***Moby Dick***

***Chapter 29 – Enter Ahab; To Him, Stubb***

***Summary:***

* Notice that the title of this chapter is a stage direction, so we should probably be thinking about ways that the novel is starting to resemble a play.
* Also notice that this is the first chapter where Ishmael seems to have completely disappeared as narrator. He’s been fading away for a few chapters now, but in this chapter we don’t get any first-person pronouns, Ishmael doesn’t do anything, and the events in this section, especially Stubb’s monologue, seems to be things that Ishmael couldn’t have witnessed.
* The *Pequod* keeps sailing south and the weather becomes consistently pleasant and beautiful.
* Captain Ahab spends more and more time on deck, especially at night. He seems to live on deck and just visit his cabin below, which feels "like going down into one’s tomb" to him (29.2).
* At night, when everyone working on deck is trying to be quiet so the others can sleep below, Captain Ahab avoids walking on the quarter-deck (where the captain usually gets to pace around) because the sound of his bone leg would disturb everyone beneath.
* One evening, Ahab can’t resist and does start pacing on the quarter-deck. Stubb comes up and tries to suggest that he knock it off, or that perhaps he could put something on the end of his leg to muffle the sound.
* Ahab freaks out at Stubb, calls him a dog, and orders him below to his kennel.
* When Stubb objects to this, Ahab calls him "a donkey, and a mule, and an ass" and repeats the order to go below decks (29.7).
* Stubb heads back down into the ship toward his cabin, shaken and surprised at the way he’s been treated.
* At first he just seems angry, but the more he talks about it to himself, the more he appears afraid of Ahab’s bizarre behavior.

***Synopsis***:

Ahab does indeed seem psychologically troubled. He maintains a total dictatorship on board. He is restless and paces the deck, and the striking of his peg leg on the wood echoes throughout the ship. When Stubb complains about Ahab’s pacing, Ahab calls him a dog and advances on him. Stubb retreats. This chapter is short and dramatic, as the stage-direction title implies.

***Brief Analysis:***

Some days elapse and the Pequod reaches the bright Quito spring in the Tropics. Every twenty-four hours at night Ahab would aid the sailors with the rope, a "touch of humanity" in him. When Stubb makes a joke at Ahab's expense, Ahab sharply reprimands him and calls him a donkey, then a mule. He finally kicks Stubb. Stubb wonders how Ahab seems to sleep only three hours each night, and says that Ahab is afflicted with "what some folks ashore call a conscience." Stubb admits that "coming afoul of that old man has a sort of turned me wrong side out."

The occasion details marking Ahab's friendly or cordial behavior serve not to humanize Ahab, but instead to emphasize how separate and distinct he remains from the rest of the crew. Whenever he performs a kindly action it is a departure from his conventional behavior and thus notable. More appropriate to Ahab's demeanor is his stern treatment of Stubb, which instills a great fear and loathing in him. Melville even portrays Ahab as a person who does not even need to follow conventional human behaviors, living on barely any sleep. However, Stubb draws an interesting conclusion from this behavior by Ahab, finding that this is evidence that Ahab has a conscience. This suggests that particular human qualities may exist within Ahab, despite his stoic and harsh behavior; in particular, Ahab is a haunted man, afflicted by his experiences and obsessed with these.

***Analysis:***

“[I]cebergs all astern,” the *Pequod* sails into “the bright Quito spring”—a dreamy redundancy has taken over the days on the ship—”For sleeping men, ’twas hard to choose between such winsome days and such seducing nights.”—the changing weather continues to wrought changes in Ahab—he is restless,pacing the decks by night—sometimes there’s a show of “humanity”: when the men are asleep Ahab stays off of the upper decks to prevent them dreaming of the crunching teeth of sharks—still, he mostly avoids his cabin—“It feels like going down into one’s tomb” —Once, when Ahab does venture out on deck he is met by humorous Stubb, who says that being the captain Ahab could do as he pleased, but Stubb also hints that there might be some way of muffling the noise—Creek, Thunk! Creek, Thunk! Creek, Thunk!—angered by the suggestion, Ahab faces down Stubb—“Am I a cannon-ball, Stubb….that thou wouldst wad me that fashion?”—“Down, Dog, and Kennel”—Stubb doesn’t take kindly to the mistreatment—“I will not tamely be called a dog, sir”—“Then be called ten times a donkey, and a mule, and an ass, and be gone, or I’ll clear the world of thee”—this violent retort sends Stubb into his head, to contemplate his next course of action—”A hot old man! I guess he’s got what some folks ashore call a conscience; [it’s a kind of Tic-Dolly-row they say—worse nor a toothache](https://chasingflukes.com/reading_guide-overview/glossary-contents/29tic-dolly-row/)“—a queer fellow that Ahab, he thinks—actually, comes to think of them, all things are queer—Stubb is disturbed by the exchange and decides to sleep on it—”so here goes to hammock again; and in the morning, I’ll see how this plaguey juggling thinks over by daylight.”

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Ahab](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ahab) often walks the quarterdeck at night, when only the night-watch sailors are about, since he cannot sleep well in the evenings. The Pequod is drawing toward the Equator and Quito (capital of Ecuador), and the night-air has turned warmer and more pleasant. As Ahab paces the quarterdeck, his ivory leg scrapes against the wood and often wakes the sailors. But when [Stubb](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters) goes above to tell Ahab, gently, that this is the case, Ahab curses him, calls him a dog, and tells him to “sleep in his grave” below the deck. Stubb takes umbrage at being called a dog, but Ahab again shouts him down, and Stubb retreats to the belowdecks.

***Analysis Part 1:***

One of the under-heralded aspects of the novel is its humor, and in this instance, the reader is reminded that Ahab’s peg-leg would naturally cause the wood to resound below decks as he paces in the night. Stubb appears the best suited, of the three mates, for speaking to Ahab, since Stubb does not feel it necessary to amend his statements in order to please the captain. Yet Stubb is no match for Ahab.

***Summary Part 2:***[Stubb](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters), talking to himself as he walks back to sleep, says that [Ahab](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ahab) is the strangest captain he has ever seen. Stubb also repeats what another sailor has told him: that Ahab’s bunk is often disturbed the morning after he sleeps, indicating that Ahab tosses and turns the whole night long. Stubb wonders what must be wrong with the old man, and vows to find out at some point during the voyage.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Ahab’s inability to sleep soundly will continue throughout the novel, until, by the chase sequence spanning the final three chapters, Ahab is not sleeping at all, but is instead keeping an all-night vigil, in case Moby Dick should reappear at any moment. It is characteristic of Stubb that he is not terrified but more interested or amazed by Ahab's strange behavior.