

Moby dick: enigma essay sample



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Moby Dick is an enigma. Some whalers, like many aboard the Pequod, believe he is an immortal being with god-like qualities. Other whalers believe he is a tangible albino sperm whale. Moby Dick is the source of all that is evil for Ahab, and an impediment of a whaling voyage to those like Starbuck. There is vast variability of character perceptions, and particular beliefs or lack thereof that imbue Moby Dick with his power, which make him tremendously inscrutable. Many Whalers encountered in Moby Dick have differing opinions on the whale. Some whalers, as Ishmael describes, observe Moby Dick as perpetual. “ It cannot be much of a matter of surprise that some whalemens should go still further in their superstitions; declaring Moby Dick not only ubiquitous, but immortal.” (p. 155) There are many among the whaling community that put Moby Dick on a divine pedestal. They see him as a whale demi-god, who is everywhere at all times and cannot be killed. This is true for those such as “ Gabriel” who warns that anyone who tries to hunt Moby Dick will face certain doom, such as his old chief mate Macey, who is individually killed by the whale.

There are other whalers, such as the Captain of the Bachelor, who hear of the great White Whale, but do not believe he exists. The Bachelor disregards him, and thus receives a successful whaling voyage and a party on board. Moby Dick is, however, a very real whale, who causes the demise of many whalers throughout the world, such as those among the Rachel, who simply try to hunt the whale and end up with a lost whaling boat. The whaling community provides Moby Dick with his power. He is a god to the speculative, a myth to the practical, and a natural force to others. The members of the Pequod have many different views over what the White

Whale is. Starbuck sees Moby Dick as an obstruction of a perfectly good whaling voyage. “ I am game for his crooked jaw, and for the jaws of Death too, Captain Ahab, if it fairly comes in the way of the business we follow; but I cam here to hunt whales, not my commander’s vengeance.” (p. 139) He views Moby Dick as a revenge mission, and constantly tries to steer Ahab away from it. Fedallah gives Moby Dick the position as the end by means of which Ahab will die. This turns Moby Dick into a supernatural power that has power over free will. The rest of the crew rallies behind the idea of catching Moby Dick, after they are offered the golden Doubloon.

They turn Moby Dick into a challenge for the themselves, and also a means to a reward. Ahab has a very personal perception of Moby Dick. After his accident in which he lost his leg to Moby Dick, the whale became the source of all evil for the Captain of the Pequod. “ All evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale’s white hump the sum of all general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down.” (p. 156) Moby Dick affects Ahab so drastically that Ahab views all that is evil in humankind, and the White Whale, as interchangeable. Ahab is obsessed with vengeance. He goes so far as to Captain a whaling voyage for the sole purpose of capturing one whale that he has pinned all of his pain and suffering into. Ahab is indeed a “ monomaniac” because he is unreasonably obsessive over Moby Dick, and can be rational to everything else except Moby Dick. He transforms the White Whale from a sperm whale to the concept of evil. Ishmael believes that Moby Dick can be anything.

He constantly searches for the true nature behind the whale, and, as the narrator, constantly takes in everyone else's view of Moby Dick. However, Ishmael truly believes that Moby Dick is almost impossible to understand. "If then, Sir William Jones, who read in thirty languages, could not read the simplest peasant's face in its profounder and more subtle meanings, how may unlettered Ishmael hope to read the awful Chaldee of the Sperm Whale's brow? I put that brow before you." (p. 275) He understands the great inscrutability of Moby Dick. Ishmael only sees the whale in for brief moments in three chapters, therefore making it hard to comprehend a full understanding of the whale. Moby Dick is unfathomable. Although a tangible whale, he turns into a god, a legend, a reward, a blockade and the idea of evil. Many different characters have different understandings of the whale, however Ishmael understands the most: that Moby Dick is in understandable.