

The theme pride in "moby dick"



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Throughout the novel, *Moby Dick*, by Herman Melville, the theme pride, or hubris, can be followed from the beginning to the end. It did not take long to see that Captain Ahab had a heart that was driven by revenge and because of that strong drive the *Pequod* was destroyed and all but one of the crew members. Ahab's sense of pride and longing to search for the White Whale, the Evil of the Earth, *Moby Dick* caused him to commit the ultimate sin, being prideful.

When *Moby* took Ahab's leg, Ahab's life turned completely around but for the worse. Ahab had once lived what most would consider a normal life to a life full of revenge and turmoil. He believed he was doing good for the world but in all actuality, he became evil and twisted and ultimately turned his back on God by following a path that Satan himself would walk. This story started slowly at first and the twisted relationship between Ahab and *Moby Dick* was not very noticeable but as the book progressed the evil grew and the full presence of the devil could be felt and seen in each move that Ahab and *Moby Dick* were making.

Although one of Captain Ahab's drives was revenge, his pride was the death of him because of his infatuation with acquiring the accomplishment of killing *Moby Dick*, the white whale. Pride killed Captain Ahab. Herman Melville was an American novelist who was born in New York City on August 1st, 1819, to Allen and Maria Gansevoort Melvill (it wasn't until Maria's husband's death that they added an e to the name). When Herman was just a young child he fell ill to scarlet fever and his vision was left permanently impaired. He had a good life though because his father was a successful high-end importer and merchant. Although the family enjoyed a prosperous life, Allan had borrowed

heavily to finance his business interests. In 1830 the family moved to Albany because Allan was attempting to branch into the fur trade but the business failed and the family's fortune took a significant hit. After the sudden passing of his father and continued financial struggles with his family, Melville took to sailing with merchants for work. He enjoyed working on the ship, but did not dedicate himself to the sea immediately (Melville, Herman. Pullman Strikes Out Introduction, xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/bb/hm_bio.html) after the first time he sailed. He kept working in other ways to try to help his family. Because he never found the work he could enjoy, he returned to sailing with whalers. Once he returned home, his family was much more stable financially and they encouraged him to take up his passion for writing.

With their support, Herman recorded his tales of the South Seas and began to seek out a publisher (Melville, Herman. Pullman Strikes Out Introduction, xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/bb/hm_bio.html). He wrote two novels that were successful, Typee in 1846 and Omoo in 1847 but his subsequent book, Moby Dick (his masterpiece) in 1851 sold very poorly. Melville knew he had to keep working so he delivered a series of lectures throughout the late 1850s. The following decade Melville began a 20-year career as a customs inspector in New York City and he also turned his creative interests to poetry during this period and published a collection called Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War in 1866. Finally, In 1876, he published the grand Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land that was based on a previous trip to the region. Following his sudden death of an apparent heart attack in New York City in 1891, he posthumously came to be regarded as one of the great American writers. Before his death, he was working on a novel and although

his popularity had vanished at that point, his books were reprinted and he slowly started becoming popular in the literary world. By the 1920s, Melville had become a well-known figure among readers and critics alike and his last novel was published in 1924 as *Billy Budd, Sailor*.

Today, we regard Herman Melville as one of America's greatest writers, his masterpiece *Moby-Dick* adapted for the big screen in 1956. School reading lists still have Melville's work and interest in his works spiked again in 2015 with the release of the Ron Howard-directed, *In the Heart of the Sea*, about the ill-fated voyage of the *Essex*. The novel, *Moby Dick*, was written in 1851 and tells the story of a sailor named Ishmael and his experience on a whaling ship. The novel was written during the Antebellum Period in the United States of America, a very chaotic time in American history. The Antebellum Period marks the years leading up to the Civil War. During the years leading up to the Civil War, there was a significant divide between races, where many of the Caucasians in America wanted to keep the African Americans enslaved. Many claimed that the Constitution of the United States sets out with the declaration that slaves are property (Secession Era Editorials Project. Furman: New Railroad Mileage, 1850-1860 (by Region), history. furman.edu/editorials/see.py? menu= ds menu&%2Bsequence= ds menu&location=%3E%2BDred%2BScott%2BDecision%2B) Being that the novel was written during the Antebellum Period, it could be argued that the white whale symbolized the inevitability of the monoculture of whiteness to devastate the nation (Kouroubetes, Michael *Moby-Dick: From a Multi-genre, Multi-Cultural Perspective*, IUSB Graduate Journal, <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/iusbgrj/article/download/22103/28057/>).

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Although pride can be seen in multiple characters, the character that pride follows mainly is Captain Ahab, the captain of the whaling ship Ishmael was on. Captain Ahab's character was formed in the image of the King Ahab in the bible. King Ahab in the bible was known for the evil he did in the sight of the Lord (1Kgs 16: 30-33) (Eric Ziolkowski, "" Melvilles Ahab"", n. p. [cited 22 Nov 2018]. Online: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/443/people/related-articles/melvilles-ahab>). Captain Ahab's enormous amount of pride is seen in his own quest to vanquish the white whale (Eric Ziolkowski, "" Melvilles Ahab"", n. p. [cited 22 Nov 2018]. Online: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/443/people/related-articles/melvilles-ahab>). Captain Ahab did not name himself (Melville 264). Although Ahab may seem arrogant because of how he placed himself on a pedestal, I believe this goes back to his pride. Ahab did not show his face for so long, only because he felt he was better than everyone because of his life's accomplishments. He was, clearly, a veteran to the sea and he felt that made him better than everyone else. His position of authority and his ailment of missing a leg built upon his pride.

Ahab in all his thoughts and actions ever had in view the ultimate capture of Moby Dick (Melville 681). After Ahab showed himself, his fiery pride was quite evident in his actions and behavior. He felt such a strong need for revenge and had built a pride within himself based on his personal need to take down Moby Dick. He wanted to have the achievement of killing Moby Dick and he would not rest until that was accomplished. What ultimately builds such a strong case for pride in this quote is that he was not thinking what if I kill Moby Dick, he knew that he was going to do it. He felt that he was the king of the sea and nothing could stop him from defeating Moby

Dick. In his fiery eyes of scorn and triumph, you then saw Ahab in all his fatal pride. (Melville 1663). What becomes apparent is that the ship was no longer being led with thought, Ahabs willpower and pride were leading it. Had he not had such a deep infatuation with killing Moby Dick, he would have survived, as would have the rest of his crew. He felt no remorse towards the lives of his crew being lost because he saw himself as superior.

Ahab seemed an independent lord (Melville 1717). The way Captain Ahab carried himself with his pride was evident to everyone on the ship. He made his superiority clear by leading the ship and his crew to their demise to fulfill what his pride yearned so deeply for. Ahab created an image of himself as an almighty being equal to God. As the theme pride is followed, it is apparent that it is extremely hazardous, and cost Ahab not only his life but his entire crews lives as well. Older people can sometimes be heard saying, "Idle hands are the Devil's tools," and I think this can be applied to the novel because Ahab proved that "" The Devil will drive a man without a drive."" While Ahab sat idly seeking revenge, the Devil planted seeds of pride within him which caused Ahab to become the evil man he was.