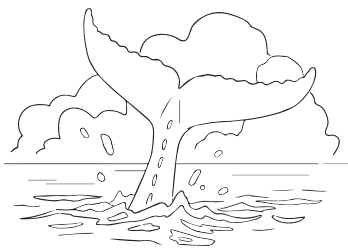


# WORLDVIEW GUIDE

## MOBY-DICK

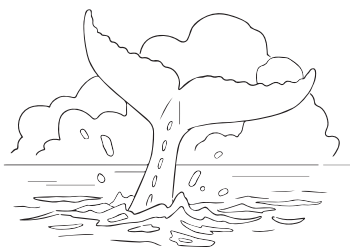


*Toby J. Sumpter*

canonpress  
Moscow, Idaho



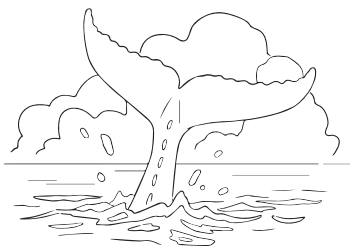




## CONTENTS

Introduction . . . . .	I
The World Around . . . . .	3
About the Author . . . . .	5
What Other Notables Said . . . . .	7
Setting, Characters, and Plot Summary . . . . .	9
Worldview Analysis . . . . .	13
Quotables . . . . .	25
21 Significant Questions and Answers . . . . .	27
Further Discussion and Review . . . . .	35
Taking the Classics Quiz . . . . .	37

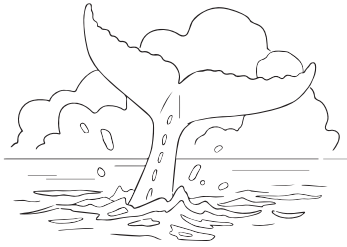




## INTRODUCTION

“Call me Ishmael” is one of the most famous opening lines in all of literature. Intriguing, haunting, suggestive, ambiguous—the narrator does not say that his name is Ishmael. He summons the reader to call him by that name. And in so doing, the narrator invites the reader not merely into a story but an epic, a tale that encompasses life, death, the universe, God, angels, demons, and man caught in the eye of that cosmic hurricane. If you consent to call him Ishmael, you consent to this voyage.





## WORLDVIEW ANALYSIS

*Moby-Dick* is a great and magnificent tragedy. Like the ocean liner *Titanic*, it soars with humanistic beauty, ingenuity, humor, understanding, a sense of dread and destiny, and yet it ultimately drives like a raging madman into the hard reality of the world God created. *Moby-Dick* is both an American epic and, as a literary genre, a romantic tragedy.

And yet, for somewhat obvious reasons, *Moby-Dick* is highly reminiscent of the biblical story of Jonah. It contains a man who seems to have gone mad at sea and is defeated by a whale, along with an argument, a struggle, a storm of words and emotions about what is right, what is good, and what is fair. The book of Jonah famously ends with God's unanswered question to Jonah, fuming and wishing to die. Is the story of Jonah, like *Moby Dick*, a romantic tragedy?

“In token of my admiration for his genius, this book is inscribed to Nathaniel Hawthorne.” So reads Herman Melville’s dedication of *Moby-Dick* to his friend and contemporary American author. Hawthorne, like Melville, remains one of the principal players in the American romantic project.

Of course, in order to make any sense of these claims, we need to define our terms. Romanticism is not the genre of cheap paperbacks at the grocery store. Rather, Romanticism is a current of thought, belief, life, and art characterized by the numinous, the mystical, the poetic, the emotions and feelings of humanity wrestling with the wild, beautiful, and ultimately tragic forces of nature, and behind all of that, even God Himself. Albert Camus, the 20th-century French philosopher wrote this about *Moby-Dick* and several other Melville titles: “These anguished books in which man is overwhelmed, but in which life is exalted on each page, are inexhaustible sources of strength and pity. We find in them revolt and acceptance, unconquerable and endless love, the passion for beauty, language of the highest order—in short, genius.”<sup>2</sup> Anguish, love, strength, pity, passion for beauty, and the exaltation of life—all of these are characteristics of the Romantics.

These sensibilities are evidenced in the breadth and depth of *Moby-Dick*’s subject matter and language. On

---

2. Andrew Delbanco, *Melville: His World and Work* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), xiv.