Call me Ishmael. Some years ago—never mind how long precisely—having

little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me

on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part

of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen and

regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about

the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever

I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and

bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever

my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral

principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and

methodically knocking people’s hats off—then, I account it high time to

get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball.

With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I

quietly take to the ship. There is nothing surprising in this. If they

but knew it, almost all men in their degree, some time or other,

cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me.

There now is your insular city of the Manhattoes, belted round by

wharves as Indian isles by coral reefs—commerce surrounds it with her

surf. Right and left, the streets take you waterward. Its extreme

downtown is the battery, where that noble mole is washed by waves, and

cooled by breezes, which a few hours previous were out of sight of

land. Look at the crowds of water-gazers there.

Circumambulate the city of a dreamy Sabbath afternoon. Go from Corlears

Hook to Coenties Slip, and from thence, by Whitehall, northward. What

do you see?—Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand

thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries. Some

leaning against the spiles; some seated upon the pier-heads; some

looking over the bulwarks of ships from China; some high aloft in the

rigging, as if striving to get a still better seaward peep. But these

are all landsmen; of week days pent up in lath and plaster—tied to

counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks. How then is this? Are

the green fields gone? What do they here?