***Moby Dick***

***Chapter 10 –A Bosom Friend***

***Summary:***

* Ishmael goes back to the Spouter-Inn and finds Queequeg already there, sitting by the fire, carving the lines on the face of his sacred wooden statue a little deeper.
* When Ishmael comes in, Queequeg puts the statue away and picks up a book. He can’t read the book, but he counts the pages in groups of fifty and seems amazed at how long it is.
* Ishmael watches Queequeg with interest and decides the Queequeg may be a "savage" but is also "a simple honest heart" (10.3).
* According to Ishmael, Queequeg looks a little bit like the popular image of George Washington, at least in the shape of his head.
* Ishmael is a little bit confused that Queequeg doesn’t acknowledge him at all, especially considering that they shared a bed last night.
* However, he decides that Queequeg’s indifference is a little bit noble; even though he’s a long way from home, he seems content just to be himself and doesn’t need to make friends everywhere he goes.
* As Ishmael sits watching Queequeg he feels "a melting" in his heart and decides that he will "try a pagan friend [...] since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy" (10.5).
* Somehow, knowing Queequeg makes Ishmael feel better about the whole world.
* Ishmael tries to explain the book to Queequeg, and then they chat about the town and share a pipe of tobacco.
* After they finish smoking, Queequeg hugs Ishmael to him and says that they are "married" (10.7).
* Ishmael tells the reader that this means they are "bosom friends" who would die for each other, but there may be more to it than that (10.7).
* After supper, Ishmael and Queequeg go back to their room. Queequeg gives Ishmael the embalmed head and then takes out all his money and gives half of it to Ishmael. (Apparently, they’re going to share everything equally!).
* Next, Queequeg tries to get Ishmael to worship the statue with him.
* Ishmael thinks about this for a little while, since he doesn’t want to go against the will of God by worshipping an idol.
* In the end, Ishmael agrees to kneel before the statue with Queequeg after all, because he decides that God can’t really be jealous of a little piece of wood.
* Furthermore, Ishmael decides, if he wants Queequeg to participate in Ishmael’s own Presbyterian worship, he should observe Queequeg’s form of worship, too.
* Ishmael and Queequeg go to bed and have a cozy little chat before they fall asleep.

***Brief Analysis:***

Contemplating Queequeg’s serene comportment, Ishmael develops a great respect for his new friend, noting that “[y]ou cannot hide the soul” under tattoos and appearances. Although Ishmael still thinks of Queequeg as a savage, the latter becomes, in Ishmael’s mind, “George Washington cannibalistically developed.” Ishmael makes some small gestures of friendship toward Queequeg, and the two become friendly. He admires Queequeg’s sincerity and lack of Christian “hollow courtesies.” According to the customs of Queequeg’s home, he and Queequeg are “married” after a social smoke out of the tomahawk pipe. Queequeg gives Ishmael half his belongings, and the two continue to share a bed, having many long chats. Ishmael even consents to join in Queequeg’s idol worship, explaining to his Christian readers that he is only obeying the Golden Rule, as he would hope the “savage” to join in Christian worship with him.

***Detailed Summary:***

Describing Queequeg, he says, "He looked like a man who had never cringed and never had had a creditor. Whether it was, too, that his head being shaved, his forehead was drawn out in freer and brighter relief, and looked more expansive than it otherwise would, this I will not venture to decide; but certain it was his head was phrenologically an excellent one. It may seem ridiculous, but it reminded me of General Washington's head, as seen in the popular busts of him. It had the same long regularly graded retreating slope from above the brows, which were likewise very projecting, like two long promontories thickly wooded on top. Queequeg was George Washington cannibalistically developed." On the one hand, this builds up Queequeg as physiognomically similar to George Washington, and in Melville's time, cranial shape was considered a prime predictor of intelligence, character, and everything else essential about a person. On the other, "cannibalistically developed" reminds us that (in Ishmael's opinion, anyway) all the flesh on Queequeg's head was originally someone else's. And from that one thinks of the theological question: if on the Day of Judgement, everyone is resurrected in their re-assembled bodies, what about a cannibal whose body is entirely made up of other people's bodies? (Yes, this demonstrates a misunderstanding about how the biology of the body works, but that is the sort of theological debate people used to have.)

"Here was a man some twenty thousand miles from home, by the way of Cape Horn, that is--which was the only way he could get there--thrown among people as strange to him as though he were in the planet Jupiter." To get from Boston to Fiji around Cape Horn, one has to travel around the bulge of South America, so it is basically Boston to Recife (Brazil) to Cape Horn to Fiji, which is 4164-3247+5707 miles (according to one calculator), or 13,118 miles. Even allowing for varying from straight-line paths due to winds and currents, twenty thousand miles seems a high estimate.

We would speak of being "on the planet Jupiter" rather than "in the planet Jupiter." Given the low density of Jupiter, "in" may be more accurate, but I doubt Melville knew that.

"This soothing savage had redeemed it. There he sat, his very indifference speaking a nature in which there lurked no civilized hypocrisies and bland deceits. Wild he was; a very sight of sights to see; yet I began to feel myself mysteriously drawn towards him. And those same things that would have repelled most others, they were the very magnets that thus drew me. I'll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy." Ishmael's disdain of Christian kindness must be based on events prior to the novel, since we have not seen anything (yet, anyway) that would account for his disillusionment.

"Thus I soon engaged his interest; and from that we went to jabbering the best we could about the various outer sights to be seen in this famous town." So then comes the engagement, then ...

"He seemed to take to me quite as naturally and unbiddenly as I to him; and when our smoke was over, he pressed his forehead against mine, clasped me round the waist, and said that henceforth we were married; meaning, in his country's phrase, that we were bosom friends; he would gladly die for me, if need should be. In a countryman, this sudden flame of friendship would have seemed far too premature, a thing to be much distrusted; but in this simple savage those old rules would not apply." Even if Queequeg used the word "married", it seems odd that Ishmael would repeat it unless there were more to the ceremony than becoming the equivalent of blood brothers. And his description of Queequeg as a "simple savage" is belied by almost everything else he says about him. Or more accurately, when Ishmael is talking about Queequeg in offhand terms and generalizations, he describes him patronizingly, but when he talks about specific conversations, or actions, or beliefs, then Queequeg is his equal (if not his superior). (One example is the story of the punchbowl [later, Chapter 13, page 73], where When Ishmael is not thinking about what he is saying, he sees Queequeg as primitive and inferior, but Queequeg's story--and the fact that Ishmael relates it--indicates that when he is thinking about Queequeg he sees him entirely differently.)

It has long been argued (though probably not back to Melville's time) that knowing individuals belonging to a group makes it harder to negatively stereotype that group, and this seems to be the case with Melville. He starts out with the standard beliefs about South Sea Islanders everyone "knows," but as he gets to know Queequeg, most of them fall away.

"He made me a present of his embalmed head; took out his enormous tobacco wallet, and groping under the tobacco, drew out some thirty dollars in silver; then spreading them on the table, and mechanically dividing them into two equal portions, pushed one of them towards me, and said it was mine." Interestingly enough, Queequeg does not seem to expect Ishmael to give him a gift or to divide up his belongings.

"He then went about his evening prayers ... I deliberated a moment whether, in case he invited me, I would comply or otherwise. ... I was a good Christian; born and bred in the bosom of the infallible Presbyterian Church. How then could I unite with this wild idolator in worshipping his piece of wood? But what is worship? thought I. Do you suppose now, Ishmael, that the magnanimous God of heaven and earth--pagans and all included--can possibly be jealous of an insignificant bit of black wood? Impossible! But what is worship?--to do the will of God--that is worship. And what is the will of God?--to do to my fellow man what I would have my fellow man to do to me--that is the will of God. Now, Queequeg is my fellow man. And what do I wish that this Queequeg would do to me? Why, unite with me in my particular Presbyterian form of worship. Consequently, I must then unite with him in his; ergo, I must turn idolator. So I kindled the shavings; helped prop up the innocent little idol; offered him burnt biscuit with Queequeg; salamed before him twice or thrice; kissed his nose; and that done, we undressed and went to bed, at peace with our own consciences and all the world."

One can argue that Ishmael is merely trying to justify what is easiest for him to do. Clearly what he is doing is prohibited by the Bible (in the first of the Ten Commandments, no less!), and all his justification cannot get around that. (He could presumably argue that Jesus has negated all the commandments of the Pentateuch, but that is a bit too deep for a man such as Ishmael.) Presumably, one might agree with Ishmael that God should not be jealous of a piece of wood, but the use of the word "jealous" reminds us of the constant characterization of God as "a jealous God" in the Old Testament. And if Ishmael is "a good Christian; born and bred in the bosom of the infallible Presbyterian Church," he would be reminded of it too. But nevertheless, he does pose a valid theological question. Why should an all-powerful God care about this sort of thing? Asking God, of course, is likely to get you a non-answer such as , "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb?" [Job 38:4-8] It makes for great rhetoric, but it is not really an answer.

"How it is I know not; but there is no place like a bed for confidential disclosures between friends. Man and wife, they say, there open the very bottom of their souls to each other; and some old couples often lie and chat over old times till nearly morning. Thus, then, in our hearts' honeymoon, lay I and Queequeg--a cosy, loving pair." Well, okay, while the first couple of references to "loving" and "affectionate" might be chalked up to different times, I think it becomes apparent after a while that there is more going on than just friendship.

***Significance:***

Ishmael returns to the Spouter-Inn—Queequeg notices Ishmael’s return but ignores it—he whittles away at his idol’s nose a bit and then starts counting the pages of a book—stopping on every 50 pages (the highest he can count, Ishmael guesses) to appreciate the magnitude of the volume by the number of 50 pages it contained—Ishmael pays scrupulous attention to the man: “savage,” marred face, inviting, lots of tattoos, simple, honest heart, deep dark eyes, tokens of spirit, friendly—“He looked like a man who had never cringed or never had a creditor”—shaved head and forehead shows his emotion—phrenologically excellent head—Queequeg’s head = General Washington’s head, “cannibalistically developed”—Ishmael finds Queequeg’s lack of attention to him unfair—Queequeg doesn’t talk to the other seamen but is  rather “content with his own companionship”—Ishmael begins to feel a softening for Queequeg and tries to talk to him—uses signs, noises, and hints for communication—they talk about the night before—agree to sleep together again that night—have a social smoke from the tomahawk-pipe—smoking bonds the men—Queequeg approaches Ishmael and makes the motions to “marry” him— “married” = bosom friends—[#bromance](https://chasingflukes.com/reading_guide-overview/chapter_summaries-home/chapter-summaries-part1/#chowder)—Later, Queequeg gives Ishmael the embalmed head and half his money (15 pieces of silver) as a gift—At bedtime, Queequeg conducts his nightly prayers and ritual—Ishmael thinks he should partake in worshiping the “negro” idol—problem: Ishmael is a good Christian, not supposed to put any god before the one God (as per the First Commandment)—argument: what is worship? (why would God be jealous of a little piece of wood?); worship = to do the will of God; the will of God, the Bible says, is to do unto others as…—Ishmael decides to worship with Queequeg—[#idolator?](https://chasingflukes.com/reading_guide-overview/chapter_summaries-home/chapter-summaries-part1/#ship)—then they go to bed, “a cosy, loving pair,” but they do not “go to sleep without some little chat.”

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

[Ishmael](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ishmael) leaves the chapel at the end of the sermon and walks back to the Spouter Inn, where he sees [Queequeg](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/queequeg) by the fire, the latter having left before the sermon’s close. Ishmael watches as Queequeg prays again to his “idol,” the small wooden god, and as Queequeg then takes up a large book, one he cannot read (since he is illiterate), and pages through it, counting 50 pages at a time before starting again with the next 50. Ishmael says to himself that Queequeg is a “noble” and “good” man, even if a cannibal and a savage, and Ishmael feels a good deal of warmth toward Queequeg for this reason.

***Analysis Part 1:***

In these earlier chapters of the novel, Ishmael does seem, on occasion, to laugh inwardly at Queequeg’s “backwardness,” as here, when Queequeg demonstrates he does not actually know how to read a book. But, later on, Queequeg will repeatedly demonstrate his prowess on a whale-ship, and Ishmael will have reason to be in awe of his friend, rather than to make fun of him—even if in gentle fashion, as in this scene.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Ishmael](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ishmael), wanting to be friendly with [Queequeg](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/queequeg), shows him what the words and pictures in the book signify, and Queequeg offers that the two should share a pipe, to which Ishmael agrees. Queequeg then presses his forehead against Ishmael’s and says that the two are now “bosom friends,” meaning that Queequeg would “gladly die” for Ishmael. Ishmael says that, although the two barely know one another, it seems reasonable with Queequeg, who is so open of spirit and friendly, to commit to such deep friendship so fast. Queequeg invites Ishmael to worship his small idol. Ishmael, believing it is God’s will to do the will of one’s fellow man, and that Queequeg’s will is that Ishmael worship this idol, gladly joins in the prayers to the idol, and does not consider this a violation of his Presbyterian upbringing. Queequeg also splits his money evenly with Ishmael, and Ishmael accepts it, since he has very little cash to his name. Ishmael and Queequeg get back into bed together, and Ishmael remarks that they are as comfortable in the bed, falling asleep, as would be husband and wife.Religion Theme Icon

***Analysis Part 2:***

A very important scene in the novel. Ishmael appears to recognize a central religious truth about Christianity, as he interprets it. Namely, if a Christian God is a generous one, and wants man to be generous to his fellow-men, then, in this instance, Ishmael is right to allow Queequeg to practice his own religious rituals, and to do everything within his power to make his friend happy, so long as it does not compromise his own beliefs and practices. It sounds like a sensible idea, on Ishmael’s part, but in fact, if all men were to follow this principle, a great deal of human religious conflict would be avoided entirely. At this point in the novel, therefore, Ishmael reveals a remarkable openness of spirit, if also a certain naiveté, as to how others might treat those they find different, “exotic,” or “strange.”