***Moby Dick***

***Chapter 25 – PostScript***

***Summary:***

* Ishmael adds one more point that to make whaling seem dignified, nay, *royal*: the oil used at royal coronations *must* be whale oil, right? And so the British kings and queens have all been anointed with oil that comes from the work of common seamen on stinking whaling ships.
* (Note: this may or may not be true—in fact, it probably isn’t true. But it’s hilarious.)

***Synopsis***:

Ishmael adds some speculation to the previous chapter’s “facts.” He reminds the reader that sperm whale oil is used in the coronation of royalty, and suggests that sperm oil has been used to anoint kings because it is the best, purest, and sweetest of oils.

***Brief Analysis(Ch24-25):***

Ishmael interrupts his narrative to speak as an advocate for the dignity of the whaling industry and whales. He argues that whaling is a clean and upright profession that brings considerable profit to the economy. Whalers have expanded our understanding of the globe through exploration. The whale is important to world literature. Even kings and queens rely on whale oil for their coronations.

This is the first of more than forty chapters in which Ishmael halts the flow of the narrative to discuss some aspect of cetology (the study of whales), the whaling business, or the whale's reputation. Modern readers might well wonder why he does this. First, Ishmael tells us early on that he is going to sea to learn more of whales and whaling. He hopes to establish this as a worthwhile topic; that is why he refers to biblical sources such as the Book of Job or the Book of Jonah, here and throughout the novel, which add to the whale's reputation. Further enhancing the status of whales, he alludes to Alfred the Great (849-99 a.d, king of Wessex 871-99) who ended the Danish conquests in England; promoted English culture; and, Ishmael argues, wrote about whales. In addition, Melville grounds his story in reality by his sections on cetology. He wants to create at least the illusion of fact in the novel, and he does an admirable job of convincing the reader that these events could occur.

Finally, the reader should notice that the narrator is having a good time. For the most part, these chapters on cetology are not dull, dry, tedious accounts. The tone is light-hearted and sometimes even silly. In the chapter "Postscript," Ishmael argues that the whaling industry provides royalty with "coronation stuff" because the oil used to anoint a new king or queen probably is whale oil: "Think of that, ye loyal Britons!" avers the very American Ishmael.

Ishmael argues like a formal debater or a lawyer speaking to a jury, but his goal is to entertain as well as to inform. We might remember that Melville's audience in the 1850s consisted of more patient readers; they almost certainly had longer attention spans than we have today. A good book might last the winter, and Ishmael's wit would provide a welcomed break.

Glossary

superfluous excessive, more than is needed.

puissant powerful.

anoint to put oil on in a ceremony of consecration.

***Analysis:***

Ishmael notes that the same oil used for the coronation of kings is sperm oil in its unmanufactured, unpolluted state.

This chapter is essentially as its title states, a postscript; this is important for stylistic integrity, lending integrity to the essay style of the previous chapter in its complete form.

***Significance(Ch 24-25):***

The *Pequod* is well underway, and [Ishmael](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/#Ishmael) takes a few moments to explain the virtues of the whaling industry. He notes that people think those in the whaling industry are disreputable because they work in dirty conditions and are uncouth; but as soldiers, whose job is at least as bloody and dirty as whaling, they come home to a hero's welcome. He also explains that whaling is a very profitable business, and that whale ships have aided in exploration of Earth to its most remote parts. In increasing enthusiasm for whales and whaling, he argues vehemently against several other beliefs about why whales and whaling are unimportant or undignified. Chapter 25 provides an additional thought about this topic. In his role of advocate for whaling and whalemen, Ishmael points out that it is oil from whales that is used in the coronations of Britain's kings.

This section introduces [Ishmael](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/#Ishmael) as the advocate of whales and whaling, a side of Ishmael that will emerge again and again throughout the novel. He believes that whales and whalemen are misunderstood and disrespected, so he argues for a more respectful attitude toward them. This sometimes takes the form of protesting against some misconception he thinks people have. At other times, it takes the form of elaborate descriptions of whales or whaling processes, meant to show that the whales are noble and awe inspiring, and the whalemen are hardworking, courageous, and clean.

***Analysis in Detail(Ch 22-25):***

The Pequod sets sail around noon that day after Charity brings her final gifts of a nightcap for Stubb and a spare Bible to the crew. Captains Peleg and Bildad are still in charge of the ship and give orders. Captain Ahab has not yet made an appearance. The crew says Ahab has been sick and is not yet completely recovered, that is why he does not leave his quarters. Orders are given to take down the tent Peleg has occupied on the deck of the ship, and raise the anchors. Peleg orders about the ship in such a fashion that Ishmael involuntarily stops working in shock and leans for a moment on his handspike. At this point, Peleg kicks Ishmael in the rear and asks him if that was how he worked on the merchant ships. Peleg continues around the ship ordering the workers and using his foot whenever he felt necessary. As the ship makes its way out of the harbor and into the Atlantic, the time comes for Peleg and Bildad to go back to shore on the sailboat. They both seem uncomfortable and apprehensive at the separation but say their goodbyes and leave the ship in the hands of Ahab.

In the next short chapter, Ishmael tells of a man named Bulkington who is on board the ship. Ishmael draws a parallel between Bulkington and the ship. Even though the harbor and land provide warmth and comfort, if the ship is dashed upon the land in a storm, it would mean certain destruction. Ishmael believes it would be better to die at sea than be dashed against the shores.

In Chapters 24 and 25, Ishmael attempts to convince the average man of the importance and nobility of those who hunt whales. This tangent leads Ishmael to compare the virtues of the whaling profession those of the military. Ishmael asserts whaling is a noble profession and that some who have worked on whaling ships have even had noble blood flowing through their veins. In addition, Ishmael notes that at the coronation of kings, it is sperm whale oil that is used to anoint the king's head. Ishmael indicates there would be none of this oil if it weren't for whalemen.

In the first part of this chapter, Ishmael is busy studying the actions of Captain Peleg and Bildad and too surprised by Peleg's crassness to do his own work. As a result, he gets kicked in the rear as a punishment. Although the boat and men are covered with a freezing spray, Ishmael tries to set a pleasant tone, commenting that he is looking forward to happy times on the ship. The chapter ends dismally, however, as the men give heavy-hearted cheers as the ship heads out.

Chapter 23 appears to be a transition chapter between leaving harbor and being at sea. Ishmael praises a man by the name of Bulkington who seems unable to stay away from the sea. Ishmael indicates Bulkington will die at sea and this brief chapter in the book will be his only epitaph. Ishmael compares a ship sailing on rough seas to a person's soul. People choose to stay in a life full of turmoil because by giving up the fight, they would be committing moral suicide.

In Chapters 24 and 25, Ishmael defends the whaling industry as honorable employment. Ishmael seems to have the mindset that ordinary people look down their noses on this profession. Therefore, he seems moved to use his scholarly knowledge to prove whaling has had positive impacts on all of mankind.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Ishmael](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ishmael) includes a brief addendum to his previous chapter, asking the reader whether he or she knows that oil is used to anoint the heads of kings when they are invested with the throne, and that, furthermore, the oil used for these services comes from the whale. This, Ishmael implies, is a testament to the inherent nobility of the act of whaling, and of the products whaling provides to humankind.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Another of Ishmael’s small fugues, or tangential descriptions. This time, Ishmael makes clear that whaling is not just metaphorically “royal”—it is, in fact, bound up with the ceremonies that constitute royalty itself, throughout the world.