

Mystery of moby dick



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Moby Dick tells the story of a former schoolteacher called Ishmael, who joins a whaling voyage after a severe bout of depression. He befriends Queequeg, a harpooner, and the two quickly become friends. The voyage they sign up for is on the Pequod.

They will be hunting sperm whales for three years, but their captain is Ahab, a strange man who isolates himself in his cabin. It is revealed he was attacked by a great, white whale called Moby Dick and lost his leg due to it. Hunting down the animal is Ahab's constant goal throughout, with Ishmael, Queequeg, and the rest of the crew along for the long, long ride. Ishmael is an unusual narrator, who often pauses the story and speaks of his own knowledge and experiences. He can be in a dire situation with his shipmates, or he can go off on a tangent about the biology of whales. Even still, the novel is filled with countless events, from discovering Ahab has secretly allowed an entirely different boat crew on board and having to endure typhoons, to watching the obsession with Moby Dick grow deeper and deeper into madness. The titular whale rarely shows itself, and its final appearance is towards the end of the journey, with one final battle between Ahab and Moby Dick. By the end of everything, Ishmael is left alone drifting in the ocean after losing against the sheer power of the whale. He is the lone survivor of the voyage and the only one who could tell the tale.

Moby Dick can be interpreted in a number of ways, but Daniel Paliwoda contemplates if the animal is a religious symbol. Paliwoda believes Moby Dick is a representation of a deity and religious conflict, whether the being is benevolent or malevolent is up for debate. In his criticism, he remarks how drastically Ahab's life changed after encountering the whale, much like how a

persons life shifts upon discovering faith in any religion. In a sense, and one aspect the author does not point out, Ahab resembles a faith in religion gone too far. His fascination with Moby Dick is understandable, but he becomes overly zealous and drags everyone in his crew along for his goal; it is one of the largest plot points in the book. He can think of little else, blinded by his own beliefs, and refuses to give in, even until his last breath. He cares more about Moby Dick than he does saving the people who has traveled with him for so long. With Moby Dick still alive, Ahab wonders how he can live his life. Having been crippled by the whale, Ahab prefers not to be in life for anything else but to seek revenge. Everything in life irritates him because it dulls and numbs his purpose. He has no need of anything that does not bring him closer to killing the white whale, notes Paliwoda. In the same vein, the albino whale is barely in the story; it is constantly talked about by the other characters, and its name is the title of the book, yet it refuses to show itself. It resembles God, a being that exists in the minds of many, yet invisible and hiding from a physical existence. Its fury shows when it finally appears. However, it can also be argued that Moby Dick is more akin to the Devil, tempting Ahab until he reaches his watery demise. It torments the captain's mind endlessly, plaguing every single thought he has; it brings an otherwise ordinary person into a deep, relentless sin. Ahab himself mentions he does not sleep well, and when he dreams, it is full of frenzies and clashing. While both sides have validity and evidence, it may be best to view Moby Dick as the idea of a deity, instead of a specific one. In either interpretation, it is something that transcends humanity and its actions and mindset are far beyond our thinking. The fact that it can be seen as either is a contradiction

within itself and that is the point; the novel contains so many ideas and themes that a concrete explanation is impossible to find.

In Chris O. Cook's critique, he pondered on the contrast between the whale and his pursuer, Ahab. Ahab appears to only have one purpose throughout the entire novel, to battle Moby Dick again, and kill the great beast; for what reason, it is never fully explained if it is for revenge for his leg, or if he is unable to handle defeat. He has a definitive purpose in the story, acting as a driving force that leads the crew along. Interestingly, the whale holds this same push in the narrative, and yet it is far more ambiguous in nature. It does not have a clear meaning or goal, remaining a mystery until the last word in the novel. The titular whale is barely even present throughout the story, remaining elusive and physically appearing around three times. One is naturally tempted to regard Moby-Dick as allegory, even to the point of suspecting the literal element to be almost wholly arbitrary as merely the most convenient delivery system for whatever codified import the book intends. The novel dares us to do this, even as it exhorts us not to; it is, of course, for doing precisely this that Ahab is ruined: He is powerless to refrain from imposing significance onto that which is mere existence and nothing more. Cook here points out the strangeness of the two, comparing how we share similarities with Ahab even if we do not realize it. Ahab chases after Moby Dick; a human chases after something on a grander scale than he can hope to grasp. The persistent captain was injured and punished for his lack of knowledge, in his attempt to grasp what he did not have: the whale who symbolizes the limits of what is comprehensible by man. Despite the heavy warning, Ahab does not cease his journey to claim Moby Dick for himself,

and it ultimately leads to his watery demise. Moby Dick does not even directly kill him; the harpoon Ahab throws misses and the rope wraps itself tightly around his neck, bringing him under the surface. In other words, he brought danger upon himself; it did not come to him. The death being by his own hands only lends more foolishness upon him. But in the great Sperm Whale, this high and mightily god-like dignity inherent in the brow is so immensely amplified that gazing on it, in that full front view, you feel the Deity and the dread powers more forcibly than in beholding any other object in living nature (Melville 386). To make the creature even more enigmatic, there are bizarre hieroglyphics upon its head that no one can translate. Cook even notes how the novel's genre, difficult to pinpoint, adds to its charm and mysteriousness. It contains countless different elements that suggest it is an epic, a tragedy, a transcendentalist work, an adventure novel, or even a horror story. Melville likely delighted in his experimental writing, wishing it to be an amalgamation. The author ends his article with a devoid, yet truthful sentiment about the boundaries humans cannot cross: After all the prophecy has been fulfilled, Ishmael, lone survivor of the Pequod, floats to his eventual rescue on the empty coffin of his friend Queequeg. But those who try to find a moral explanation for Ishmael's survival will be stymied, as, once again, the answer is devoid of significance: Ishmael does not survive because of anything; rather, he is the narrator because he survived had he not, then someone else, or no-one at all, would be telling the story. It has been said that the function of the epic is to parallel and accordingly, assign meaning to the very fact of human existence. Moby-Dick, in the end, assigns to life the most terrifying possible explanation: utter chance (Cook). Ishmael did not earn his survival, not by skill or good works or courage; instead, he was the

last one left alive because that was merely how it worked out in the end. He is not the chosen hero or the only one who can defeat the whale. He is a mortal man who could have easily died along with his shipmates and captain.

In contrast to pondering Ahab and the whale, April Gentry discusses how Ishmael regards the beast. Ironically enough, he tells the reader to not read too much into the story and not to mistake it for an allegory; however, we cannot help but to do so. Ishmael himself is uncertain of what the great beast is a symbol of, as he considers how white is both a pure and feared color. He speaks of how it has always been holy and revered, and though in other mortal sympathies and symbolizings, this same hue is made the emblem of many touching, noble things—the innocence of brides, the benignity of age; though among the Red Men of America the giving of the white belt of wampum was the deepest pledge of honor (Melville 208). However, he does consider the negative connotations of the color: This elusive quality it is, which causes the thought of whiteness, when divorced more kindly associations, and coupled with any object terrible in itself, to heighten that terror to its further bounds. Witness the white bear of the poles, and the white shark of the tropics; what but their smooth, flaky whiteness makes the transcendent horrors they are? (Melville 209). He goes back and forth, contemplating various views and aspects, musing that it can be frightening due to lack of warmth and coldness, yet acknowledges that it is a mystic, divine color. Though, by the end, he does not know what is correct, just like many of us. He does not know what the whale is or what it is supposed to mean, but it just is what it is. Chapter 99, The Doubloon, is

another example of how one singular item can be viewed in so many ways. Ahab studies a gold doubloon, pondering on what the inscriptions may represent. Ahab sees pride and structures in the coin: There's something ever egotistical in mountain-tops and towers, and all other grand and lofty things; look here, -three peaks as proud as Lucifer (Melville 480). Yet, Stubb believes the symbols are the various signs of the zodiac, while Flask does not care and sees it as simple money to purchase cigars with; no one on the ship can reach an agreement on its meaning. It is commentary on how no matter how strong and detailed an argument is, people will always disagree and see it in a completely different light; additionally, it can also be commentary on how critics search for meaning in every aspect of a story, even if there is none to be found. The article continues on to state the same sentiment: Pip's initial response to the coin, "' I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look,'" has been taken by many critics as Melville's statement on the scene itself and on the issue of interpretation in general. Everyone looks, and sees what he will, says April Gentry. It is a bizarre paradox, but one that humans must confront again and again. Moby Dick is everything we lack, and yet in both the book and outside of it, the whale is still judged and viewed by mortal eyes as we search for meaning in its existence.

Moby Dick is a book filled with countless possible themes and symbols, but the white whale is perhaps the most mysterious and intriguing. The whale's ephemeral and otherworldly nature represents man's limited knowledge and wisdom, and in that same sense, can be a symbol for infinite possibilities. In a paradoxical way, the whale's endless interpretations prove our restrained knowledge, as we are unable to identify it as something we do not know. The

reason many interpretations often are opposites of each other is because, to us, all we can see is contradictions within something we do not understand. Like the concept of God and Satan, Moby Dick is beyond human comprehension, holding power that we can only strive to attain and driving us mad if taken too far. Mankind must make do with what it can. Rather than claiming the white whale represents the Christian God or the Christian Devil, it is more proper to say that it represents the concept of a god: an ephemeral being who knows everything and is everywhere at once. Melville did not intend for the whale to represent one specific aspect, rather hold the potential for countless interpretations; in this sense, he reminds us of how human we truly are.