***Moby Dick***

***Chapter 13 –Wheelbarrow:***

***Summary:***

* Ishmael and Queequeg leave the inn the next day; Ishmael pays with Queequeg’s money.
* The landlord and other guests are amused by their intimate friendship.
* They borrow a wheelbarrow to transport all their belongings as they go to catch a ferry called the Moss, which will take them to Nantucket.
* As they walk, everyone stares at the two men who are "upon such confidential terms" (13.2), but Ishmael and Queequeg ignore them.
* Ishmael asks Queequeg why he carries his own harpoon—don’t whaling ships come with harpoons?
* Queequeg says that he prefers his own, which has a successful history of whale slaughter.
* Queequeg tells Ishmael a story about the first time he saw a wheelbarrow.
* He didn’t know how it worked, so he tied it to his chest and carried it on his shoulders.
* When Ishmael asks if people laughed at him for this, Queequeg tells another story: back at his home on Kokovoko, the captain of a whaling ship was invited to the wedding feast for Queequeg’s sister. The captain didn’t understand the local customs and washed his hands in the punchbowl.
* Then Queequeg asks Ishmael if he thinks the Kokovoko people laughed at the captain for this blunder. We would guess—yes?
* Ishmael and Queequeg board the ferry with all of their luggage in tow, and the Moss sets sail down the river.
* On one side of the river, they see fancy houses, and on the other, whale ships at the docks.
* The boat moves into more open water, and Queequeg and Ishmael both get excited as the boat jostles and reels around.
* Eventually, Ishmael and Queequeg notice that the other passengers are making fun of them for being "so companionable" (13.7).
* Queequeg grabs one particular country bumpkin who is "mimicking him behind his back" and throws him high in the air, then turns his back on the guy and starts smoking his pipe again (13.7).
* The bumpkin tattles on Queequeg to the ferry captain, who threatens Queequeg and tells him to leave the guy alone.
* The weather suddenly gets rougher, and the bumpkin in question is swept overboard.
* Everyone panics and nobody can seem to get the ship under control—the boom (a long pole attached to the bottom of the sail) is swinging wildly around.
* Queequeg, cool-headed as always, quickly stabilizes the boom with a rope, pulls off his shirt and jacket, jumps into the sea, and rescues the bumpkin, who promptly revives.
* Everyone is grateful to Queequeg for the rescue, and the captain forgives him for what he did to the bumpkin earlier.
* Queequeg remains humble about his heroics.

***Brief Analysis:***

Together, Ishmael and Queequeg set off for Nantucket with a wheelbarrow full of their things. The people of New Bedford stare at this white man and “savage” behaving so friendly with each other. Queequeg tells Ishmael stories about the first time that he used a wheelbarrow (he picked it up instead of wheeling it) and about a white captain who attended a wedding feast on Kokovoko and made a fool of himself. On the ferry to Nantucket, a bumpkin mimics Queequeg. Queequeg flips the man around in the air to rebuke him and is subsequently scolded by the captain. A moment later, a rope in the ferry’s rigging breaks, and the bumpkin is swept overboard as the ferry goes out of control. Queequeg takes charge of the ropes to secure the ferry and then dives into the water to save the man who has gone overboard, which wins everyone’s respect.

***Analysis:***

The boarders seem amused by the sudden friendship between Ishmael and Queequeg. They borrow a wheelbarrow, and start on their way to Nantucket. Queequeg tells a funny story about the first wheelbarrow Queequeg had ever seen, and how he did not know what to do with it. Ishmael and Queequeg board a schooner to Nantucket. On this schooner, a local bumpkin mocks Queequeg, who responds by pushing him back. The bumpkin complains to the Captain that Queequeg is the devil, but the Captain merely warns him. When the bumpkin is swept overboard when the mainsail breaks, Queequeg saves him and thus receives an apology from the captain. Queequeg seems to deserve a medal for his action, but behaves quite magnanimous.

The descriptions of Queequeg as an intensely honorable and admirable character become an actuality in this chapter, in which Queequeg saves a man from drowning despite the fact that he earlier mocked Queequeg. He even behaves with dignity and great humility after doing so, refusing accolades for his bravery.

***Significance:***

"Next morning, Monday, after disposing of the embalmed head to a barber, for a block, ..." A barber's block is a wooden model of a head used for fitting wigs, so the head must be embalmed full-sized rather than a "shrunken head". (Readers unfamiliar with the term "barber's block" might parse this as Ishmael trading the head to a barber and getting a block in return.)

The punchbowl story reminds me of several similar stories--the person at a fancy dinner who when given a fingerbowl thinks it is a beverage, or the soup; the person who tears open the tea bag to make tea and, upon being admonished that that is wrong, then drop the unopened sugar packet directly into the cup; and so on. Melville's point, of course, is that culture and etiquette is arbitrary, and while he is not entirely subtle, the point is still valid.

"How I snuffed that Tartar air!" Is that the air of Tatary, or is it air that is like "a person of irritable or violent temper"?

"Lubber-like" means "like a clumsy seaman", a lubber being a clumsy seaman. This seems odd, since we think of "land-lubber" as deriving from "land-lover", but "lubber" does not mean "lover".

Queequeg, feeling himself slighted at one point, tosses a sailor in the air, and "then slightly tapping his stern in mid-somerset, the fellow landed with bursting lungs upon his feet." A "somerset" is a somersault.

***Critical Study:***

It’s Monday—Ishmael goes and settles his and Queequeg’s bill at the Spouter-Inn, but using the money Queequeg gave him the night before—Coffin, the landlord, and the other tenants find Ishmael and Queequeg’s new relationship funny—men such as these two are not normally seen as friends—the men borrow a wheelbarrow and head for the packet schooner that will take them to Nantucket—The Moss—Queequeg carries his own harpoons because he knows them and likes to recall what they have killed for him—tells Ishmael the story of the first time he encountered a wheelbarrow—he picked it up and carried it on his shoulders instead of pushing it—“Didn’t the people laugh?” Ishmael asks—Queequeg relates a story from his native island—a visitor to Kokovoko, a self-important Westerner, washed his hands in a sacred punch bowl because he saw a high priest do it and thought that was what the bowl was for—“Didn’t our people laugh?” Queequeg asks—Ishmael finally takes in the open sea—ocean = “common highway” for ships, which unlike a road or footpath leaves no records of slavish heels or hoofs—a green hand mockingly mimics Queequeg and gets busted—Queequeg grabs him up and flips him into the air— “the bumpkin” starts yelling for the “Capting!”—the Captain threatens Queequeg: “if you try any more of your tricks aboard here…,” but he should have been paying attention to his boat—the wind blows the rigging apart, causing the boom to swing wildly above deck—the bumpkin is knocked overboard—Queequeg secures the boom, getting the Moss out of jeopardy, then dives in the ocean and saves the bumpkin—everyone is grateful—Ishmael decides to stay close to Queequeg: “From that hour I clove to [him] like a barnacle”—“till poor Queequeg took his last long dive” (what?!)—Queequeg, meanwhile, doesn’t think his actions so impressive—he asks for a cup of water, takes a drink, redresses, and lights his tomahawk-pipe—“We cannibals must help these Christians.”

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Ishmael](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ishmael) pays for the inn’s room with some of [Queequeg’s](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/queequeg) money, and the two place their belongings—both their bags—into a wheelbarrow they borrow from someone on the street. As Ishmael and Queequeg walk down to the wharf, to pick up the packet-steamer Moss, which will take them to Nantucket, some people on the street stare at the apparent friendship of a white man and a “cannibal.”

***Analysis Part 1:***

Melville has prepared the reader to accept that a man from Polynesia and a man from New York City might walk together in New Bedford, or in Nantucket—these whaling and fishing towns were among the most diverse and cosmopolitan of American locales in the mid-1800s.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Queequeg](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/queequeg) tells [Ishmael](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ishmael) a story of the first time he saw a wheelbarrow, in Sag Harbor. Not knowing what to do with it, he strapped his belongings inside and strapped the wheelbarrow to his shoulders, thus carrying it through the crowds instead of wheeling it. When Ishmael wonders aloud that Queequeg must have been taken for a foreign fool, Queequeg tells another story, of a white sailor who landed on the island of Kokovoko once, and who went to a large banquet with all the island’s dignitaries. The white captain, thinking that a large punchbowl was a “finger-glass,” rinsed his hands in it, only to be laughed at by all those present, who knew the bowl was for the purpose of ceremonial drinking.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Queequeg here demonstrates an important lesson in the “relatively” of politeness and etiquette across cultures. On the one hand, in the US, Queequeg is viewed as a hopelessly crude savage, one who does not understand even the most fundamental of American customs. But Queequeg is just as quick to point out that every culture has its customs—and, therefore, that every culture has its own conception of what is polite and what is “savage.”

***Summary Part 2:***

[Queequeg](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/queequeg) and [Ishmael](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ishmael) load their belongings onto the Moss, and set out through the cold wind for Nantucket. Once the boat is underway, Queequeg finds a “young sapling,” about to set out on his first whaling voyage, making fun of Queequeg “behind his back.” Queequeg takes the young boy and throws him up in the air. The boy lands on his feet unharmed, but the captain of the Moss comes up to Queequeg and upbraids him, saying that Queequeg could have killed the boy. When Ishmael intervenes and explains to Queequeg the captain’s words, Queequeg replies that the boy was a “small fish,” and that Queequeg has no need to harm such a small creature.

***Analysis Part 2:***

The first of Queequeg’s rescues. Here, Ishmael and Melville never mention this particular boy again, but it is safe to say that Melville has inserted this scene in order to foreshadow Queequeg’s rescue of other characters in the novel, including Pip, after he falls out of Stubb’s whaling-boat. Queequeg has courage and a willingness to help others that people who see him as a savage do not. In a sense, too, Queequeg is Ishmael’s “savior,” as the life-buoy intended for him—the man’s casket—is the flotation device Ishmael uses after the Pequod sinks.

***Summary Part 3:***

But just after this conversation, the winds whip the boom back and forth, and the boom knocks the young boy off the decks of the ship. [Queequeg](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/queequeg), sensing that the boy might drown, throws a line around the boom to steady it, and jumps into the water, finding the boy beneath the waves and swimming him back to the Moss, and to safety. The boy and the captain are thankful for Queequeg’s efforts, and Ishmael remarks to himself that, after this moment, he “clove to Queequeg like a barnacle.” Queequeg accepts only fresh water as repayment, and calmly smokes his tomahawk-pipe on deck.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Queequeg’s virtue and courage are characterized by an inability to glory in his achievements. Where other sailors might attempt to use their “rescues” in order to advance their careers, or perhaps to lighten their other duties aboard the vessel, Queequeg is content to do a good deed, to receive some small recognition for it, and to carry on with himself.