***Moby Dick***

***Chapter 5 –The Breakfast***

***Summary:***

The Spouter-Inn’s breakfast table is filled with whalers, yet the meal, to Ishmael’s surprise, is not enlivened with sea stories or bawdiness. Instead, the men eat in silence. Queequeg uses his harpoon to help himself to more meat.

***Detailed Summary:***

Ishmael goes down to breakfast, exchanging a few words with the landlord.

Ishmael knows the landlord was teasing him with sinister stories about Queequeg before, but he doesn’t hold a grudge—Ishmael likes a good laugh.

The inn is full of different sailors. Ishmael can tell how long they’ve been ashore from their complexions: those who are more tanned and healthy-looking have only come back recently, while those who’ve been on land for a while are pale and sicklier-looking. Queequeg looks healthiest of all: after all, he has the darkest skin.

Ishmael expects breakfast to be fun and jolly and for everyone to tell whaling stories, but instead the meal is silent and everyone seems awkward and embarrassed.

Even though they’re all bold sailors, they’re not the most socially adventurous guys around.

Queequeg isn’t embarrassed—he’s just cool and collected. His table manners are pretty bad, though: he brings his harpoon to breakfast so that he can use it to reach across the table and pick things up, and he only eats rare steak.

After the meal, Queequeg smokes his tomahawk-pipe, and Ishmael goes for a stroll.

***Brief Summary:***

Ishmael goes downstairs deciding not to hold a grudge against Coffin for “skylarking with [him]” about Queequeg—breakfast is filled with burly sailors, nearly all of them whalemen—Ishmael judges how long each sailor has been on land based on his tan—”But who could show a cheek like Queequeg?”—everyone is socially awkward and silent, behavior which surprises Ishmael in these men “who have seen the world”—Queequeg, by contrast, is totally at his ease, using his harpoon to grapple his rare beefsteaks—Afterwards, Queequeg smokes his tomahawk-pipe and Ishmael goes for a stroll around town.

***Critical Analysis:***

Ishmael goes to the bar-room, which is now full of boarders who are nearly all whalemen. There are some men who appear more at ease in manner because of their travels, although Ledyard and Mungo Park, the great New England and Scotch travelers, respectively, possess the least assurance of the group. Queequeg sits at the head of the table, having brought his harpoon to the breakfast table and using it during the meal.

Melville continues to establish Queequeg as a combination of civilization and savagery. While Ishmael respects his behavior at breakfast, in which Queequeg somehow assumes a position as the head of the table, Queequeg nevertheless brings his harpoon to the breakfast table, considered an obvious breach of polite behavior.

***Critical Study(Ch 3-5):***

[Ishmael](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/#Ishmael) enters the Spouter Inn. He is disappointed that there are no empty beds available, so he will have to share one with a harpooner who, the landlord tells him, is dark skinned and likes his steaks rare. After trying to sleep on a wooden bench, Ishmael decides to give sharing a bed a try and goes to the room. In the middle of the night, the harpooner finally comes in. His face and torso are covered in tattoos; he looks foreign and fierce. Ishmael is afraid, realizing the man is a South Seas cannibal. When the harpooner gets into bed, he is surprised to find Ishmael already there and begins to wave a weapon around. Ishmael calls Peter Coffin (landlord of the Spouter Inn) who introduces the harpooner as [Queequeg](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/" \l "Queequeg). Coffin explains the situation and everyone goes back to bed.

In Chapter 4, Ishmael wakes up to find Queequeg's tattooed arm thrown over him in a warm, loving gesture. He is disconcerted at first, but his discomfort is replaced with a sense of how comical the situation is. When he wakes Queequeg up, the harpooner is similarly momentarily confused. Queequeg gets up and gets dressed, then shaves his face with his harpoon and leaves the room. In Chapter 5, Ishmael gets dressed himself and goes downstairs for breakfast with the other boarders. The others seem to be an interesting bunch, but they are strangely silent at breakfast. Ishmael is puzzled by their shyness and by Queequeg's way of eating using his harpoon. After breakfast Ishmael goes for a walk.

These chapters introduce [Queequeg](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/" \l "Queequeg) and revolve around the tension [Ishmael](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/#Ishmael) feels because this mysterious harpooner is nowhere to be seen. It doesn't help that Peter Coffin seems to be deliberately withholding details about the absent harpooner. Ishmael is increasingly concerned about sharing a bed with the man, but his desire for comfort gets the better of him. The tension escalates when Queequeg actually comes into the room and, not realizing Ishmael is there, begins his bedtime rituals and tries to get into bed. Even the resulting confrontation is not enough to completely release the tension: in the morning, the men are both under the counterpane (quilt or bedspread), and Ishmael recalls a frightening episode from his early childhood. Queequeg's presence, however, seems to soothe Ishmael.

Ishmael watches Queequeg complete a series of mundane morning activities like getting dressed, shaving, and eating breakfast. The savage of the night before is now a comical man with a dented hat and a tendency to use his harpoon for everything. He shaves with it ("vigorous scraping, or rather harpooning of his cheeks") and serves himself breakfast with it. By the time breakfast is over, Ishmael's feeling toward Queequeg is one of amusement rather than fear, which is an important step in the development of their close friendship.

***Significance :***

The morning after his first night with Queequeg, Ishmael sits down to breakfast at a table full of whalemen. Ishmael first notices the differing shades of each man’s skin as a reflection of each man’s travels — a darker hue reveals a recent return from an “Indian voyage,” while subsequently lighter shades denote more and more time spent at home. The whalemen at Ishmael’s table are markedly changed, but only temporarily. The passage of time returns each man’s skin to its original color.

Ishmael expects a breakfast full of colorful tales about whaling, since “men who have seen the world, thereby become . . . quite self-possessed in company.” Instead, Ishmael finds the men eating in awkward and “embarrassed” silence. He compares his table-mates’ demeanor with that of men who have travelled through Siberia or starved in the jungles of Africa — turned inward and away from society.

By contrast, Queequeg sits at the head of the table “as cool as an icicle,” harpooning raw beefsteaks with a “genteel” manner. Queequeg’s skin is permanently tattooed with many “contrasting climates” all at once. In the previous chapter, we see Queequeg as a patchwork of cultures, and perhaps that is a telling key to his cool gentility. Does the “social polish” of travel come from an adaptability, an ability to be fundamentally changed by new experiences? For these whalers of European descent, I wonder if that adaptability would hold true in European travels, unlike in their frequent travels to “exotic” locales. Perhaps the whole idea of some travels being harder than others, and the inward-turning that results, really just reflects an ethnocentric stubbornness.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Ishmael](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ishmael) rises and sees [Peter Coffin](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters) the next morning—although he is a little embarrassed at having been tricked by Coffin into sharing a room with a cannibal (and one who turned out to be utterly harmless), Ishmael tells the reader that it is important to take a joke well, and to be able to laugh at oneself. [Ishmael](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ishmael) goes in to breakfast with other whalers and sailors staying at the Spouter Inn—some of whom have just come back from long sea-voyages. Although Ishmael expects that these “old salts” will talk loudly and willingly of their lives on the open ocean, Ishmael is instead shocked to find that the breakfast is largely silent, and that the whalers, though they have probably done brave deeds, have very little to say for themselves. Ishmael notes that [Queequeg](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/queequeg) eats a strange breakfast of beefsteaks, “cooked very rare,” which he lances with his harpoon. That implement seems never to leave his side.

***Analysis Part 1:***

An example of Ishmael’s expectations about whaling, and the realities of the lifestyle that are in fact quite different. Ishmael perhaps wonders why all whalers aren’t like the carousers aboard the Grampus, who stomp onto shore, demanding alcohol and speaking loudly of their triumphs. But Ishmael also detects a darker side to whaling—perhaps a recognition that the job is particularly dangerous, that men are often lost, and that the reality of life on the open water is one of privation, loneliness, and long separation from land. Queequeg, for his part, seems to have no problem with the apparent silence of the other whalers.