

Born New York City; father goes bankrupt, insane when Herman is 12. Age 15, he leaves school, works as bank clerk, teacher, farm worker. Age 19, he sails merchant ship to Liverpool, other sea voyages, including whaling trip where he jumps ship and lives among Typee cannibals in Marquesas.

TYPEE 1846
OMOO 1847
MARDI 1849
REDBURN 1849
WHITE-JACKET 1850

MOBY DICK 1851
PIERRE 1852
ISRAEL POTTER 1855
PIAZZA TALES 1856
CONFIDANCE MAN 1837

BILLY BUDD (1924)
POETRY

MOBY DICK, or, THE WHALE. A Novel by Herman Melville, published in New York 1851 and in London under title, THE WHALE, 1851

Ishmael the narrator decides to go to sea, goes to Nantucket, meets Queequeg, harpooner from South Seas ("a George Washington cannibalistically developed"). They sign on PEQUOD, named for first Indian tribe wiped out by white Americans. Elijah delivers warning about disastrous voyage, Father Mapple gives sermon about Jonah and the whale. After several days at sea, Ahab appears and reveals voyage is to revenge himself against white sperm whale MOBY-DICK who took Ahab's leg last voyage. Starbuck, first mate, senses how maniacal Ahab is but is powerless to do anything. PEQUOD chases other whales, goes through storms, meets other ships; finally British whaler gives Aham news MOBY-DICK was sighted recently; Queequeg builds his own coffin.

Ahab gives speech to crew which alarms them, Starbuck warns Ahab God is against him. MOBY-DICK is sighted, 3 day chase begins. Whale crushes one of the boats, drags crewman down in harpoon line, Ahab's wooden leg is broken off as whaleboat is smashed. On third day, MOBY-DICK crashes into PEQUOD, Ahab strike blow against white whale but is caught in harpoon line and drowned, tied to the whale. PEQUOD sinks, taking all men and boats down in wake. Only survivor is Ishmael who emerges, holding Queequeg's coffin.

The narrative is sometimes naturalistic, sometimes fantastic and shaped into obscure parables. Large sections dwell upon the science of whales or upon the intricacies of the whaling business and its history. Amid the often turbulent complexity of the narrative form, the dramatic events unfold slowly.

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"These men are madmen, and of the most dangerous sort, for their lunacy is not continuous, but occasional, evoked by some special object; it is protectively secretive, which is as much to say it is self-contained, so that when, moreover, most active it is to the average mind not distinguishable from sanity, and for the reason above suggested, that, whatever its aims may be - and the aim is never declared - the method and the outward proceeding are always perfectly rational.

"Now something such an one was Claggart, in whom was the mania of an evil nature, not engendered by vicious training or corrupting books or licentious living, but born with him and innate, in short, 'a depravity according to nature'".

Herman Melville: BILLY BUDD, section 11

