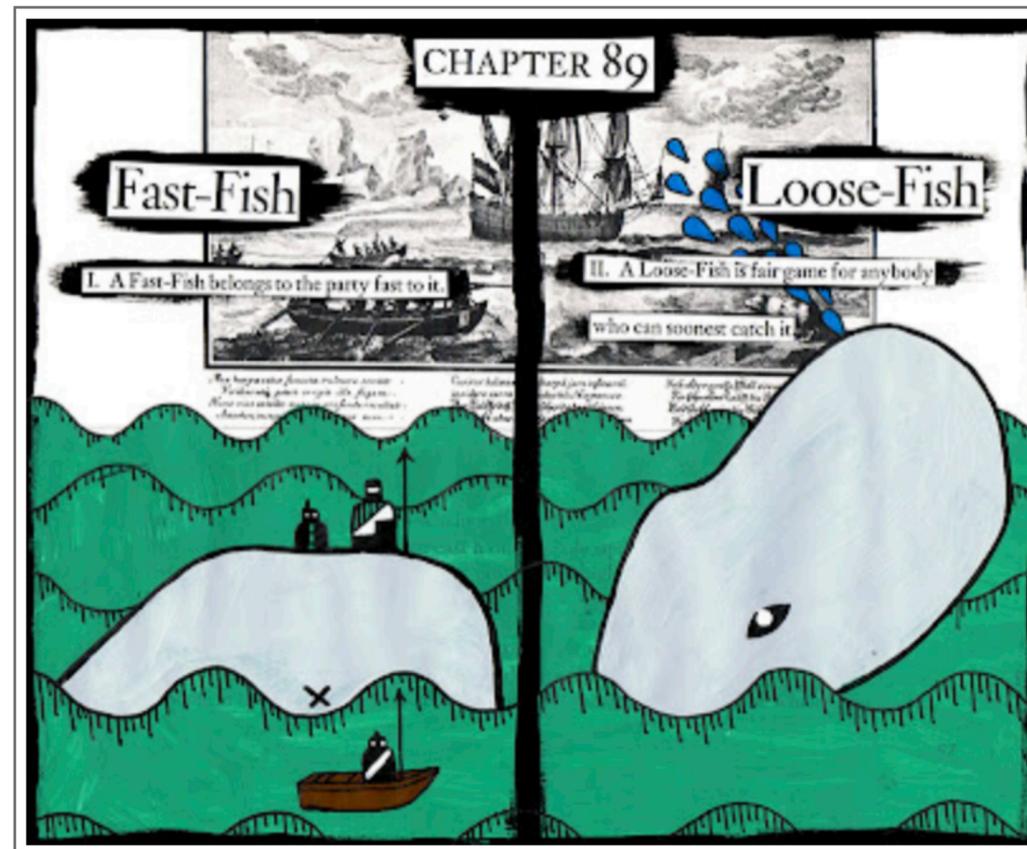
Title: **I. A Fast-Fish belongs to the party fast to it.**

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

8.5 inches by 7 inches

acrylic paint, collage and ink on found paper

September 21, 2010



POSTED BY [MATT KISH](#) AT [11:11 AM](#)



From your blogs

- DIEGO: The globe itself has repeatedly, throughout history, been viewed as a Loose-Fish for colonial powers and empires to claim for themselves behind their Loose-Fish justifications of divine right or Manifest Destiny. Then we have Melville directly asking us readers to view ourselves as both Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish, fastened to the systems we are born and raised in, yet fair game to whatever outside influence we let catch us. If we should be both, then we should also be weary of the distinctions of Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish applied to others, realizing how absurd it is to blindly follow the claims to land, property, thoughts, and people.

Historical Context

- * 1850: future of United States was up for grabs.....so too was the American literary scene.
- * 1850: **Fugitive Slave Act of 1850:** required that any escaped slaves be handed over to the authorities. Made slavery a national (not just Southern) problem
- * **Territorial Expansion:**
- * in 1850 US was pushing itself across the continent
 - railroad and steamboats started to connect county & very different people
- * **Mexican War 1846-1848:** annexation and invasion of Mexico. Territorial expansion.

Fugitive Slave Act (part of Compromise of 1850)

- * required citizens to assist in the recovery of fugitive slaves.
- * denied a fugitive's right to a jury trial (instead of jury, special commissioners)

\$150 REWARD.
RANAWAY from the subscriber, on the night of Monday the 11th July, a negro man named
TOM,
about 30 years of age, 5 feet 6 or 7 inches high; of dark color; heavy in the chest; several of his jaw teeth out; and upon his body are several old marks of the whip, one of them straight down the back. He took with him a quantity of clothing, and several hats.
A reward of \$150 will be paid for his apprehension and security, if taken out of the State of Kentucky; \$100 if taken in any county bordering on the Ohio river; \$50 if taken in any of the interior counties except Fayette; or \$20 if taken in the latter county.
July 12-84-tf B. L. BOSTON.

\$200 Reward!

Ranaway from the subscriber, living in Saline county, on the 4th inst., two Negromen, named Jim and Jack--each aged about 25 years.

Jim
is dish-faced; has sore eyes and bad teeth; is of a light black or brown color; speaks quick, is about 5 feet 7 inches high; had on when last seen, blue cotton pants, white shirt, white fulled coat and new custom-made boots.



Jack
had on the same kind of clothing with shoes, has a very small foot, wears perhaps a No. 6 shoe, and has heavy tacks in the heels; is about the same height and color of Jim. They are doubtless aiming for K. T.

A reward of \$100 each will be given if taken outside of the State, or \$50 each if taken in the State, outside of Saline county.
C. D. WILLIAMS,
Spring Garden, P. O., Pettis county, Missouri.
Harrisonville, Mo., June 7th, 1860.

Ch. 89: “Fast Fish, Loose Fish”— Fugitive Slave Law

“But if the doctrine of Fast-Fish be pretty generally applicable, the kindred doctrine of Loose-Fish is still more widely so. That is internationally and universally applicable.

What was America in 1492 but a loose-fish, in which Columbus struck the Spanish standard by way of waiving it for his royal master and mistress? What was Poland to the Czar? What Greece to the Turk? What India to England? What at last will Mexico be to the United States? All Loose-Fish.

What are the Rights of Man and the Liberties of the World but Loose-Fish? What all men's minds and opinions but Loose-Fish? What is the principle of religious belief in them but a Loose-Fish?” What to the ostentatious smuggling verbalists are the thoughts of thinkers but Loose-Fish? What is the great globe itself but a Loose-Fish? And what are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too?” (435)

*

Mexican-American War

- Began in May 1846, over a territorial dispute involving Texas. President Polk declared war on Mexico
- The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed on February 2, 1848, ended the Mexican-American War in favor of the United States.

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

- Feb. 2, 1848: The Peace **Treaty at Guadalupe Hidalgo** signed to end war.
 - Rio Grande became boundary.
 - Mexico surrendered area called the **Mexican Cession**. The U.S. paid \$15 million for this land.
 - Mexicans living in this area would have the rights of U.S. citizenship.



Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

The boundary line between the two republics shall commence in the Gulf of Mexico, three leagues from land, opposite the mouth of the Rio Grande, otherwise called Rio Bravo del Norte, or opposite the mouth of its deepest branch, if it should have no more than one branch emptying directly into the sea; from thence up the middle of that river, following the deepest channel, where it has more than one, to the point where it strikes the southern boundary of New Mexico; thence, westwardly, along the whole southern boundary of New Mexico (which runs north of the town called Paso) to its western termination; thence, northward, along the western line of New Mexico, until it intersects the first branch of the River Gila; (or it should not intersect any branch of that river, then to the point on the said line nearest to such branch, and thence in a direct line to the same;) thence down the middle of the said branch and of the said river, until it empties in to the Rio Colorado; thence across the Rio Colorado, following the division line between Upper and Lower California, to the Pacific Ocean.

The boundary line...shall be religiously respected...

- The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Tratado de Guadalupe Hidalgo in Spanish), officially titled the Treaty of Peace, Friendship, Limits and Settlement between the United States of America and the Mexican Republic signed on February 2, 1848, in the Villa de Guadalupe Hidalgo in Mexico City

Compromise of 1850

- * **Question/Concern: Would new territories (result of war with Mexico) in the West be slave states or not?**
- * Ever since the Missouri Compromise (of 1820), the balance between slave states and free states had been maintained
- * California petitioned to be free.
- * Dispute over land: Texas claimed that its territory extended all the way to Santa Fe.
- * These petitions challenged previous compromise: Missouri Compromis

Missouri Compromise

- * After the Senate and the House passed different bills and deadlock threatened, a compromise bill was worked out with the following provisions: (1) Missouri was admitted as a slave state and Maine (formerly part of Massachusetts) as free, and (2) except for Missouri, slavery was to be excluded from the Louisiana Purchase lands north of latitude $36^{\circ}30'$.
- * Included in this compromise was the controversial Fugitive Slave Act

Slavery and Freedom

- * See Andrew Delbanco's biography of Melville *Melville, His World and Work* (Knopf 2005) stresses the importance of slavery for Melville's outlook in the years he wrote *Moby Dick*.

Take Aways?