***Moby Dick***

***Chapter 40 – Midnight, ForeCastle***

***Summary:***

* This chapter is a full-on dramatic scene with stage directions, playbook-style dialogue—the whole thing.
* The crew of the *Pequod* who are on watch are standing, lying, and leaning all over the deck, singing a song about Spanish ladies. They’re an extremely multicultural bunch.
* The first Nantucket Sailor tells them not to be sentimental and changes the lovey-dovey song about girls to a whaling ballad.
* The mate’s voice (we don’t know which mate) is heard calling "eight bells" (midnight).
* The second Nantucket sailor orders Pip to strike the bell and summon the next watch, or shift, to come on duty.
* A French sailor suggests that everyone who was on this shift have a dance before they go to bed and orders Pip to get his tambourine.
* Pip doesn’t know where his tambourine is. Some of the sailors object, saying the plank floor isn’t good to dance on and that there aren’t any girls.
* The Long Island sailor is willing to dance whenever he can. The Azores Sailor brings Pip his tambourine.
* Pip plays, and some of them dance; some go to bed below decks; some sleep where they are.
* Tashtego is off to the side smoking. He thinks the white men are silly for wasting their energy.
* The Old Manx sailor wonders if these young men ever think about the fact that they’re dancing over other sailors’ ocean graves, but he figures they might as well dance anyway.
* The crew exhausts themselves and stop dancing. The wind picks up.
* The Maltese sailor thinks the waves heave like the bosom of a woman. This theme finds an appreciative audience, to say the least, and eventually they’re talking about Tahitian dancing girls.
* The storm gets worse and the ship is making all sorts of alarming cracking noises, but as long as it’s flexible and has a little give to it, the sailors know it will hold together.
* Ahab’s orders are apparently to steer right into a storm to pass through it.
* The Old Manx sailor sees bad omens everywhere and points out a strange bright mark in the sky that looks like Ahab’s birthmark; everything else is black.
* This leads to some racist comments from the Spanish sailor.
* Daggoo, understandably, is offended and they begin fighting with knives.
* Tashtego points out that gods and men are both brawling—the gods with the storm and the Spanish sailor and Daggoo with their knives.
* One of the mates orders everyone to reef, or tie down, the topsails and the sailors all abandon the fight in order to keep the ship afloat amidst the storm.
* The little black tambourine-playing boy Pip is left alone, trying to find shelter from the storm under the windlass (a mechanism for hauling heavy weights), worrying about the ocean’s white squalls and the white whale and praying to the white God to keep him safe.

***Synopsis:***

“Midnight, Forecastle” is scripted like a scene from a play and presents the sailors, all of different nationalities, showing off and singing together. They get into a fight when a Spanish sailor makes fun of Daggoo. The onset of a storm, however, halts their fighting and makes them tend to the ship. Pip asks the “big white God,” who may be either God or Ahab, to “have mercy on this small black boy.”

***Analysis(Ch32-40):***“Cetology” seems to be a grandiose digression, a way for Ishmael to show off his knowledge and his literary bent. The use of publishing terminology (the category names Folio, Octavo, and Duodecimo come from the different sizes of books produced by nineteenth-century printers) suggests the arbitrariness of human attempts to understand and classify the natural world. For Ishmael, though, the meaning lies not in the final classification but in the act of classifying, which signifies hope and resistance to futility. The classification also suggests that humans, in their imperfection, need such aids to understanding, lest they be lost in a deep and fathomless sea of information and phenomena.

With the statement of his quest, Ahab reveals his motivation to be considerably more complicated than resentment at losing his leg. Ahab’s desire to strike at the world’s malevolent agency indicates his profound intelligence and the philosophical reach of his mind; he looks for hidden realities beneath superficial appearances. At the same time, his sentiments suggest delusion and madness. One of the puzzling questions presented by his soliloquy is whether God is the malevolent agency against which Ahab seeks to strike out. Ahab echoes both Hamlet, in his probing of the metaphysical truths underlying everyday appearances, and Iago, in his absolute rejection of piety and morality and his manipulation of others in pursuit of his goal. In any case, Ahab strives to exceed the limits proscribed for human beings by conventional morality and religion.

Beginning with Chapter 36, the chapters in this section feature stage directions and other devices borrowed from plays. These elements heighten the reader’s awareness that the book is becoming more dramatic: conflicts emerge between the characters, and Ahab self-consciously gives a performance to unite and manipulate his crew. These chapters often echo Shakespeare, both in their general style and in specific allusions to Shakespeare’s plays. Ahab’s soliloquy, in particular, masterfully imitates Shakespearean cadences and rhythms. Both Ahab and Starbuck are given soliloquy-style monologues in these chapters, each getting the chance to plead his case to the audience, as it were, as eloquently as he can.

***Critical Analysis:***

The various harpooners and sailors sing in chorus "farewell and adieu to you, Spanish ladies." They sing "our captain stood upon the deck, / a spy glass in his hand, / a viewing of those gallant whales / that blew at every strand." Sailors from various nationalities give their various thoughts on the voyage. The crew cheers at the impending arrival of the white whale.

Despite the definite feelings of misgiving on the part of Starbuck and the distrustful narrator's voice of Ishmael, there is little atmosphere of gloom and foreboding among the rest of the crew concerning Ahab's obsession with the whale. This chapter describes the cheerful reaction of the crew, who eagerly anticipate their adventure. This is significant, for Melville prepares the reader for the eventual doubts of the crew concerning Ahab's quest against Moby Dick.

***Analysis(Ch37-40):***Around midnight in Chapter 40, the crew are all "standing, lounging, leaning, and lying in various attitudes," singing together. Sailors from many different nations are represented in the crew, and they dance, talk, and argue. As the dancing winds down, the wind picks up, and soon they are coming into a storm. As the storm gets worse, the crew have to begin tying down the sails in order to weather it.

[Chapters 37–40](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/chapters-37-40-summary/) give glimpses into the events following [Captain Ahab](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/#Captain_Ahab)'s big announcement. They depart from [Ishmael](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/#Ishmael)'s first-person narrative and are structured like sections of a play, including stage directions. First readers get a peek into what Ahab, [Starbuck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/#Starbuck), and [Stubb](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/" \l "Stubb) are thinking, in their own words: Chapters 37–39 are each spoken in first person, first by Ahab, then by Starbuck, then by Stubb. Chapter 40 focuses on the crew and their revels.

Ahab's words paint a picture of a man with an absurdly grand sense of his own importance. He fancies that he is a king wearing an iron crown, and that he has greater power, will, and perception than ordinary men. Yet his importance and his mission—to "dismember my dismemberer"—are also exhausting and consuming: "time was, when as the sunrise nobly spurred me, so the sunset soothed. No more. This lovely light, it lights not me; all loveliness is anguish to me, since I can ne'er enjoy." Despite Ahab's clear madness (not just your average madness, as Starbuck may think, but "madness maddened"), this look into the inner workings of his mania encourages readers to see his humanity.

When Starbuck speaks, he reveals how trapped he feels by the situation—he's given his oath to obey a man who he now knows is a madman, and he has no choice but "to obey, rebelling; and worse yet, to hate with touch of pity." He also expresses his distaste for the crew's enthusiasm for Ahab's quest.

The contrast between Ahab and Starbuck in these chapters sets the stage for later confrontations and tension between them.

***Critical Study(37-40):***

As evening turns into night, various characters react to the events of the day. At sunset, Ahab, in his cabin, is pleased with the ease with which he swayed the crew and is outspoken in his determination. At dusk by the mainmast, Starbuck feels incapable of changing his captain's plan and is resigned to his role. At the night's first watch (8 p.m.) atop the foremast (nearest the front of the ship), Stubb's reaction is to laugh at the absurdity of it all. At midnight, in the forecastle some of the crew and harpooners are still partying and drinking wine.

In these chapters, Melville continues to present dramatic scenes, using brief stage directions, soliloquy, and dialogue. There is no narration from Ishmael. In addition to progressing the plot, Melville is able to offer the reader character insights through the thoughts and speech of Ahab, Starbuck, Stubb, and assorted crewmen.

Through his cabin windows at the back of the ship, Ahab can see the "white and turbid wake" of the ship's passing and thinks of it as his own momentous impress on the world. His vanity includes an apparent pride in being what he calls "demoniac"; as he says, he is "madness maddened!" He mocks the gods and is determined to be both the prophet of his revenge and its executioner.

Starbuck's response contrasts with most of the crew's in a revealing way. The first mate recognizes that he is no match for his captain and is resigned to Ahab's "Heaven-insulting purpose"; yet he fears the ominous future. Stubb typically tries to laugh at the "predestinated" situation and sings a drinking song. Most of the rest of the crew, representing various parts of the world, are content to party past midnight; they seem oblivious to their journey into doom. An exception is young Pip, the cabin servant who finds terror where the rest see cause for "jollies." We will learn more about his insights in Chapter 93.

Glossary

turbid thick, dense, and dark.

whelp a puppy or cub.

eight bells here, midnight, the end of the watch that began at 8 p.m. The ringing of a bell marks each half hour of the watch.

***Analysis(Ch 37-40):*** Ahab is alone in his cabin thinking over the events of the meeting with his crew. He admits to himself he expected to find at least one to be distrustful of his plan as Starbuck was. Ahab notes that he no longer finds pleasure in life and seeks only vengeance. Although the men may think Ahab is mad, he knows he is mad. In addition, Ahab indicates that the loss of his leg was prophesized before it happened and he chose not to heed the warning. Ahab now prophesizes that he will dismember the whale as the whale dismembered him.

Starbuck leans against the main mast thinking back over the scene that just played out before him. Although he wants to disobey Ahab and go against his orders, he feels in a way tied to the man and obligated to do his bidding. Starbuck indicates his only hope is rooted in the size of the sea. Since the whale has the whole ocean to swim in, he reasons, there is always the chance the ship and the whale will not meet up during their voyage. As Starbuck mulls things over on deck, he hears the reveling of the crew below. He wonders if any of them have any humanity in them at all and wonders how they could so easily follow such a mad man. Also, he admits that he now knows the true horror that life can hold.

When alone with his thoughts, Stubb admits all he can do is laugh about the circumstances in which he finds himself. He says it is the only way to handle what is queer about life. Stubb takes the mindset that if he is predestined to be on board a ship commanded by a mad man, then that is his destiny. There is nothing he can do about it.

The remainder of the ship's crew aboard the ship is busy with their merry making and dancing. Their talk soon turns to women. A fight is about to break out between Daggoo and a Spanish sailor when the men are called to man the boat because a squall has blown up. Pip, a small boy who plays the tambourine for the dancing ends the chapter by praying for the safety of the men on board the ship, even those who don't have the sense to feel fear.

While they were with Ahab, all of the crew except Starbuck showed reckless excitement at the idea of chasing Moby Dick to his death. These four chapters shed light on the inner thoughts of two of the headsmen and one of the crewmembers after they have had time to think about Ahab's announcement. Starbuck has already shown displeasure with Ahab's plan. He believes the only hope is that Ahab will not be able to find Moby Dick in the great expanse of the sea. Stubb, on the other hand, can only laugh at the queerness of it all. In line with the theme of fate that threads through the novel, Stubb believes that if it is his fate to be involved in this doomed mission, he has not choice but to be involved.

The rest of the crew revels and makes merry after Ahab leaves them. They seem to have no thoughts about the futility of the deed they have just agreed to. Just as the men are about to break into a fight, a squall breaks up and the crew is called to work. After they leave, Pip, a small black boy prays for the safety of these men whom he says, "have not the bowels to feel fear." It should be noted some people, especially those in Old Testament times, considered the bowels to be the seat of the emotions, hence Pip's reference to the men's bowels. Pip also refers to God as white, a common misrepresentation but one that strengthens the idea that all commanders, including God, must be of Caucasian descent.

Also, Melville sets these chapters up in the form of play complete with stage directions. The soliloquies presented by Ahab, Starbuck and Stub much mimic ones Shakespeare might have written for one of his plays. Melville may present this particular section of the book in this way because it is the only way to allow each character to speak for himself in private without the narration having to pass though Ishmael. For the remainder of the book, Melville returns control of the narration to Ishmael.

***Analysis-Study(Ch32-40):***In these chapters, the real cause of Captain Ahab's obsession becomes clear. He tells the crew that they will find and kill the white whale Moby Dick...or die trying.

Captain Ahab's Quest

Is there a cause worth dying for? Captain Ahab, the morose, brooding captain of the whaling ship Pequod, has such a cause. He has vowed to follow the white whale Moby Dick until he has his revenge, whatever the cost to his crew, his boat, or himself. Let's explore Chapters 32-40 of Herman Melville's 1851 classic, Moby-Dick.

Chapter 32-33: Cetology and Specksynder

The narrator thinks about cetology, or the study of whales. Instead of real information, though, the chapter is a list of complaints about why studying whales is difficult. So, he'll make a new system where he classifies the whales into three groups by size. Sperm whales, of course, are the biggest and the best.

Then, the narrator talks about whaling itself. Each person on the ship has a different role, like the specksynder, a sort of harpooner. We hear about Captain Ahab's strict discipline. The narrator grumbles about Captain Ahab using the ceremonies of the ship for his own gain, and muses that he's not a king, so he shouldn't act like one.

This section serves to let the reader know about two things: first, that protagonist Ishmael considers himself an expert on whales and whaling, but really is not, and second, that Captain Ahab is not the excellent leader he should be. There is also the foreshadowing of the white sperm whale being the biggest, best, and most ferocious. The reader knows that a white sperm whale will play a large part in the action of the story.

Chapter 34: The Cabin-Table

At noon, the officers retire into the cabin for dinner. This grim meal takes place in silence. Though Ahab hasn't forbidden the men from speaking, they are afraid. No one enjoys their food.

After the officers are done, the harpooners get to eat. They have a lively meal where they all get plenty. In fact, they throw forks at the cook, Dough-Boy, because they don't think he's moving fast enough. The narrator muses on the difference between the silent officers and the lively harpooners. No one feels comfortable in the cabin, as it is the lair of the dour Ahab.

Here, the reader gets more clues about Ahab's leadership, and realizes that on this particular whaling mission, maybe being an officer isn't the best job. In fact, the order here is upside down...the officers are scared while the harpooners seem jovial and aggressive. The harpooners have more control over their destiny than Ahab and the officers.

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| Ahab vowed revenge against the white whale Moby Dick |
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Chapter 35-36: The Mast-Head and The Quarter-Deck

Everyone must take their turn as lookout on the mast-head, and now the responsibility falls to Ishmael. It's a great experience. The weather is nice and he feels important. He likes it up there; it's relaxing, even though there are no luxuries, just pegs to stand on. Ishmael spends too much of his time on lookout daydreaming, so he might miss a whole bunch of whales. He admits that he's an awful lookout.

Something is clearly bothering Captain Ahab, so he spends the whole day pacing around the deck and in his cabin. When he comes out, he orders the whole crew to the aft of the boat and reminds them all of their duty. He says they should have a 'dead whale or a stove boat', meaning kill the whale or die trying.

Then, he pulls out a gold coin and tells the crew that whoever can find a whale first gets it. Of course, he warns them, it's not just any whale. It's a white sperm whale, with three holes in its fluke. Ahab nails the coin to the mast and says it'll stay there until there's a winner.

The harpooners are uneasy, and Tashtego tells the others he must be talking about Moby Dick. First mate Starbuck agrees, and tells the others that Moby Dick is the whale that ate Ahab's leg. Ahab tells them he's out for revenge. The crew cheers at this, and Ahab shouts that they should all get drinks, but Starbuck refuses. He said he's here for money, not revenge. Ahab offers him money, and Starbuck agrees, so the whole crew drinks to the death of Moby Dick.

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| Captain Ahab offered a gold coin to the first man to spot the white whale |
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Chapter 37-40: Sunset, Dusk, First Night Watch, and Midnight, Forecastle

The men muse. Captain Ahab thinks that, although the sunset is beautiful, he can't enjoy it. The quest for the white whale has completely consumed him. Starbuck is against Ahab's plan, but he knows he's first mate and must help his captain. He hopes they never find the whale, and the whole plan will be off. He's upset that the crew seems to be excited to hunt down Moby Dick. Starbuck is sure that awful things are coming. Stubb thinks the whole situation is funny, and since everything is all because of Fate, it doesn't matter how he feels about it. Might as well just be happy for a while.

The First Night Watch ends with the crew lounging around the deck, singing and dancing. Pip, a young black boy, is ordered to strike the bell for midnight, so the next shift reports. When they get there, they join in the singing. Pip plays the tambourine. Finally, tired of singing and dancing, the crew stops. It's then that they realize a storm is coming.

The wind howls and the waves get worse. Ahab tells the men to steer into the storm and ride it out. The men argue with each other and begin to fight. Daggoo pulls out a knife, but the storm worsens and the men must stop fighting to save the ship. Everyone rushes for shelter, leaving Pip alone. He huddles under the windlass and prays while the storm tosses the ship about.

Lesson Summary

Here, we learn a whole lot more about life on the Pequod, and the growing gulf between Captain Ahab and his men. The men are afraid of the moody captain, but he does make his mission clear...they will get the white whale Moby Dick, or die trying.

The men are excited by the gold bounty offered for spotting the whale, but their excitement soon turns to terror when it becomes clear that Ahab means it. As if to cement that sentiment, he orders the men to steer right into a violent storm, which tosses the ship around and puts all their lives into extreme danger.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

This chapter is structured as a small play, set on the forward deck of the Pequod. A group of sailors from countries all over Europe begin dancing on the deck, as a kind of wild celebration they say is brought on by [Ahab’s](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ahab) exhortation to them (to kill [Moby](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/moby-dick) [Dick](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/moby-dick)), and by the wine Ahab has had them drink. A Spanish sailor gets into a fight with [Daggoo](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters), but the sailors all scramble when a storm rises and they must go about “battening down” the ship to prepare for it. [Pip](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/pip), a small African boy who was taken onto the boat some time earlier, speaks quietly to himself, asking for God’s help to protect him from the crazed and drunken sailors around him.

***Analysis Part 1:***

A bizarre chapter, and one of the first of numerous “playlets” that dot the novel. Melville uses these plays as a way to fully capture the diversity of people and thoughts on the ship without having to filter them through he consciousness of a narrator. It is interesting that in a novel so concerned about omens and prophecies and the impossibility of interpreting such things, that Melville sometimes feels the need to eliminate the interpretive force of an interpreting narrator from his book. It is interesting to note that, in this chapter, it is unclear where Ishmael has gone, or if he is even the narrator of the “playlet” at all.