

Quotations from Moby Dick

The speaker is the narrator, Ishmael, unless otherwise noted.

Chapter 1 The Loomings

Call me Ishmael.

Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off--then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball. With a philosophical flourish, Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship.

...and so the universal thump is passed round, and all hands should rub each other's shoulder-blades, and be content.

Chapter 2 The Carpet-Bag

But it's too late to make any improvements now. The universe is finished; the copestone is on, and the chips were carted off a million years ago.

Chapter 7 The Chapel

...how it is that we still refuse to be comforted for those who we nevertheless maintain are dwelling in unspeakable bliss; why all the living so strive to hush all the dead; wherefore but the rumor of a knocking in a tomb will terrify a whole city. All these things are not without their meanings. But Faith like a jackal, feeds among the tombs, and even from these dead doubts she gathers her most vital hope.

Methinks we have hugely mistaken this matter of Life and Death. Methinks that what they call my shadow here on earth is my true substance...Methinks my body is but the lees of my better being. In fact take my body who will take it I say, it is not me.

Chapter 8 The Pulpit

...for the pulpit is ever this earth's foremost part; all the rest comes in its rear; the pulpit leads the world.

Chapter 9 The Sermon

...if we obey God, we must disobey ourselves; and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists.

Chapter 13 Wheelbarrow

It's a mutual, joint-stock world, in all meridians. We cannibals must help these Christians.

Chapter 16 The Ship

For all men tragically great are made so through a certain morbidness. Be sure of this, O young ambition, all mortal greatness is but disease.

He's a grand, ungodly, god-like man, Captain Ahab....

...Ahab has his humanities.

Chapter 17 The Ramadan

...Heaven have mercy on us all--Presbyterians and Pagans alike--for we are all somehow dreadfully cracked about the head, and sadly need mending.

Chapter 20 All Astir

...when a man suspects any wrong, it sometimes happens that if he be already involved in the matter, he insensibly strives to cover up his suspicions even from himself.

Chapter 23 The Lee Shore

...all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea....

Chapter 24 The Advocate

For what are the comprehensible terrors of man compared with the interlinked terrors and wonders of God?

Chapter 26 Knights and Squires

...an utterly fearless man is a far more dangerous comrade than a coward.

Chapter 28 Ahab

...moody stricken Ahab stood before them with a crucifixion in his face; in all the nameless regal overbearing dignity of some mighty woe.

Chapter 29 Enter Ahab; to Him, Stubb

Old age is always wakeful; as if, the longer linked with life, the less man has to do with aught that looks like death.

Chapter 33 The Speksynder

For be a man's intellectual superiority what it will, it can never assume the practical, available supremacy over other men, without the aid of some sort of external arts and entrenchments....

Oh, Ahab! what shall be grand in thee, it must needs be plucked at from the skies, and dived for in the deep, and featured in the unbodied air!

Chapter 34 The Cabin Table

...Ahab's soul, shut up in the caved trunk of his body, there fed upon the sullen paws of its gloom!

Chapter 35 The Masthead

... lulled into such an opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie is this absent-minded youth by the blending cadence of waves with thoughts, that at last he loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; and every strange, half-seen, gliding, beautiful thing that eludes him; every dimly-discovered, uprising fin of some undiscernible form, seems to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it. In this enchanted mood, thy spirit ebbs away to whence it came; becomes diffused through time and space; like [Cranmer's](#) sprinkled Pantheistic ashes, forming at last a part of every shore the round globe over. There is no life in thee, now, except that rocking life imparted by a gently rolling ship; by her, borrowed from the sea; by the sea, from the inscrutable tides of God. But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch; slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over [Descartian vortices](#) you hover. And perhaps, at mid-day, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever. Heed it well, ye Pantheists!

Chapter 36 The Quarter-Deck

"D'ye mark him, Flask?" whispered Stubb; "the chick that's in him pecks the shell. T'will soon be out."

"Vengeance on a dumb brute!" cried Starbuck, "that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous."

All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks...If a man will strike, strike through the mask! (Ahab).

Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me (Ahab).

Who's over me? Truth hath no confines (Ahab).

Chapter 37 Sunset

Gifted with high perception, I lack the low, enjoying power; damned, most subtly and most malignantly! damned in the midst of Paradise! (Ahab).

Oh, hard! that to fire others, the match itself must needs be wasting! (Ahab).

What I've dared, I've willed; and what I've willed, I'll do! (Ahab).

Chapter 38 Dusk

Oh, life! 'tis in an hour like this, with soul beat down and held to knowledge, -as wild, untutored things are forced to feed-Oh, life! 'tis now that I do feel the latent horror in thee! (Starbuck).

Chapter 39 First Night-Watch

HA! ha! ha! ha! hem! clear my throat!--I've been thinking over it ever since, and that ha, HA's the final consequence. Why so? Because a laugh's the wisest, easiest answer to all that's queer; and come what will, one comfort's always left--that unfailing comfort is, it's all predestinated (Stubbs).

I know not all that may be coming, but be it what it will, I'll go to it laughing (Stubbs).

Chapter 40 Midnight, Forecastle

Oh, thou big white God aloft there somewhere in yon darkness, have mercy on this small black boy down here; preserve him from all men that have no bowels to feel fear! (Pip).

Chapter 41 Moby Dick

I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul. A wild, mystical, sympathetic feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine.

...immortality is but ubiquity in time...

...all this to explain, would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go. The subterranean miner that works in us all, how can one tell whither leads his shaft by the ever shifting, muffled sound of his pick? Who does not feel the irresistible arm drag? What skiff in tow of a seventy-four can stand still? For one, I gave myself up to the abandonment of the time and the place; but while yet all a-rush to encounter the whale, could see naught in that brute but the deadliest ill.

Chapter 42 The Whiteness of the Whale

Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright.

...all deified Nature absolutely paints like the harlot, whose allurements cover nothing but the charnel-house within...

Chapter 44 The Chart

God help thee, old man, thy thoughts have created a creature in thee; and he whose intense thinking thus makes him a Prometheus; a vulture feeds upon that heart for ever; that vulture the very creature he creates.

Chapter 49 The Hyena

There are certain queer times and occasions in this strange mixed affair we call life when a man takes thiswhole universe for a vast practical joke, though the wit thereof he but dimly discerns, and more than suspects that the joke is at nobody's expense but his own.

Chapter 53 The Albatross

But in pursuit of those far mysteries we dream of, or in tormented chase of that demon phantom that, some time or other, swims before all human hearts; while chasing such over this round globe, they either lead us on in barren mazes or midway leave uswhelmed.

Chapter 54 The Town Ho's Story

Now, as you well know, it is not seldom the case in this conventional world of ours-- watery or otherwise; that when a person placed in command over his fellow-men finds one of them to be very significantly his superior in general pride of manhood, straightway against that man he conceives an unconquerable dislike and bitterness; and if he have a chance he will pull down and pulverize that subaltern's tower, and make a little heap of dust of it.

Chapter 59 Brit

...as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half known life. God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return!

Chapter 61 The Line

All men live enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halters round their necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever-present perils of life.

Chapter 63 The Dart

To insure the greatest efficiency in the dart, the harpooneers of this world must start to their feet from out of idleness, and not from out of toil.

Chapter 68 The Blanket

Oh, man! admire and model thyself after the whale! Do thou, too, remain warm among ice. Do thou, too, live in this world without being of it. Be cool at the equator; keep thy blood fluid at the Pole. Like the great dome of St. Peter's, and like the great whale, retain, O man! in all seasons a temperature of thine own.

Chapter 72 The Monkey-Rope

...I seemed distinctly to perceive that my own individuality was now merged in a joint stock company of two: that my free will had received a mortal wound; and that another's mistake or misfortune might plunge innocent me into unmerited disaster and death.

Chapter 73 Stubb and Flask Kill a Right Whale; and Then Have a Talk Over Him

So, when on one side you hoist in Locke's head, you go over that way; but now, on the other side, hoist in Kant's and you come back again; but in very poor plight. Thus, some minds for ever keep trimming boat. Oh, ye foolish! throw all these thunderheads overboard, and then you will float light and right.

Chapter 74 The Sperm Whale's Head--Contrasted View

The whale, therefore, must see one distinct picture on this side, and another distinct picture on that side; while all between must be profound darkness and nothingness to him. Is it not curious, that so vast a being as the whale should see the world through so small an eye, and hear the thunder through an ear which is smaller than a hare's? But if his eyes were broad as the lens of Herschel's great telescope; and his ears capacious as the porches of cathedrals; would that make him any longer of sight, or sharper of hearing? Not at all.--Why then do you try to "enlarge" your mind? Subtilize it.

Chapter 79 The Prairie

I try all things; I achieve what I can.

Chapter 80 The Nut

The whale, like all things that are mighty, wears a false brow to the common world. For I believe that much of a man's character will be found betokened in his backbone. I would rather feel your spine than your skull, whoever you are. A thin joist of a spine never yet upheld a full and noble soul.

Chapter 85 The Fountain

Doubts of all things earthly, and intuitions of some things heavenly; this combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards them both with equal eye.

Chapter 86 The Tail

Real strength never impairs beauty or harmony, but it often bestows it; and in everything imposingly beautiful, strength had much to do with the magic.

Chapter 87 The Grand Armada

...withhold any amazement at the strangely galled whales before us, for there is no folly of the beasts of the earth which is not infinitely outdone by the madness of men.

...amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still for ever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve round me, deep down and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy.

Chapter 89 Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish I.

A Fast-Fish belongs to the party fast to it..... What are the sinews and souls of Russian serfs and Republican slaves but Fast-Fish, whereof possession is the whole of the law?.....

..... II. A Loose-Fish is fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it..... What was America in 1492 but a 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?...

And what are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too?

Chapter 96 The Try-Works

Look not too long in the face of the fire, O man! Never dream with thy hand on the helm! There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness. And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces. And even if he for ever flies within the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains; so that even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle is still higher than other birds upon the plain, even though they soar.

Chapter 99 The Doubloon

And some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth...

Born in throes, 't is fit that man should live in pains and die in pangs! So be it, then! Here's stout stuff for we to work on. So be it, then.

Chapter 104 The Fossil Whale

Such, and so magnifying, is the virtue of a large and liberal theme! We expand to its bulk. To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme.

No great and enduring volume can ever be written on the flea, though many there be who have tried it.

Chapter 106 Ahab's Leg

...all miserable events do naturally beget their like.. Yea, more than equally...since both the ancestry and posterity of Grief go further than the ancestry and posterity of Joy. ...in the face of all the glad, hay-making suns, and soft-cymballing, round harvest-moons, we must needs give in to this: that the gods themselves are not for ever glad. The ineffaceable, sad birth-mark in the brow of man, is but the stamp of sorrow in the signers.

Chapter 107 The Carpenter

Seat thy self sultanically among the moons of Saturn, and take high abstracted man alone; and he seems a wonder, a grandeur, and a woe. But from the same point, take mankind in mass, and for the most part, they seem a mob of unnecessary duplicates, both contemporary and hereditary.

Chapter 109 Ahab and Starbuck in the Cabin

...let Ahab beware of Ahab; beware of thyself, old man (Starbuck).

Chapter 110 Queequeq in His Coffin

Top-heavy was the ship as a dinnerless student with all Aristotle in his head.

...whatever is truly wondrous and fearful in man, never yet was put into words or books.

Chapter 113 The Forge

In no Paradise myself, I am impatient of all misery in others that is not mad. Thou should'st go mad, blacksmith; say why dost thou not go mad? How can'st thou endure without being mad? Do the heavens yet hate thee, that thou can'st not go mad?... (Ahab).

Oh, Pip! thy wretched laugh;, thy idle but unresting eye; all thy strange mummeries not unmeaningly blended with the black tragedy of the melancholy ship, and mocked it!

Chapter 114 The Gilder

...the mingled, mingling threads of life are woven by warp and woof; calms crossed by storms, a storm for every calm.

There is no steady unretracing progress in this life; we do not advance through fixed gradations, and at the last one pause:--through infancy's unconscious spell, boyhood's thoughtless faith, adolescence' doubt..., then scepticism, then disbelief, resting at last in manhood's pondering repose of If.

Where lies the final harbor whence we unmoor no more?

...Our souls are like those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them: the secret of our paternity lies in their grave, and we must there to learn it. Let faith oust fact; let fancy oust memory; I look deep down and do believe (Ahab).

Chapter 125 The Log and Line

Lo! ye believers in gods all goodness, and in man all ill, lo you! see the omniscient gods oblivious of suffering man; and man, though idiotic, and knowing not what he does, yet full of the sweet things of love and gratitude (Ahab).

Chapter 127 The Life-Buoy

Now, then, Pip, we'll talk this over; I do suck most wondrous philosophies from thee! Some unknown conduits from the unknown worlds must empty into thee! (Ahab).

Chapter 128 The Pequod Meets the Rachel

Hast seen the White Whale? (Ahab to Captain of Rachel).

Chapter 132 The Symphony

From beneath his slouched hat Ahab dropped a tear into the sea; nor did all the Pacific contain such wealth as that one wee drop.

Chapter 134 The Chase the Second Day

Aye, aye, Starbuck, 'tis sweet to lean sometimes, be the leaner who he will; and would old Ahab had leaned oftener than he has (Ahab to Starbuck).

Ahab is for ever Ahab, man. this whole act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled. Fool! I am the Fates' lieutenant; I act under orders (Ahab to Starbuck).

Chapter 135 The Chase the Third Day

The ship? Great God, where is the ship?" (unidentified crew member).

Epilogue

"AND I ONLY AM ESCAPED ALONE TO TELL THEE" (Job). The drama's done. Why then here does any one step forth?--Because one did survive the wreck."