

## OTHER ELEMENTS

Melville's book is notoriously full of chapters that take the reader away from the narrative of the *Pequod*. In a more conventional novel, they might be called digressions, but a case might be made for their being integral to the nature of the book, which is *sui generis*. Topics include:

- Descriptions of the ship and its various parts
- Descriptions of the process of killing, dissecting, and processing whales
- Classification and anatomy of whales
- The representation of the whale in art and literature
- History
- Biblical commentary, etc.

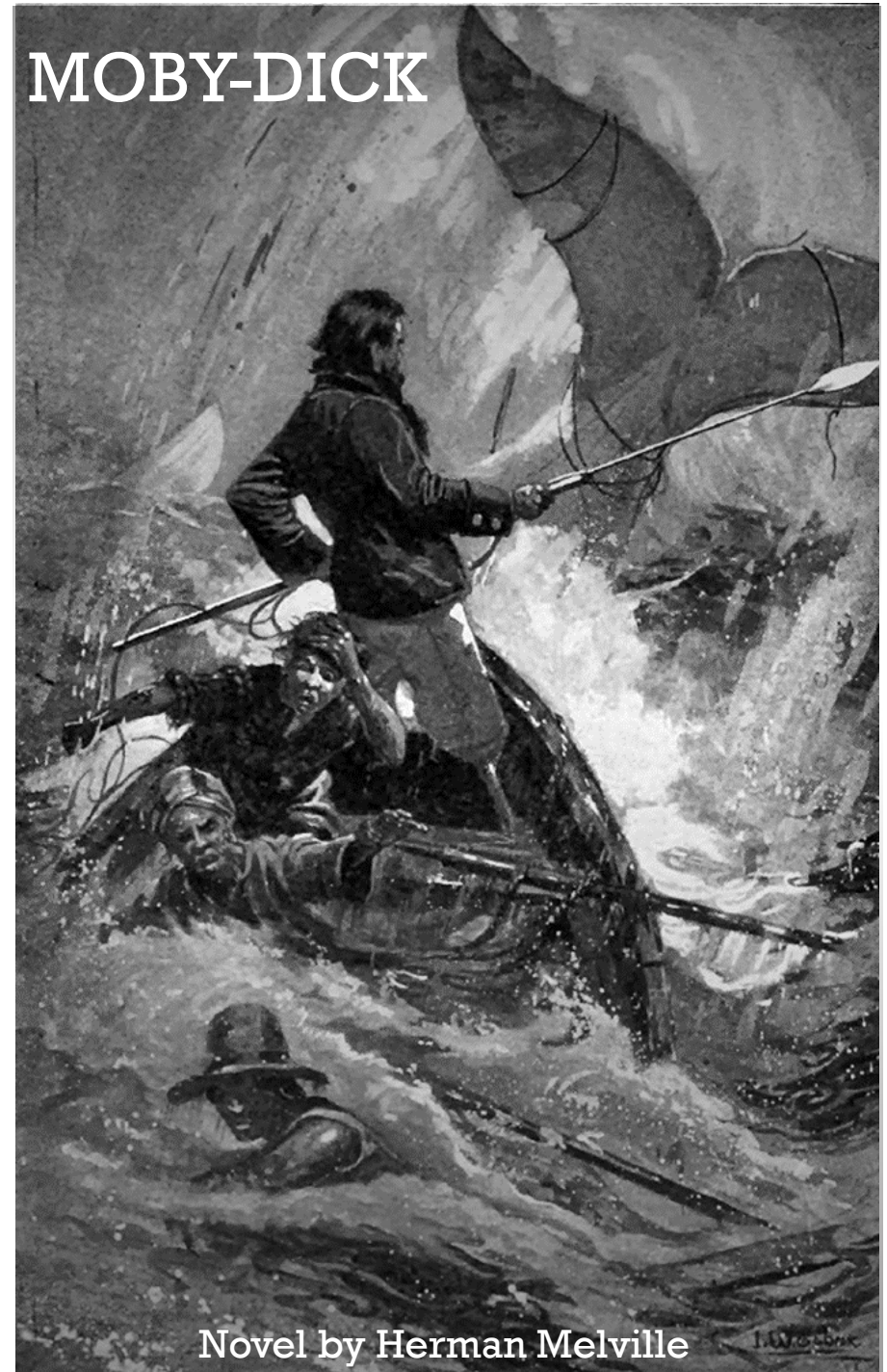
## LANGUAGE

The Wikipedia article on the novel, quoting the critical edition by John Bryant and Haskell Springer, says: "An incomplete inventory of the language of *Moby-Dick* includes nautical, biblical, Homeric, Shakespearean, Miltonic, cetological, alliterative, fanciful, colloquial, archaic, and unceasingly allusive. Melville can stretch grammar, quote a range of well-known or obscure sources, or swing from calm prose to high rhetoric, technical exposition, seaman's slang, mystic speculation, or wild prophetic archaism."

- What elements of this language are especially suited to opera?
- What aspects of the language strictly require the printed page?
- How desirable is it to maintain linguistic consistency in adapting a novel that glories in its stylistic diversity?
- In particular, what can or should be done to match Melville's use of Shakespeare, not only as the normal heightened language of Ahab, but increasingly as the language of obsession and madness?

## HUMOR

Perhaps surprisingly for such a novel, *Moby-Dick* is often a very funny book. Is there any place for humor in an operatic adaptation? Are there places where the intensity of the fate-driven story can be broken up by genre elements of a lighter or more tuneful nature?



# MOBY-DICK: INGREDIENTS IN THE NOVEL

## SETTINGS

- On land
- On board the *Pequod*. Only on deck, or include Ahab's cabin, forecabin, &c?
- In the small boats at sea

## NARRATIVE

- Pre-embarkation: Ishmael travels to Nantucket, meets Queequeg, hears a sermon, signs up on the *Pequod*, hears the warnings of Elijah [1–21]
- The *Pequod* sets sail; introduction of officers and crew [22–27]
- First appearance of Captain Ahab [28–29]
- Ahab's challenge to the crew [36]
- Thoughts of Ahab, Starbuck, Stubb, and others in the crew [37–40]
- Description of Moby Dick [41]
- The first lowering; Fedallah and yellow men come out of hiding [48–50]
- The Spirit-Spout [51]
- The first gam [53–54; also 71, 81, 91, 100, 115, 128, 131]
- The first whale kill [61]
- The *Pequod* in the Grand Armada [87]
- Pip goes overboard twice, the first without incident, but the second time he almost drowns and is insane by the time he is rescued [93]
- Lightning strikes the *Pequod*; Ahab's "magic" use of the lightning and creating a new compass [119–124]
- Queequeg in his coffin [110]
- Ahab's refusal to help Capt. Gardener of the *Rachel* look for his son [128]
- Ahab and the mad Pip [129]
- Ahab and Starbuck talk of home [132]
- The three-day chase of Moby Dick [133–135]
- Ishmael's epilogue

## CHARACTERS

- Captain Ahab
- Ishmael
- The mates: Starbuck, Stubb, Flask
- The harpooners: Queequeg, Tashtego, Daggoo
- Other crew members: Carpenter, Blacksmith, Cook, Doughboy
- Fedallah and his men
- Pip, the cabin boy
- Sailors on other ships met in the gams
- Characters encountered prior to setting sail
- Use of the operatic chorus
- Moby Dick

## IMPLICATIONS

It is clear that Melville's narrative is no mere simple telling of the story, but carries implications that resonate far beyond its confines. How explicitly may these be handled in an opera, and how should they influence the selection and treatment of characters and incidents from the story? A few of these implications include:

- Religion. Is there a God? Is there a Heaven and a Hell? How do these fit the conventional religious doctrines of established faiths and preachers?
- Fate. The increasing sense of foreboding in the novel, partly supporting the religious view, partly suggesting forces more primitive still.
- Aspiration... and the point where aspiration tips over into madness.
- The American character, both in the individual (Ahab, Starbuck, Ishmael), and in the nation (e.g. morality, pursuit of commerce).
- Contemporary history. America in the third generation after Independence, heading inexorably into Civil War.
- Race. The *Pequod* has a racially-mixed crew, including all three harpooners, but is it making specific points about race in America or slavery?