***Moby Dick***

***Chapter 37 – Sunset***

***Summary:***

* Note that this chapter has stage directions at the beginning and in the middle. From now through Chapter 40, the novel will take on the style of a play.
* For this chapter only, the novel shifts into first-person narration from Captain Ahab himself. Since the novel is temporarily turning into a play anyway, you can think of it as a soliloquy, a dramatic monologue laying out the internal reflections of a character.
* Ahab notes that he seems to turn everything around him paler.
* Ahab imagines himself wearing the "Iron Crown of Lombardy," which was used to crown the Holy Roman Emperors and was supposed to contain a nail from Jesus' cross. He feels like the jagged edge of the metal is digging into his forehead.
* Ahab can’t enjoy the sunset, although he knows it’s beautiful. He seems to have lost the power to enjoy things.
* Ahab is surprised that nobody seriously objected to his plan of revenge. He knows that he’s somewhat crazy, but he can’t change his plans at this point. He’s going to run over everything that gets in the way of his quest for the white whale.

***Synopsis:***

“Sunset” begins with a stage direction that sets Ahab alone near a window and consists of a melancholy soliloquy by Ahab. He notes that everyone thinks that he is mad and that he agrees with them to a certain extent. He self-consciously calls himself “demoniac” and “madness maddened.” He reveals that it was foretold that he would be dismembered by a whale. He proclaims, however, that he will be both “prophet” and “fulfiller” of Moby Dick’s destiny. He accepts the inequality of the battle and challenges Moby Dick, claiming that the whale cannot avoid his fate: “The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run.”

***Critical Study:***

Ahab sits alone in the cabin by the stern windows, gazing outward. This chapter is told from the perspective of Ahab, who claims that there was once a time when the sunrise nobly spurred him, but no more. He considers what he has dared and willed, and what he will do, despite the fact that Starbuck may think him mad. Ahab calls himself "madness maddened."

With Moby Dick yet to appear, Melville develops the primary conflict of this section to be the struggle of Ahab against his intense desire to defeat the white whale. These internal thoughts by Ahab are significant, for they demonstrate that Ahab has a sense of self-awareness concerning his supposed madness; he is not a man completely possessed by his need for justice, but a man who realizes his faults and in some sense attempts to suppress them.

***Analysis:***

[Captain Ahab](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/#Captain_Ahab) in Chapter 37 says that "all loveliness is anguish to me" and that he will do what he has decided to do even though his men, especially [Starbuck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/#Starbuck), may think him mad. He is not mad, he says; rather, he is "madness maddened." He swears to "dismember my dismemberer."

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

***Summary Part 1:***

This short chapter is told from the perspective of [Ahab’s](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ahab) internal monologue, and has him sitting alone in his cabin, reciting to himself that, although [Starbuck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/starbuck) appears worried about the Pequod’s new mission, Ahab will exact revenge against [Moby Dick](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/moby-dick), and “dismember” his “dismemberer.” Ahab vows that “the path to his fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon his soul is grooved to run,” meaning he will stop at nothing to achieve his goal of killing Moby Dick.

***Analysis Part 1:***

A beautiful sentence in the novel—that Ahab’s purpose “is fixed . . . with iron rails, whereon his soul is grooved to run.” One of the particularly exciting features of the novel is its insistence on densely-patterned, “poetic” language, in descriptions of internal states and external landscapes. This sentence is a grand example of Melville’s descriptive abilities (not to mention the importance of trains at the time of the novel's writing).