

MOBY DICK

by Herman Melville



THE AUTHOR

Herman Melville (1819-1891) was born in New York City. His family later moved to Albany, where his father died and young Herman was forced to go to work in a bank at age 13. He later served briefly as an elementary school teacher and a newspaper reporter. At age 19, he went to sea for the first time. Two years later, he embarked on a lengthy whaling expedition, where he gained the knowledge that became the foundation for his great novels. During the expedition, he and another sailor left the ship on a Pacific island, where he found himself among a tribe of cannibals. His experience became the foundation for his first novel, *Typee* (1846), the most popular of his works during his lifetime. This was followed by *Omoo* (1847) and Melville's great classic, *Moby Dick* (1851). At the time *Moby Dick* was published, Melville had recently met Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose work he greatly admired and to whom he dedicated his masterwork. Melville continued writing until his death in 1891, producing increasingly experimental works including the short story *Bartleby the Scrivener* (1853) and the short novel *Billy Budd* (1891).

Melville was a pessimist, an unhappy loner who struggled with despair throughout his life. In the world around him and within himself he saw little but evil, which he personified in the white whale of his greatest novel. *Moby Dick* was a literary failure when it was first published. Not until well into the twentieth century was it appreciated as one of the classics of American literature. Despite the voluminous details about whaling found in the story, it is essentially a myth of the pervasiveness of evil in the world and in the human heart. In this respect, it has much in common with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, another great seafaring story.

PLOT SUMMARY

The story begins with the narrator, Ishmael, introducing himself as a restless young man whose eyes turn to the sea whenever he become weary with life. He intends to go from New York to Nantucket Island to seek employment on a whaling vessel. He stays over for two nights in New Bedford, where he meets a harpooner from the South Seas named Queequeg. The two become friends, and determine to set sail on the same vessel. While in New Bedford, Ishmael attends a mariner's chapel, where he hears a resounding sermon on the book of Jonah.

Once arrived in Nantucket, Ishmael and Queequeg go to the Try Pots Inn. The next day, on instructions from Queequeg's idol Yojo, Ishmael goes to find a ship and signs them on to sail with

the *Pequod*, helmed by Captain Ahab. When the ship sets sail on Christmas Day, the mariners have yet to meet the captain. After the ship is underway for some days, Ahab finally appears on deck, but does little and says less. One day he snarls at Stubb for a minor provocation and reveals that he has a hair-trigger temper, then later casts his pipe into the sea because he intends to forego all such pleasures. On another day, he calls the entire crew together and speaks to them of the great white whale that deprived him of his leg, and makes them all drink and swear to kill Moby Dick, despite Starbuck's misgivings. Ishmael then describes the superstitions that surround the great white whale - that he is ubiquitous, that he is immortal, that he is sly and malicious, seeking the deaths of those who pursue him. Ahab, we are told, was so furious when the whale splintered all three of his whaleboats that he attacked the monster with the six-inch knife, losing his leg in the process and leaving him mad, though possessed of all his physical and mental faculties. His monomania was such that the members of the crew were caught up in his fervor and also longed to kill the white whale. Ishmael then speaks of whiteness as symbolic of twisted malice and death, the impersonal evil of the universe. Soon after, two crew members hear noises below decks, and are convinced that someone they have not yet seen is hidden there. Meanwhile, Ahab pores over his charts, trying to divine the location of his prey.

Days later, as Ishmael and Queequeg weave a mat and the former considers the interactions of chance, necessity, and free will, Tashtego spots a pod of whales. As the crew prepares to lower the whaleboats, five men appear from below decks, unseen previously by the sailors. They are ordered by Ahab to man a fourth whaleboat, which he personally will helm. The five are Fedallah, a Persian harpooner, and four Filipino crewmen. As the four boats begin to engage the whales, a storm engulfs them, and they lose contact. Starbuck's boat, in which Ishmael and Queequeg ride, is almost separated from the others and from the ship in the storm. For weeks after, the only whale they sight is a far-off spout seen often at midnight, which seems to lure them on, perhaps to their doom; many in the crew think it is Moby Dick.

After rounding the Cape of Good Hope, they encounter another Nantucket whaler, the *Goney*, on its way home, but are unable to communicate with them. Later, they meet a whaler called the *Town-Ho*, and hear a tale of a mutiny on board and an encounter with Moby Dick that cost the life of the first mate. Sailing northeast toward Java, the *Pequod* encounters huge beds of krill and sees the right whales that feed on it, but ignores them since their quarry is the sperm whale. They then see a rare sight - a giant squid, which because of its color they first mistake for Moby Dick. Shortly after, they encounter their first sperm whale, which is dispatched by Stubb's boat, then beheaded, sliced up and boiled down. They soon meet another whaler, the *Jeroboam*, which suffers an epidemic, proclaimed by a mad Shaker on board to be God's judgment for having attacked Moby Dick, said to be the incarnation of the madman's God. Again, in the encounter with the white monster, the mate commanding the whaleboat had lost his life. With the head of the sperm whale now hanging from the side of the ship, Ahab orders them to kill a right whale, though not strictly part of their mission, so that the two heads can balance the ship; this supposedly is good luck, assuring that the ship will never capsize. Stubb and Flask soon take their boats and kill the whale in question, but while they are bringing it in, Stubb tells Flask that he believes Fedallah to be the devil, and that Ahab had sold his soul to him in order to capture Moby Dick. In the process of emptying the oil reservoir in the head of the sperm whale, Tashtego is almost killed when he falls into the reservoir just as the head breaks loose from its moorings on the ship, but Queequeg dives down and cuts him loose, much like delivering a baby from its mother's womb. The *Pequod* then encounters the *Jungfrau*, a German ship, which, not yet having caught a single whale, begs for some oil. No sooner does the *Pequod* share its store than a pod of whales appears, but boats from both ships attack the

same whale. The crew of the *Pequod* makes the kill first, but the whale is lost when it sinks rather than floating, as most dead whales do. The *Pequod* then encounters an enormous herd of whales while going through the Malacca straits. Despite the large number of whales, the boats only succeed in killing two. Later, they meet a French whaler, the *Bouton de Rose*, which has tied up two whales that had died on their own, one of which had been wounded by Stubb's dart. The two dead whales smell horrible, and Stubb tricks the inexperienced captain into releasing the whales, telling him they are hazardous to the health of the crew. Stubb then recovers the whale he initially wounded and retrieves from it several handfuls of ambergris, a rare and expensive substance used in perfumes and hair dressings. Soon after, the *Pequod* encounters the *Samuel Enderby*, a British whaler whose commander, Captain Boomer, had lost an arm to Moby Dick a year earlier. Boomer tells Ahab that Moby Dick, when last sighted, was heading east, and Ahab immediately leaves to pursue his obsession. In descending from the deck of the British vessel, Ahab damages his ivory leg, and upon returning to the *Pequod*, orders the carpenter to make him a new one out of one of the pieces of whale jawbone stored below decks.

As the *Pequod* nears Formosa on the way to the coast of Japan, a routine check uncovers a major leak in the barrels of oil below the deck. Starbuck informs Ahab and proposes that time be set aside to repair the barrels. Ahab, insisting that he, as captain of the ship, will make all such decisions, states that he cares nothing for the loss of their cargo, but that the main purpose of the voyage must be pursued at all costs. When Starbuck demurs, Ahab threatens him with a loaded pistol, but shortly thereafter apologizes and orders the repairs to be made. In the process of cleaning out the storage area, Queequeg is taken ill with a fever, and is near to death. He asks that a coffin be made for him, and the carpenter obliges. The sick man is lifted into the coffin to see if it suits him, and he likes it very well. Surprisingly, he soon recovers and tells everyone that he had decided not to die yet. He then used the coffin for a sea-chest, and began duplicating in carvings on its lid the tattoos that covered his body. Having emerged into the Pacific, Ahab, anticipating the long-awaited conflict with the white whale, orders Perth the blacksmith to make him a special harpoon - well-tempered, stronger, and sharper than any other. When the tip is formed, Ahab cools it, not in water, but in blood given by the ship's harpooners. Weeks later, the *Pequod* meets another Nantucket whaler, the *Bachelor*, which had finished a successful voyage and was heading home full to the brim with precious oil. No contrast could be greater than that between the jolly captain of the home-bound vessel and the stern Ahab, determined to press on after Moby Dick. The next day, the crew of the *Pequod* kills four whales. As Ahab's boat waits to tow their catch back to the ship, Ahab sleeps and dreams of a hearse. Fedallah, in prophetic fashion, assures him of three things that must precede Ahab's death: he must see two hearses, one not made by mortal hands and the other made of wood grown in America; that Fedallah will die before him and be his pilot even after death; and that Ahab may be killed only by hemp. Like Macbeth, Ahab concludes from these prophecies that on this voyage he is immortal, and will surely slay the white whale. Ahab orders the *Pequod* to head for the equator, but the ship soon is engulfed by a typhoon. In the midst of the storm, Starbuck discerns three evil omens: the wind is from the east - the direction in which Ahab is taking the ship, and thus is telling them to return home; Ahab's whaleboat is broken by the storm, staved in at the place where the captain would stand; and St. Elmo's fire appears, both on the three masts and on the tip of Ahab's new harpoon - the worst of all possible omens for a sailor. When the typhoon ends as suddenly as it had begun, Starbuck goes down to the cabin to inform Ahab of the change in the weather. Outside the cabin, he considers shooting the captain with the very musket with which Ahab had threatened Starbuck earlier, and thus saving the lives of all the crew from the madman's obsession, but he can't bring himself to do it. When Ahab emerges from his cabin, he realizes that

the storm has reversed the magnetic field of the ship's compass, but he awes the ignorant mariners by making a new one out of a needle. Later, mad Pip begins prattling and is chased by the other sailors, but Ahab protects him and offers him the hospitality of his private cabin from then on - mad kindred spirits had found one another. When the ship reaches the equatorial whaling grounds, one of the crew falls from a mast into the sea and is lost; when a life-buoy is cast after him, it too sinks. Queequeg volunteers his coffin as a replacement, and the carpenter seals it and turns it into a life-buoy. In quick succession the *Pequod* meets two ships, both of which had recently had encounters with Moby Dick. First they meet the *Rachel*, which had the day before lost an entire whaleboat and its crew, including the captain's son, to the white whale ("Rachel weeping for her children, because they were not"). Ahab refuses their request for help in finding the lost boat, and presses on in search of his nemesis. As they travel, they encounter another bad omen when a sea eagle seizes Ahab's hat and drops it into the ocean. They then meet the *Delight*, which had also lost five men to Moby Dick the day before. Ahab moves quickly onward, and amidst the beauties of a clear day at sea, Starbuck tries to convince the captain to return home and give up his quest. Ahab, longing for his young wife and child, almost gives in to the chief mate's entreaties, but hardens himself and moves on in his quest.

The next morning, Ahab himself spots Moby Dick from his perch aloft. He immediately orders the boats to be lowered and gives chase, but the white whale submerges, only to rise vertically directly under Ahab's whaleboat, which he bites in half. The boats then return to the *Pequod* and continue to give chase. On the second day of the pursuit of Moby Dick, the whale announces his presence with a full breach, then attacks the three remaining boats (Ahab took Starbuck's boat, leaving the mate in command of the ship). Ahab sinks his harpoon into the great whale, but Moby Dick splinters all three boats; in the process, Fedallah is lost and Ahab's ivory leg is splintered. Back on the *Pequod*, new boats are lowered and the carpenter quickly makes Ahab a new wooden leg, and the chase continues into the third day. During the night the *Pequod* overruns the whale, which is now towing several harpoons and their ropes. Ahab turns about into the wind and continues the pursuit. When they spot Moby Dick, three boats are again lowered, and Ahab's boat alone is immediately surrounded by sharks, which clearly expect scavenging opportunities shortly. The white whale again charges the whaleboats, splintering those helmed by Stubb and Flask, but leaving Ahab's untouched. Ahab then sees Fedallah pinned by ropes to the whale's back, and realizes that this partially fulfills the Persian's prophecy - Ahab sees him again after his death, and the whale itself is the hearse not made by mortal hands. The accompanying sharks now begin biting the rowers' oars, making them smaller at each thrust. Moby Dick then turns to attack the *Pequod* itself. The monster rams it with his head and splinters the planking, causing Ahab to realize that the *Pequod* itself is the second hearse, made with wood from America. Ahab once again harpoons the monster, but is caught in the harpoon rope and dragged out of the boat; he thus dies by hemp. Meanwhile, the *Pequod* sinks below the waves, with the harpooners maintaining watch on the three masts. As the ship sinks, the sea eagle that had taken the last flag again tries to take the new one, but Tashtego holds it with his hammer, and the eagle goes down with the ship. Alone of all the crew, Ishmael survives; he does so by clinging to Queequeg's coffin, which had been turned into a life-buoy, and thus floated to the surface when the ship sank. A day later, he is picked up by the *Rachel*, marveling that the circling sharks seemed to have their mouths sealed, and did not touch him.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Ishmael - A sailor who is the narrator of the story. His name is no accident, based on the biblical character who became a homeless wanderer.
- Queequeg - A South Sea islander and harpooner who befriends Ishmael and joins him on the *Pequod*. Queequeg is a pagan who carries his small wooden idol, Yojo, with him wherever he goes. He serves as the harpooner on Starbuck's whaleboat, and his coffin is the means of Ishmael's salvation at the end of the story.
- Father Mapple - Pastor of the mariners' church in New Bedford, he preaches a resounding sermon on the book of Jonah.
- Peleg and Bildad - Chief owners of the *Pequod*; Quakers who know how to drive a hard bargain.
- Ahab - Captain of the *Pequod*, he lost his leg in a fierce encounter with the white whale Moby Dick and is obsessed with finding and killing him. In the end, he perishes, along with his entire crew, from the malice of the monster.
- Starbuck - Chief mate of the *Pequod*, a brave but cautious man, and a devout Christian.
- Stubb - Second mate of the *Pequod*, good-humored and easy-going.
- Flask - Third mate on the *Pequod*, a small and intense man who loved passionately the killing of whales.
- Tashtego - An American Indian who served as harpooner on Stubb's whaleboat.
- Daggoo - An enormous African who served as harpooner on Flask's whaleboat.
- Fedallah - A Persian who serves as harpooner in Ahab's personal whaleboat.
- Pip - Black cabin boy who jumps from a whaleboat, is temporarily abandoned, and goes mad.
- Captain Boomer - Captain of the whaler *Samuel Enderby*, he lost an arm to Moby Dick, was thankful that his life was spared, and concluded that he should no longer pursue the white whale.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“The world's a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete; and the pulpit is its prow.”
(ch.8, p.43)

“You cannot hide the soul.” (ch.10, p.54)

“All deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous, slavish shore.” (ch.23, p.113)

“Man, in the ideal, is so noble and so sparkling, such a grand and glowing creature, that over any ignominious blemish in him all his fellows should run to throw their costliest robes.” (ch.26, p.123)

“Moody stricken Ahab stood before them with a crucifixion in his face.” (ch.28, p.132)

“It feels like going down into one’s tomb for an old captain like me to be descending this narrow scuttle, to go to my grave-dug berth.” (Ahab, ch.29, p.134)

“There are whales hereabouts! If ye see a white one, split your lungs for him!” (Ahab, ch.31, p.139)

“Vengeance on a dumb brute that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous.” (Starbuck, ch.36, p.174)

“All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event - in the living act, the undoubted deed - there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there’s naught beyond. But ‘tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him.” (Ahab, ch.36, p.174)

“Drink, ye harpooners! Drink and swear, ye men that man the deathful whaleboat’s bow - Death to Moby Dick! God hunt us all, if we do not hunt Moby Dick to his death!” (Ahab, ch.36, p.177)

“The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east revered in their statue devil; - Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; 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 the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart’s shell upon it.” (ch.41, p.194-195)

“It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me.” (Ishmael, ch.42, p.199)

“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.” (ch.44, p.214-215)

“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.” (ch.60, p.301)

“Thou shalt see my back parts, my tail, he seems to say, but my face shall not be seen.” (ch.86, p.406)

“The rushing *Pequod*, freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander’s soul.” (ch.96, p.453)

“Let Ahab beware of Ahab; Beware of thyself, old man.” (Starbuck, ch.109, p.508)

“In his fiery eyes of scorn and triumph, you then saw Ahab in all his fatal pride.” (ch.124, p.554)

“Here now’s the very dreaded symbol of grim death, by a mere hap, made the expressive sign of the help and hope of most endangered life. A life-buoy of a coffin!” (Ahab, ch.127, p.564)

“I feel deadly faint, bowed, and humped, as though I were Adam, staggering beneath the piled centuries since Paradise.” (Ahab, ch.132, p.581)

“Ahab is forever 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, ch.134, p.601)

“Against the wind he now steers for the open jaw. God keep us, but already my bones feel damp within me, and from the inside wet my flesh. I misdoubt me that I disobey my God in obeying him!” (Starbuck, ch.135, p.604)

“Moby Dick seemed combinedly possessed by all the angels that fell from heaven.” (ch.135, p.608)

“See! Moby Dick seeks thee not. It is thou, thou, that madly seekest him!” (Starbuck, ch.135, p.609)

“Retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect, and spite of all that mortal man could do.” (ch.135, p.612)

“Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell’s heart I stab at thee; for hate’s sake I spit my last breath at thee. Sink all coffins and all hearses to one common pool! and since neither can be mine, let me then tow to pieces, while still

chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale! *Thus, I give up the spear!*" (Ahab, ch.135, p.612-613)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Discuss the use of foreshadowing in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Choose three specific examples of foreshadowing in the story and show how they advance Melville's themes.
2. Authors of novels often like to use the element of surprise to sustain the reader's interest, but in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, the opposite is the case. The extensive use of foreshadowing and ominous language makes the ultimate destiny of the ship and its crew clear early in the story. Why do you think Melville chose this approach? Why not keep the reader guessing about the final fate of the *Pequod*?
3. Discuss the sermon preached by Father Mapple in chapter 9 of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. How does the message express the major themes of the novel? How does it represent the effective use of foreshadowing? Be specific, using quotations from the sermon.
4. The book of Jonah plays a significant role in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. What parallels exist between the biblical story and the novel? In what ways does the message of Melville's novel differ from that of the biblical narrative? Be specific.
5. The book of Job plays a significant role in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. What parallels exist between the biblical story and the novel? In what ways does the message of Melville's novel differ from that of the biblical narrative? Be specific.
6. Compare and contrast the prophecies pronounced by Fedallah in chapter 117 of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* with those of the witches in Act IV, scene 1 of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Give attention to language, content, and the roles played by the prophecies in the respective stories.
7. Critics for years have debated about the significance of the white whale in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Does it represent God, or nature, or fate, or evil, or the evil within Ahab himself? What do you think Moby Dick represents in the story? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
8. Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* has often been published in abridged form, largely because of the book's lengthy discourses on whales and whaling that seem to contribute little to the plot. Why do you think Melville included these chapters? Do they have any value other than increasing the reader's knowledge of whaling? What impact do they have on the themes of the novel?

9. Discuss the choice of Ishmael as the narrator in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. What about his character makes him ideal for the role? What is the significance of his almost complete absence from the action of the story? Why does Melville sometimes deviate from his technique and include conversations that Ishmael could not possibly have heard?
10. Discuss the use of names in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Include the names of characters such as Ishmael and Ahab as well as the names of the ships encountered by the *Pequod*. How do these names enrich the themes of the narrative?
11. In Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, would you consider Ahab to be a tragic hero? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
12. Discuss the author's use of foils in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Choose three sets of foils, such as Ahab and Captain Boomer, Stubb and Flask, Ishmael and Queequeg, or Peleg and Bildad and discuss how the contrasts between the characters help the author develop the themes of the novel.
13. If, as many critics believe, the white whale in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* was intended to represent God, what would this then tell us about the author's view of God? Is his understanding of God a Christian one? Why or why not? Discuss the view of God that emerges from the novel and critique from a biblical perspective.
14. Respond to the following: "The God of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* is the God of the Old Testament, a fierce and inscrutable God of judgment; the book knows nothing of a God of love and mercy." Do you agree or disagree? Support your conclusions from the novel and from Scripture.
15. In a sense, all three mates aboard the *Pequod* in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* serve to delineate the character of Ahab by means of contrast. Discuss the characters of Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask, and indicate how details of their personalities and beliefs serve to set off more clearly the unique character of the captain of the ship.
16. Some critics have argued that the white whale in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* represents the uncaring malevolence of an impersonal cosmos. What in the novel would tend to support this argument? Even if you disagree with this interpretation, find evidence in the story that might be used to advance such a position.
17. Some critics have taken a psychological approach to Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, concluding that the white whale is a metaphor, not for something external, such as God or Fate, but for that within each man with which he must inevitably do battle. Thus, *Moby Dick* becomes the symbol of the evil within Ahab himself. What in the novel would tend to support this argument? Even if you disagree with this interpretation, find evidence in the story that might be used to advance such a position.

18. Discuss the issue of race as it appears in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Does the crew of the *Pequod* demonstrate and argue for racial equality, or does it perpetuate the racial stereotypes of the nineteenth century? Remember that the book was written in 1851, when slavery was still practiced in America. Support your argument with specifics from the novel.
19. Herman Melville struggled with pessimism and despair throughout most of his life. How is the personality of the author reflected in his greatest novel, *Moby Dick*? Think backwards as you write your essay. How does the worldview of the novel help us to understand the personality of its author?
20. Herman Melville for many years was a friend and neighbor of Nathaniel Hawthorne. In fact, he dedicated *Moby Dick* to Hawthorne, who had encouraged him during the writing process. Compare and contrast the views of evil presented in the greatest novels of the two authors, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. How were the two men alike in their view of evil in the world? How were they different?
21. Compare and contrast the views of evil expressed in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, written over forty years later. Pay special attention to the use of metaphors to express the pervasive presence and overwhelming power of evil in the two novels.
22. Discuss the symbolism of Queequeg's coffin in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Be sure to address the different roles it plays in the story, and what it means to different characters. How does it help the author to communicate the major themes of the novel?
23. Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* was written during the time when Romanticism was exerting a significant influence on American literature. What evidence do you see of the influence of Romanticism on the novel? Support your arguments with specific evidence from the book.
24. Discuss the view of religion presented in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Support your arguments by noting details about the various religious and non-religious characters in the story. Be sure to incorporate observations about the different religions practiced by different characters.
25. Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* is full of biblical allusions. Choose three such allusions and discuss their significance to the story, and to the themes Melville is seeking to communicate.
26. Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* is full of allusions to the works of Shakespeare. Choose three such allusions and discuss their significance to the story, and to the themes Melville is seeking to communicate.
27. French philosopher Charles Baudelaire once said, "If there is a God, He is the Devil." Would Herman Melville agree with this sentiment? Use specifics from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* to support or refute this assertion.

28. In Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, the narrator often refers to the captain of the *Pequod* as "crazy Ahab." Do you believe that Ahab was insane? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel, and be sure to counter arguments that might be raised by those who take the opposing position.
29. During the voyage of the *Pequod* in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, the ship meets a number of other whaling vessels. What is the significance of these encounters? Why does Melville include them in the story?
30. Discuss the use of the images of death and resurrection in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Choose specific instances where these images occur, and show how they contribute to the overall themes of the novel.
31. Compare and contrast the scene in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* in which Starbuck considers killing Ahab, but eventually decides not to do so, with the similar scene in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in which Hamlet has the opportunity to kill Claudius, but does not. Consider the characters and motives of the people involved, as well as the overall nature of the two plots, in building your arguments.
32. The Greek myth of Prometheus illustrates, among other things, the danger of *hubris* - an overweening pride that is inevitably punished by the gods. Discuss the role of *hubris* in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Is such pride Ahab's tragic flaw? his besetting sin? Does the story contain other characters who share the same problem?
33. Compare and contrast the madness of Ahab on the sea in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* to the madness of Lear on the heath in William Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Be sure to address the causes of the men's madness, the consequences of that madness, and the overall view of the nature of the cosmos that the two stories reflect.
34. Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* makes use of the character of the cabin boy Pip in much the same way that Shakespeare, in many of his plays, makes use of the character of the fool. Compare and contrast the role of Pip in *Moby Dick* to that of the Fool in *King Lear*. Give attention to the wisdom of the characters and their relationship to the protagonists.
35. Some critics have suggested that the crew of the *Pequod* in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* is to be viewed as a microcosm of humanity, and as such as a canvas on which the author portrays his views of man and the world. To what extent is this an accurate assessment? Choose specific incidents and quotations from the novel that would support such a reading of Melville's intentions.
36. In Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, the ship and the business at the center of the story are pointedly American. What might Melville be saying in the novel about his view of America? Consider such issues, prevalent in his day, as individualism, racism, and Manifest Destiny.

37. Compare and contrast the voyage of the *Pequod* in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* to the journey of the protagonist in Homer's *Odyssey*. Both are sea voyages, but have very different outcomes. To what extent are the themes of the stories similar? Note in particular the relationship of the protagonists to the gods and to the cosmos, and the role played by fate in the two stories.
38. Discuss the issue of friendship as it is presented in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Pay attention not only to the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg, the friendship most central to the story, but also take note of the characters who seem to lack friendships, and are thus alienated from the rest of humanity.
39. Discuss the role of prophecy in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Choose three incidents in which prophecies are given, consider the nature and accuracy of these prophecies, and connect them to the larger themes of the story.
40. Is the ending of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* optimistic or pessimistic? Consider different aspects of the denouement, including the sinking of the ship, the death of Ahab, and the survival of Ishmael (and, by implication, of his narrative).
41. In Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, has Ahab achieved reconciliation at the time of his death? Consider reconciliation with himself, with the universe, and with God. What evidence do you see that would support your conclusion?
42. Compare the captain of the *Pequod* in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* to King Ahab in the Bible. Melville clearly chose the name deliberately. What are the connections that enable knowledge of the biblical monarch to illuminate the character of the whaler? Do you see significant ways in which the characters differ?
43. Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* was written during the age of American Transcendentalism. Compare and contrast the view of nature advanced by the Transcendentalists to that of Melville in his famous novel. Be sure to cite specifics in building your arguments.
44. Discuss the use of the primal elements - earth, air, fire, and water - in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. All four have metaphorical significance in the novel. How are they used? What is their chief significance to the message of the book?
45. Herman Melville, in both *Moby Dick* and *Billy Budd*, portrays the dangers of monomania - the obsessive focus on a single person or object. Compare and contrast his treatment of the subject in his two greatest works, noting both causes, where such may be discerned, and consequences, both for the obsessed character and for those around him.
46. Compare and contrast the quests of the fishermen at the center of Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Consider the characters of the protagonists, the reasons for their quests, and especially the symbolism invested in the great marlin and the great white whale by the two authors. Should the two sea creatures be viewed as Christ-figures? Be sure to cite specifics from the two novels in your analysis.

47. Critics consider the enormous, powerful sea creatures in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* to be Christ-figures. Do you agree? What is Christlike about these two monsters of the deep? What does the symbolism in these two novels tell you about the authors' understanding of God and His relationship to man?