

# Songs for Moby Dick

## Synopsis

A ghostly image of a lost sailor begins the performance. Out of the mist, a lost soul appears, to mourn the dead, and to be remembered.

Ishmael is the narrator's name. He travels back in time to his decision as a young man to leave the comforts of home, and sign on to a whale-hunting vessel for a three-year voyage around the world. ("Ishmael"). He travels to Nantucket, the centre of the whale-hunting industry in the 1830's and 1840's, and looks over the various ships preparing for the journey, and finds a ship that speaks to his own romantic ideas of the whale-hunt ("The Pequod"). He signs on, and waits for the final preparations of the ship to be finished, but is mystified by the absence of the captain, Ahab. ("All's Astir").

Ishmael is a good-natured, humorous observer of human nature. He describes the crew, and mimics them in a series of short songs ("Starbuck", "Stubb", "Dagoo", "Flask"), but one crew-mate touches him more deeply, and he describes his first intimate encounter with his bosom-friend, the South Seas islander Queequeg. ("Queequeg")

Finally, the captain appears, out of the depths of his cabin. Ahab has been seriously injured during his last voyage, and had his leg bitten off by a particularly large and aggressive sperm whale, an albino whale called Moby Dick by the whaling community. Ahab rouses the crew, and proclaims that their mission is to hunt and find this whale in revenge. ("Ahab")

Ishmael sings more songs about the voyage, including a philosophical song about the mystical nature of the sea ("The Masthead"), the poisonous atmosphere created by Ahab's seething obsession with the whale, as he paces the deck while the crew attempts to sleep ("Ahab at Night"), and the story of the ship's keeper Pip, a former slave, who is lost at sea and eventually rescued, only to lose his sanity, and of the disturbing relationship that forms between Ahab and Pip. ("Pip").

Finally, Moby Dick is sighted by the crew, and the hunt begins. In a relentless narrative, the crew set out in their small boats to attack the whale. They successfully harpoon Moby Dick, who races away, dragging the boats with him, and Ishmael recounts the whale's desperation and pain. The whale dives, and resurfaces with a vengeance, attacking its tormentors. Ahab stabs at the whale with his lance, but is snagged by a stray rope, and is wrapped tight against Moby Dick, who then turns and attacks the ship, sinking it. The Pequod sinks rapidly, causing a vortex that sucks the crew down, drowning all on board. ("The Hunt").

Only Ishmael survives, and sings one final song, lamenting the hatred and unthinking savagery of Ahab and the crew. ("Epilogue").