

ABOUT THE BOOK

“Call me Ishmael.” A schoolteacher signs on to a Nantucket whaler and finds himself under the command of Ahab, a captain who has lost a leg to a white sperm whale and means to have his revenge on it. Around that pursuit Herman Melville builds an encyclopaedia of the sea — the trades, the animals, the men — and a meditation on obsession, knowledge and fate.

First published in London and New York in 1851, the book was largely neglected in Melville’s lifetime and recognised in the twentieth century as one of the great American novels. Its mixture of narrative, drama, sermon and natural history remains unlike anything else in the language.

Between the “Etymology” at its opening and the Epilogue at its close, much of the book’s argument is carried in the chapter titles themselves.

ABOUT HERMAN MELVILLE

Herman Melville (1819–1891) was born in New York City. After his father’s bankruptcy and death he went to sea — on a merchant ship, then on whalers in the Pacific — and turned the experience into the early successes Typee (1846) and Omoo (1847). Moby-Dick (1851) was a commercial failure; after Pierre and The Confidence-Man his reputation faded and he worked for nineteen years as a customs inspector in New York, writing poetry. Billy Budd was left in manuscript at his death and published in 1924, by which time his rediscovery had begun.



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HERMAN MELVILLE



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Moby Dick

Or, The Whale

HERMAN MELVILLE

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