

***Moby-Dick* Book Club**

Session 1: Tuesday, September 16, at 5:30pm

Section to read: Extracts to Chapter 47

Theme: Making Meaning in *Moby-Dick*

Featured Guests: Professors Tony McGowan & Tim Marr

Welcome to *Moby-Dick* Book Club!

The New Bedford Whaling Museum *Moby-Dick* Book Club is a virtual series exploring Herman Melville's iconic American novel. Whether you're reading it for the first time or returning to it with fresh eyes, all are welcome to take part in engaging, thought-provoking conversations led by some of the world's leading Melville scholars.

Each session centers on a guiding theme and includes a suggested reading schedule—but participants are encouraged to read at their own pace and join when they can. Bring your thoughts, questions, and interpretations to share with fellow readers and Melville experts alike.

Reading Guide: Extracts to Chapter 47

These chapters take us from *Moby-Dick's* "land chapters" up to the first lowering of whaleboats from the *Pequod*. Readers are introduced to all the characters, the problem of the whale from varied angles, the question of Ishmael, the conundrum of Queequeg and Bulkington, the shift in style and perspective in cetology and the affidavit. There are so many ways that Melville and Ishmael play with meaning making—through plot, language, tone, and explicit provocations. The following are some questions that readers can consider as they process the complex text.

1. No matter which edition of the book you are reading, you will quickly see that the "first words" are not "Call me Ishmael." Instead, you probably have an editor's introduction, followed by four distinct paratextual readings: the dedication to Nathaniel Hawthorne, the Table of Contents, ETYMOLOGY, and then EXTRACTS. How are we to read this material? How, especially do ETYMOLOGY and EXTRACTS inform our reading of a book that famously "starts" with "Call me Ishmael"? Who is speaking/narrating/logging in these early pages? What, for example, is the relationship between the "pale Usher" of ETYMOLOGY and Ishmael? Who is this Sub-Sub librarian? Why doesn't the book start with the famous first line, "Call me Ishmael"?
2. What meanings might we take away from reading slowly together the first paragraph of Chapter 1: "Loomings"?
3. What is the significance of the painting in the entry to the Spouter Inn? What does that episode of close reading tell us about Ishmael and his mode of engagement with the world?
4. Can we pin down from the reading what Melville thinks about Fate?



5. The early chapters are comedic, even burlesque. Where does this narrative mode give cover to more serious content?
6. What are the most important aspects of the “bosom” friendship between Ishmael and Queequeg?
7. How are we to make sense of Bulkington’s “apotheosis” in Chapter 23, “The Lee Shore”?
8. Given Chapter 32 “Cetology” to chew on, what can we say about Ishmael/Melville’s relationship to science, to systems, and to settled truth?
9. Ishmael might be said to lose himself in thought. Consider, for example, Chapter 35: “The Mast-Head.” Consider the pros and cons of oceanic, meditative life.
10. Chapters 41 & 42, “Moby Dick” and “The Whiteness of the Whale” offer contrasting perspectives on the whale. Or do they?