

American Literature & Culture
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Herman Melville Moby Dick (Lecture 11)
Mod 03 Lecture Number 15
Herman Melville Moby Dick (Lecture 11)

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(Professor – student conversation starts)

Professor: So Moby Dick, we begin with Moby-Dick, Herman Melville's great novel or what is; is there a subtitle to this novel; Moby-Dick, A Whale? Alright let's go to the very first chapter.

Page 1 and it's called, it's titled Loomings.

(Refer Slide Time 01:41)



Professor: Ok, you will come across a variety of very interestingly title, I mean when I first read the novel several years ago, I was caught up with the, and I was fascinated by the kinds of the titles that the book has. Now there is a subtitle, in most versions, Ashwin, are you showing us the short; that sub-title?

Student: Moby-Dick Or the Whale

Professor: Moby-Dick Or the Whale. Ok that is the title, Ok. So look at the variety of titles. I would like you to go on to the contents page if you have one. Loomings, The Carpet-Bag, The Carpet-Bag , after a while, Chowder, The Ship, The Ramadan, His Mark, The Prophet, Going Aboard, Merry Christmas, Knights and Squires and later on we have very nautical related words such as The Cabin-Table, The Mast-Head, The Quarter-Deck etc. we also have Midnight, Forecastle, Moby Dick, The Whiteness of The Whale, Hark! , The Chart, Surmises, The Mat-Maker, The First Lowering, Ahab's Boat and Crew. Fedallah, The Albatross Ok then Brit, Squid, The Line, Stubb Kills a Whale, The Dart, The Crotch, Stubb's Supper, The Whale as a Dish and then we move on.

And then we have something titled as The Nut, The Pequod Meets The Virgin, The Honour and Glory of Whaling, Pitchpoling, The Fountain, The Grand Armada, Schools and Schoolmasters, Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish, Heads or Tails, The Pequod Meets The Rose-Bud, The Castaway, A Squeeze of the Hand, The Cassock, The Lamp, The Doubloon, Leg and Arm, The Decanter, Ahab's Leg, The Carpenter, Ahab and the Carpenter, Ahab and Starbuck in the Cabin, Queequeg in His Coffin, The Pacific, The Blacksmith, The Forge, The Gilder, The Pequod Meets The Bachelor, The Dying Whale, The Whale Watch, The Quadrant. Go on a little bit, go down a little bit and then The Pequod Meets The Rachel, The Cabin, The Hat,

The Pequod Meets The Delight, The Symphony, The Chase—First Day, The Chase—Second Day, The Chase.—Third Day, any comments? I am not expecting anyone, you have come to the class having read whatever I have told you or , knowing even anything about the book except that it's a book about the whale. But just one fast look, quick look at the titles of the chapters. What comes to mind?

Student: (())

Professor: Yeah, what could it be all about?

(Refer Slide Time 04:15)



Student: Seafarers like

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Student: Yeah

Professor: Seafarers?

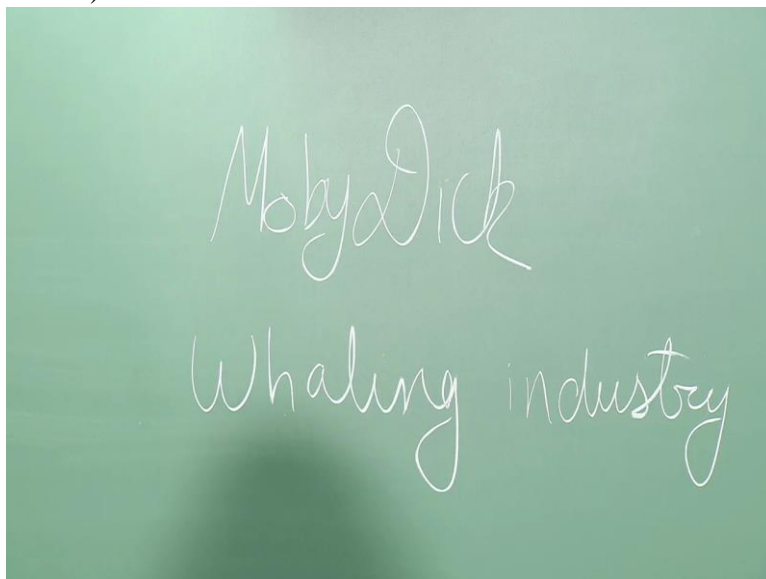
Student: Like we

(Refer Slide Time 04:21)



Professor: Ok, whaling industry, you said profession of whaling, right Ashwin? So whaling industry? Ok? Tell me more.

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Student: Captain Ahab

Professor: Ok, so this is one name that you

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Professor: you come across repeatedly, Ahab.

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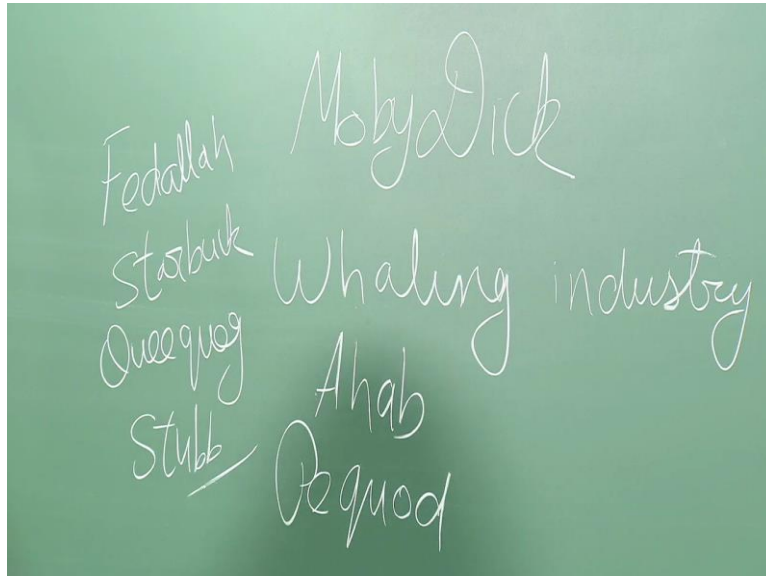


Professor: Ok, other names in the titles?

Student: Whales

Professor: The whale, Ahab, Pequod Meets The Rachel, Pequod yeah. Occasionally you come across name as names such as Fedallah, Starbuck, Queequeg , Stubb.

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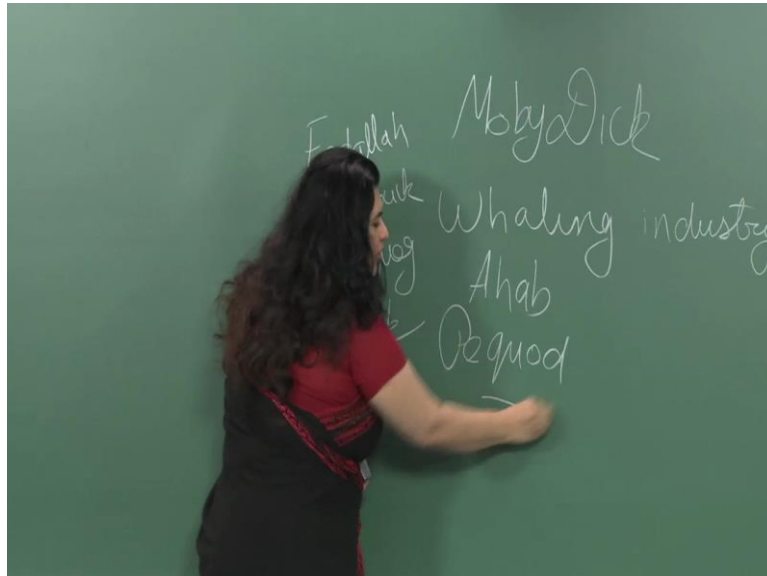
Professor: Other than that, is there anything that you come across?

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Professor: or that catches your attention? Ok. Moby Dick is the whale. The story is about whaling industry, ostensibly there is a crew; therefore several references to the ship and the various parts of the ship.

(Refer Slide Time 06:02)



Professor: Pequod is the name of the ship and who is Ahab?

Student: Captain of the ship

Professor: Captain

(Refer Slide Time 06:09)



Professor: Ahab, he may or he may not be the hero of the novel, Ok. The novel is about him or is it about Moby Dick?

Student: There, it is a

Professor: There conflict, the conflict is between, yes Rohit?

Student: It is a good; I was joining them; that's all.

Professor: Yeah?

Student: I was joining them, that's all.

Professor: Ok, so there is a conflict between Ahab and the whale, man versus nature, man versus animal, man versus this particular animal who is so extraordinary, who is being talked about all through the novel, rarely do we actually see her. Ok, we don't see her. So perhaps you know this is what Steven Spielberg had in his mind when he was making his great movie, the Jaws, Ok. Moby-Dick, the great whale, he or she, whatever is its gender, it's constantly being referred to as what sort of an animal, what sort of a creature?

Student: Beastly

Professor: Beastly, cruel, invincible, this is not the kind of an animal you would like to be pitted against. This is not the kind of animal that you would like to confront. Only Ahab once had the misfortune of confronting the animal and what was the result, what was the consequence?

Student: lost his leg

Professor: He lost his leg and how does he walk now? Not with a limb

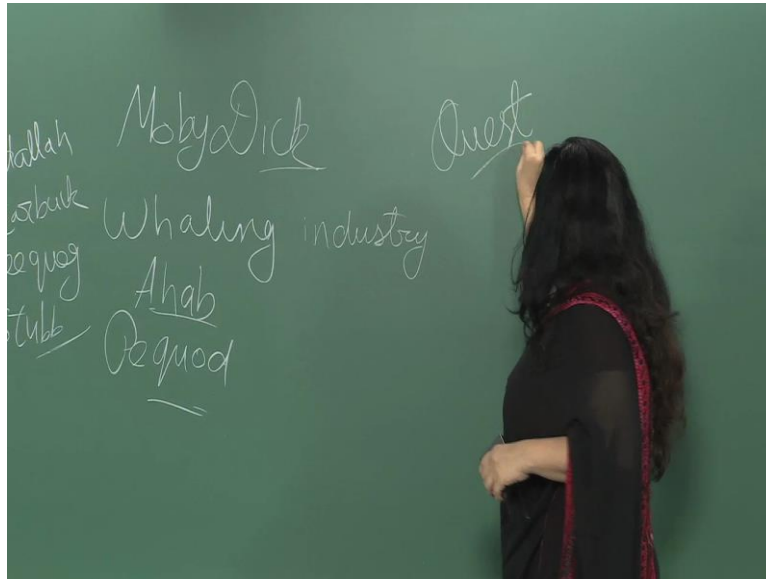
Student: Ivory

Professor: Yeah, there is an ivory stub attached to that part of his leg. Yeah, so he walks with that kind, of a limb.

Student: There is a scar

Professor: Yes, that may or may not have been the result of his encounter with the whale but the whale is responsible for biting off part of his leg. And therefore this is a story of a quest. This quest as a motif, therefore, don't just look at this kind of just, this is not just a plain vendetta story. It's a story of a quest and now how do you, I mean, do you, perhaps the whale is the anti-hero

(Refer Slide Time 08:31)



Professor: whale perhaps is the bad guy in this entire narrative but then does a whale have an address? Ok, so what do you do when you are on a chase of a whale?

Student: Wander

Professor: You wander around, you wander around and therefore it becomes, and when you wander around, how you can be so sure that you are going to bump into that very same whale. You are going to bump into several other whales also, definitely. How can you be so sure? So what is in, in other words what is the story about?

Student: Search

Professor: Search? Yes, but man versus, not just a whale now

Student: Nature

Professor: Nature, man versus universe. He is trying to unravel. He is trying to pit himself against the mysteries or the mysticism of the universe. Ok, you have no idea where to find that whale but at one point he says I am going to the end of the world I am willing to travel to the end of the world and then I am going to find it and kill it, because that is going to satisfy my revenge, yeah. So he is on a revenge spree against a dumb whale, a mute animal. This is so, now what kind; now we have established that Moby-Dick is this mysterious creature. It could be anything, forces of universe, is that force of universe that just comes and hits you anytime, anywhere. Do you think Melville is also trying to tell you something more deeper at a metaphysical level?

Student: Man pitted against fate

Professor: Man pitted against fate, Ok, so you never know, so quest; a tale of quest, a tale of fate.

(Refer Slide Time 10:35)



Professor: He is taking his chances. He may, he knows that the quest for a whale, like he is taking a huge chance, trying to find, trying to locate exactly this kind of whale, but then he is willing to take his chance, Ok. He has been injured. His pride has been injured, Ok. It is not just the physical injury he is so much worried about but his main concern is the moral injury, the injury to the pride that he has the blow, the huge blow to his ego that he has suffered. How dare a whale bite off his leg?

Ok and almost rendering him impotent. Although those things are, Moby-Dick is a tale about sexuality, about sex although we are looking at a time where, mid nineteenth century fiction, so these things wouldn't be, yes, wouldn't come up or wouldn't be so much foregrounded but then the entire novel is filled with allusion to sexuality, to homo-erotic feelings and also the fact that, you know, love of men with, and men, love between men and men, Ok, so these things are absolutely presented there, yes?

Student: I feel it is also about finding yourself

(Refer Slide Time 12:12)



Student: Especially in the ninety ninth chapter, The Doubloon, you can see that

Professor: The Doubloon?

Student: The Doubloon

Student: Yeah, The Doubloon, sorry. you can see that, Ishmael and Ahab, they are trying to find their identity

Professor: Exactly, we are going to do Doubloon soon.

(Refer Slide Time 12:28)



Professor: So, that is, therefore I gave you only 3 chapters to read from this book. One is Loomings, chapter 1, second is Ahab and third is Doubloon. Ok, although as you have seen, it is a very, let me tell you, now if you are looking for a plot, then you will be disappointed. It is not a novel of plot. Ok, so you don't have a beginning and a middle and an end, although

there is some sense of it, there is semblance. They start off at one point, Nantucket, they reach certain points, you know but there is not going to be, everything is not cause and effect related here.

Ok, so there are several chapters, especially when he digresses into description of the whaling industry, Ok the oil that people extract from whales and how it has become a major industry and all, Ok you will find that it has no bearings on the actual, I mean, you perhaps are going to ask, come on, give me the story of the whale, where is she? Or where is he? Ok, what's happening to Ahab? Why is he, why do we see him after, which chapter do we come across, first, twenty eighth chapter? So you are been, he is referred to several times just like the great whale, Ok so we feel both these presences, the aura of these great beings, Ok ; whale on one hand, and Captain Ahab, but we come across them face to face much later, Captain Ahab in Chapter 28 or after and the whale even after that.

Ok. Now what is the, what is this kind of technique? You must have come across this even in The Great Gatsby, yeah, The Great Gatsby, Ok The Great Gatsby is frequently referred to, right? He is referred to, and people have their own take on and have their own interpretation and have their own opinion about Gatsby if you have watched the movie. Who is this Gatsby? I heard once, he is a spy. He is a German spy, he once killed a man, he is filthy rich, he lives like a king, Ok, all the, he is wealthier than the wealthiest man in the world, Ok. All these things are told, none of which is true. Ok, so how personalities, how identities are created, yeah by taking bits and pieces from what we hear and are they true or not, that is another question. So extremely, it is like anticipating post modernism. But Moby-Dick, we are going to look as a supreme modernist novel, please?

Student: I am just curious. Was Hemingway inspired by Moby-Dick while writing Old Man and the Sea?

Professor: Old Man and the Sea,

(Refer Slide Time 15:23)



Professor: yeah. You see, this is a very American

(Refer Slide Time 15:25)



Professor: kind of a theme, spirit of adventure and quest, Ok and trying to prove your masculinity through adventure. So it is implicit in all the great works of American Literature. You just, you look at, you just look at something like Mark Twain's those two great novels, Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, Ok, the spirit of adventure and seeking the world out there and then in that process, discovering yourself, Ok, so how landscape shapes a person's personality, an individual's personality. That is an integral part. So American heroes, you will never find them sitting in a room. That is a European hero. And then, pondering, exactly, sitting and turning into a huge insect, Ok or reminiscing about something.

American hero goes other there, Ok and discovers himself through nature, through landscape, through adventures, a series of adventures. That is there at the heart of American literature. Think of all the great novels. Travelling and wander lust is the part, integral part of American Literature. Even your Isabel Archer, Ok, a nineteenth century girl , she travels around the world, Ok and in American Literature, you, you can arrive at the process of self-realization, self-actualization only through travel. Travel is an important part. Therefore Counter Culture specialists, name them, Azhar; the great writers of the Counter Culture movement; Dean Moriarty, yeah? What did he, what was that novel all about? The hero is Dean Moriarty.

(Refer Slide Time 17:28)



Student: (())

Professor: On the Road. Kerouac

Student: Kerouac

(Refer Slide Time 17:34)



Professor: Yes, yeah, so what is it about? Spirit of adventure, taking to the road, Easy Rider the great movie that we are going to soon talk about, taking to; so spirit of adventure, quest, travel, the journey is important, the destination is not. This is, so whatever you, so Moby-Dick is a great journey, Ok, travel by the sea. Ok because at that time, you didn't travel by road. Ok, on the road came much later. But the idea has been there forever, taking to the road, going for an, and while travelling, while interacting with people, you realize or discover yourself.

That's American hero. European hero has conversations with himself within the four walls, Ok and then he realizes, arrives certain conclusions about himself, major difference. Think, give me an example, give me any example and I can prove that, this theory. Catcher in the Rye, he is out there. Ok, he is not sitting inside his school dormitory, right. So that is one, yeah. Even Nick Carraway in The Great Gatsby, travels around, Ok, the length and breadth of America and comes to certain conclusions.

So I am coming back to my earlier question. The Great Gatsby is introduced to you after 30; it's a slim novel, so 30 pages or so, 35 pages. Captain Ahab is introduced to you after 28 chapters. Whale is introduced; the whale is introduced to you after several, many more chapters. Why, why this technique?

Student: Suspense

Professor: Ok, it is not just the suspense but the writer is building up the character. Ok, the more the character is discussed, the greater the curiosity of the reader, Ok. That is one way.

You can always introduce the character from page 1 and start building him up. But then you know everything. But here, several perspectives on a character, several people talking about a character and therefore contributing to the larger-than-life image.

So, now look at these chapters, Loomings and one of the greatest opening lines in literature. Call me Ishmael. Have you ever heard, ever come across this line, Ok, one of the greatest opening lines in literature, Call me Ishmael. Now what could it mean? Call me Ishmael, like that. I mean

Student: He is the narrator.

Professor: He is a, he is the narrator. Ok that is what you are being told. A linguist would have another kind of interest in this sentence, Ok Call me Ishmael, then there would be ambiguity about it but that's another area. Ok but here is establishing the fact that he is the narrator, so the point of view in Moby-Dick. Moby-Dick has several points of view; Gayatri, therefore when we do Doubloon, several points of view, yes.

Point of view was also important, was an important part in A Portrait of a Lady

(Refer Slide Time 21:05)



Professor: yeah sometimes the lady, sometimes it is the third person narrative, sometimes it is also Henry James stepping out and talking to you directly, face to face, like that, reader, so far you have been doing this. Now I will talk about this. Reader, by now you must be wondering whatever happened to so and so character, so let me, you know, so there, so that's point of view. Now here also you will find several points of view but we are told that there is

one single narrator, Ishmael; whether he is unreliable or not, that is up to you to decide, whether he is unreliable or not.

Now Call me Ishmael and the other day I was reading it for, while preparing for this class, I thought, why not start this class on Moby-Dick with introducing, with at least testing you on some of the great opening lines in Literature. I am giving you these series of lines. You take 2 minutes and please let me know how good you are at literature. Or else I begin. I will read. A screaming comes across the sky. Write down the answer, if you know, that is. A screaming comes across the sky, classic novels; there is nothing that is not a part of a canon.

Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, which is it?

Student: One Hundred Years of Solitude

(Refer Slide Time 22:41)



Professor: One Hundred Years of Solitude.

(Refer Slide Time 22:42)



Happy families are all alike?

(Refer Slide Time 22:45)



Student: Anna Karenina

Professor: Anna Karenina

(Refer Slide Time 22:48)



Ok. It was a bright cold day

(Refer Slide Time 22:51)



Student: 1984

Professor: 1984.

(Refer Slide Time 22:54)



It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.

(Refer Slide Time 22:59)



Student: Dickens'

Professor: Yes?

(Refer Slide Time 23:03)



Student: A Tale of Two Cities

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Professor: A Tale of Two Cities. It was the (())

(Refer Slide Time 23:07)



Professor: and it's also interesting the way the novel ends, if you remember. It was a far, far way better, you know, to die. That's the way it ends. If you really want to hear about it, the first thing probably you want to know where I was born and what my lousy

Student: Catcher in the Rye

Professor: Catcher in the Rye. Please take a look at it, it is very interesting. This is the way The Catcher in the Rye begins. If you really want to hear about it, probably you want to know where I was born and what my lousy childhood was like and

(Refer Slide Time 23:42)



Professor: how my parents were occupied and all before they had me and all that David Copperfield kind of crap but I don't feel like

(Refer Slide Time 23:49)



Professor: going into it if you want to know the truth, Ok, this is Catcher in the Rye.

I am sick man, I am a spiteful man. Look at the punctuations also here now.

(Refer Slide Time 24:01)



Professor: You should know in which direction we are moving. The moment you start seeing all these dashes and ellipses, you should know what, what genre

Student: (())

Professor: He--for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it--was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters.

Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo. Good

Student: What?

Professor: James Joyce, something by James Joyce, very clear

Student: (())

Professor: I will let you know.

(Refer Slide Time 24:52)



Professor: It was a wrong number that

Student: Finnegans Wake

Professor: Yes. It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing 3 times in the dead of night and the voice on the other hand asking for someone he was not. Ok, so what are the things you don't know here?

Let's go back. A screaming comes across the sky. and you don't know number 9, for there could be no doubt of his sex and then number 11, Ok. So, a screaming comes across the sky, these are the answers. Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow. You got the other answers, right. I am sick man, I am a spiteful man is number 7, Dostoyevsky's Notes from Underground. You know Robinson Crusoe and then those one with dashes and about not sure about the sex, that is Virginia Woolf, Orlando which is about androgyny. You know that? Orlando is about, the one of the very first novels about having both male and female attributes. Ok. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, yeah, it is not Finnegans Wake, sorry, and the last one, Paul Auster's City of Glass. It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing 3 times in the dead of night and the voice on the other hand asking for someone he was not.

(Refer Slide Time 26:42)



Professor: Alright, so, Call me Ishmael; we begin with our great opening.

(Refer Slide Time 26:51)



Professor: 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.

What do you understand by this?

(Refer Slide Time 27:56)



Student: He is depressed

Professor: Yeah?

Student: He is very sad

Student: He is depressed.

Professor: His?

Student: Depressed feeling, he wants to take the risk.

Professor: Ok, so he is talking. Go back to it, revisit it.

(Refer Slide Time 28:11)



Professor: Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth, what does it mean? See Moby-Dick is full of such kind of very complex kind of sentences, a sentence will go on and on, sometimes a sentence is so long, winding and so complex and so full of clauses and sub-clauses, that it takes an entire paragraph to write it. So it is a novel of lengthy sentences, very complex sentences. Understand what he is talking about. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth, what is being grim about the mouth?

(Refer Slide Time 28:54)



Professor: You are grim about the mouth. You grim or you grin?

Student: Sad

Professor: Yeah, you are sad. Ok, sadness is grimness. The kind of writing that Melville resorts to is something that you haven't so far, because even comparatively, Henry James is

pretty modern. Ok, his English, you don't find, there may be long, winding sentences but then it is not difficult to understand what he is trying to say. If you have read enough number of novels, Henry James is not all that difficult to follow. This may be, Ok, because it is dense with allusions. Henry James is never dense.

He has lots of ideas. It is not packed with allusions. So here, every sentence has something to fall back, like a mythology, a Greek mythology, some Latin proverb, something to do with whaling industry, shipping industry, something to do with the politics of those times, this is not you will find in Herman Melville. This is not something you will find in Dreiser, Ok Dreiser is very, you see; you get what you see, and you see what you get, that kind of writer. So understand the kinds of writers these people are. Now Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth

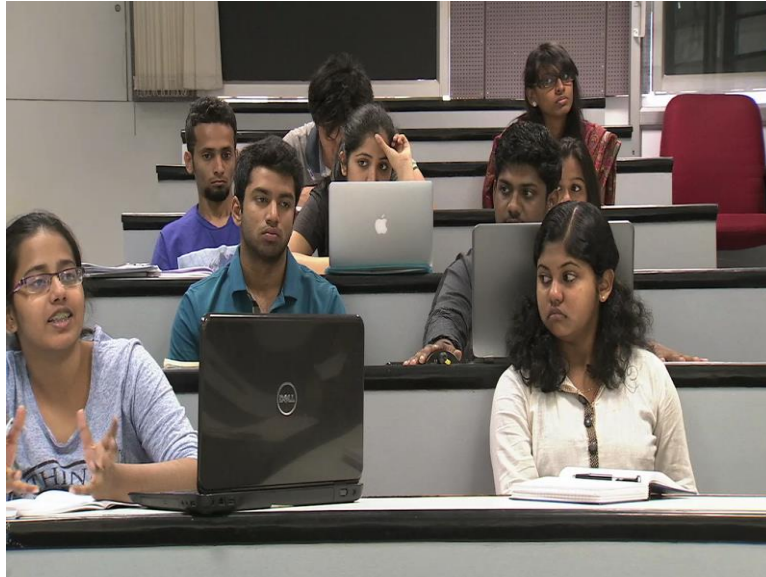
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Professor: whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; he is not talking about your November or Chennai November or American November, November of soul, Pragma?

Student: November means like, winter is

(Refer Slide Time 30:29)



Student: represented as

Professor: And what is winter of my soul?

Student: Cold

Professor: Yeah

(Refer Slide Time 30:35)



Professor: my soul is cold. Ok, coldness about my soul, what could that be; Anu? I am feeling summery about my soul and wintery about my soul. When am I happier?

Student: Sorrowful

Professor: Sorrowful, yes whenever I am sorrowful, the bottom-line is, I take to the sea, yeah. Sea has an uplifting, yeah effect on my spirits, Ok, so that is what Ishmael is all about. Ishmael is a young man. Let's not be very, yeah let's be clear about this motley crowd

because, it is a motley crowd of all kinds of people coming together. There is also a cannibal. Do you know who is that? Queequeg, yeah there is a cannibal. There is a, conventional hero also, Starbuck Ok and why, who is the conventional hero? Ashmita, a conventional hero, Starbuck and unconventional hero Ahab

(Refer Slide Time 31:40)



Professor: what could be, what is a, who is a conventional hero?

(Refer Slide Time 31:46)



Professor: What does he do?

Student: Very masculine and

Student: Very morally upright

Professor: Morally upright, Ok that is more important. Morally upright, correct hero who puts his own interests behind or after everyone else's interests. Why do we call Captain Ahab an ambiguous hero? Not because of his sexuality or masculinity, Ok, there is no ambiguity about those things.

Student: He is all about (())

Professor: We question him for his moral ambiguities. Yeah, he has endangered the lives of his crew because of his personal sense of vendetta, and what is his personal vendetta? Quest after this beast who is known for it's, the way it stealthily attacks people, the way it kills people, the way it hides when it wants to hide. I mean it is a mysterious force of nature. And endangering the lives of the entire crew, because he has he is on a personal revenge spree, Ok. Therefore we question Ahab's motives. We never question, Starbuck is above all. Therefore he is the conventional hero. Ishmael is just your narrator, Ok.

His job is to observe people. Ok, so he is a good reader of people. Ok. He is not going to take part in anything heroic. He is not going to be the leader of revolution unlike Starbuck. At one point, the entire crew revolts against Ahab. Starbuck is the leader. He says that why should all, we have homes and we have wives and children back home. Why should we die for your this, maniacal thirst for revenge? That's the idea. Ok, so the good guy versus this not so good guy and Ahab is now na, Ahab is a very interesting character. He, while Starbuck is all morally upright, very straight-forwardly goody two shoes kind of a hero, Ahab has complexities and complications.

And that's what makes a hero interesting. And then think, why such kind of a hero in this particular period? My interest is not; see I am always interested in situating a novel in its specificity of time or period. Why have this kind of a hero, why have Clyde Griffiths during the earlier twentieth century? And we, I think we talked about it. Why have a hero so out and out materialistic kind of hero at the beginning of twentieth century America?

Student: (())

Professor: American Dream, right we talked about it. We also talked about the so-called Roaring Twenties, the Gilded Age, so much of money, immediately after the First World War so America going through this huge economic boom, industrialization on one hand and agrarian society suffering on the other hand, Ok so they come from that sort of background. And also at the center was also that religious, the nature, the religious tendencies of the Mid

West and how this hero represents a revolt, a rebellion again but then he is not, he is amoral hero, we don't use the term immoral.

There is a difference? Immoral hero and amoral hero, Clyde Griffiths is decidedly an amoral hero but a representative hero of this, of the earlier twentieth century. The Great Gatsby, Gatsby is also representative of a particular society, of a particular period. Why have Ahab here? Why do we have a hero like Ahab in mid nineteenth century? When was this novel written?

R; 1851

Professor: 1851 that is before the Civil War?

Student: Yes

Professor: Yes, the American Civil War was yet to happen, was still a decade ago, Ok, a decade to come yeah but why, why have this kind of a novel at this point in American History? What was happening? You have all done Rise of the Novel course and Fiction and all that, what was happening in fiction in other parts of the world? Now what was British novel trying to do at that point? And then who were the greats after that? Was Dickens writing at the same time? Nineteenth century?

Student: Nineteen, Yeah (())

Professor: That is what I am saying, nineteenth century, when this novel was published in 1851; don't you think Dickens was also very active? Ok now, what was Dickens's concerns? Yeah? Dickens is out and out novelist of London city, of the city; therefore we have works like London in the novels of Dickens. Now, here you have to understand what was happening in America at this time?

America was still a

(Refer Slide Time 37:12)



Professor: young nation at that time.

(Refer Slide Time 37:16)



Professor: America never had a great history of novel writing, fiction writing and literature at this point. Ok, therefore, compare this novel and the plot structure of this novel, so the incoherent plot structure of this novel with the tightly structured coherence of the British novels. Compare them and contrast them, Ok because novel writing was already an established tradition in Britain at that point, not in America. So therefore some of the earlier example, whatever happened to the Transcendentalists? We are talking about American Literary Movements. When were the transcendentalists active? Yeah?

Student: Early twentieth century

Professor: Early nineteenth century. Still, so Emerson wrote his great essay called Nature and Thoreau wrote his Walden

(Refer Slide Time 38:20)



Professor: during the early nineteenth century, 1850s, 1830s, 1840s. That is the peak period of Transcendalist Movement, not earlier twentieth century. In twentieth century, we were having something else altogether. We were already talking about post-Modernism, yeah. We had people like Dreiser and people like Fitzgerald writing, Faulkner Ok, we can't be having transcendentalists during that period. So transcendental, transcendentalists what were they writing about? Basically celebrating nature, what the British poets were doing at that point? Remember? Ok, so British transcendentalism and American transcendentalism you can check the dates. Wordsworth's manifesto to Lyrical Ballads, 1798

Student: 17 (())

Professor: Yeah and Emerson's essay Nature, it comes sometimes during the 1830s. Ok, so American Transcendentalism follows the British Romanticism. Ok, and what were they doing; celebrating nature. That is the idea. Here too, you will find explorations and interactions with nature, so you have to situate now, Melville amidst this, all these kinds of motley variety of literary happenings, literary incidents and anecdotes happening all over the world. Ok, so the Transcendentalists were already very active and they had told us that man should be more attuned to the, to the spiritual side of his temperament. This is what we are going to cite. These men who talk about, these men that you are going to read about, Ok, they are pitted against nature.

You have already told me that. Moby-Dick is not about some great factory, or some great city or some great, you know, villain. It is about man versus nature, Ok. And you have to look at

the entire movement, the Transcendentalist Movement that took place, man in conversation with nature, Ok. Now Melville's nature may be something different from Wordsworth's nature and that also, you have to be careful about. So think of all these literary movements.

(Refer Slide Time 41:01)



Professor: 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, then that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off—
What does it mean?

(Refer Slide Time 41:24)



Professor: Whenever I am....wild, Ok, whenever I, so whenever I start getting berserk, I take to the sea. It is very simple. Ok, understand this. These may be lengthy, long, convoluted sentences but you have to understand this.

(Refer Slide Time 41:47)



Professor: This is my substitute for pistol and ball. Now what is pistol and ball?

Student: (())

Professor: Masculine aggressive sports, Ok and taking to the sea, seafaring is my way of asserting my masculinity. With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; Cato is a

(Refer Slide Time 42:20)



Professor: allusion is to Greek mytho, yes.

Student: He is a Roman soldier.

Professor: Roman soldier.

Student: He is a statesman

Professor: Statesman and what does he do, why this allusion to this great Roman statesman? I quietly take to the ship. I take to the ship with the same flourish, the way the great statesman had taken to the sword. Ok, that's way, that's my way of keeping myself alive. This is my skill. That was his. Swordsmanship was his skill. Seafaring is my skill.

(Refer Slide Time 43:01)



Professor: 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. And I am no one special to feel this way. Every man to some extent or the other has the same kinds of feelings towards the sea, towards the ocean, Ok. What is the idea? Spirit of adventure, yeah the spirit of adventure, the spirit of quest.

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, what do they here?

(Refer Slide Time 45:06)



Professor: What do you understand? What is, what is the philosophy here?

(Refer Slide Time 45:12)



Student: (()) seeks an adventure.

Professor: These marble-like

(Refer Slide Time 45:18)



Professor: statues of men; are they really marble-like statues, marble statues or are they, is he talking of real men of flesh and blood?

Student: Real

Professor: Real men of flesh and blood and in what context? What has happened to them?

Student: They have come to watch the sea

Professor: They have come to watch the sea, why?

Student: They all want break from the monotony of their life.

Professor: They all want break

(Refer Slide Time 45:44)



Professor: statues of men, are they really marble-like statues, marble statues or are they, is he talking of real men of flesh and blood?

Student: Real

Professor: Real men of flesh and blood and in what context? What has happened to them?

Student: They have come to watch the sea

Professor: They have come to watch the sea, why?

Student: They all want break from the monotony of their life.

Professor: They all want break from their monotony of their lives and what is those,

(Refer Slide Time 45:46)



Professor: what do they do in their monotonous lives?

Student: Sitting on their desks

Professor: Sitting on their desks

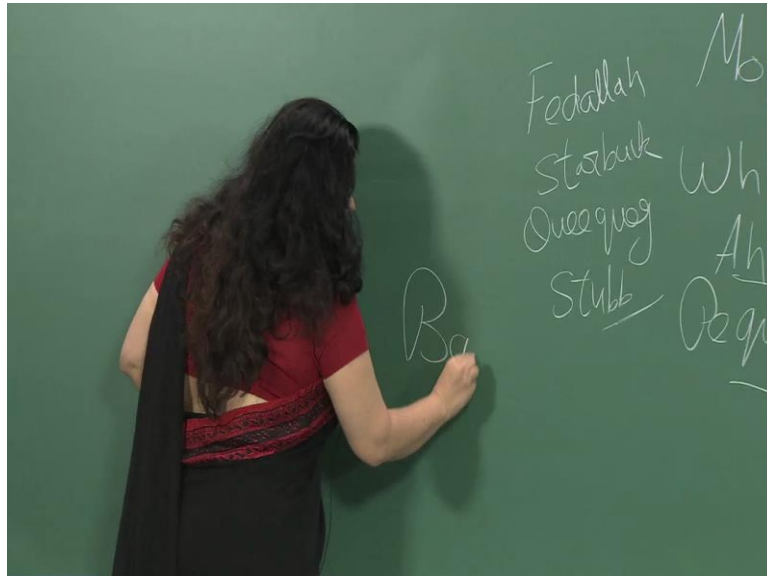
Student: Offices

Professor: Offices, carpentry or something. So industry works, factory works, Ok office works, shops nailed down to their warehouses, Ok. This is what their regular job is. And what is Ishmael's attitude towards them?

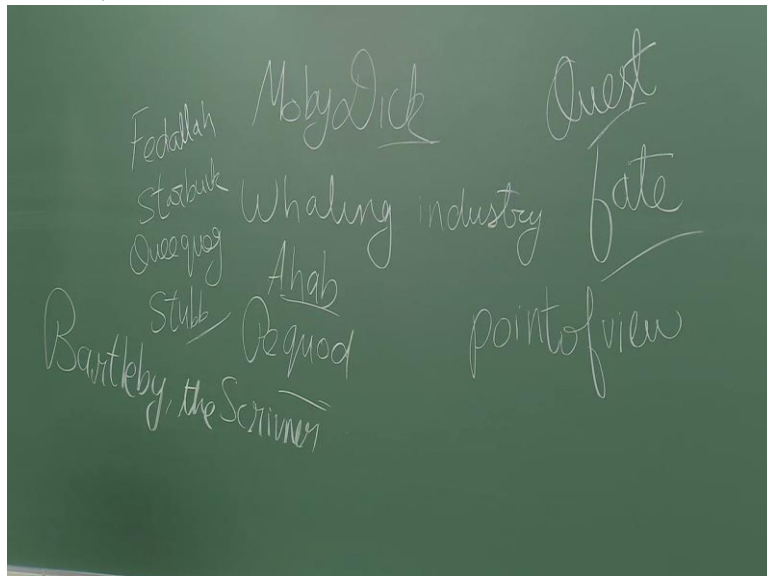
Student: Disdain?

Professor: Disdain, absolute disdain. These men are never going; they will just be mute spectators. They will be just watching the drama of life. They will be never; they will never have an important role in the drama of life. Now what is, at this point let me now urge, strongly urge that you read this particular short story again by Melville, Bartleby, The Scrivener.

(Refer Slide Time 46:42)



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Professor: Have you heard of this short story ever?

(Refer Slide Time 47:00)



Professor: It's a novella actually, not a short story exactly, *Bartleby, The Scrivener*. Ashmita, any comments on *Bartleby, The Scrivener*, heard of it? Now who is a scrivener? He is sort of a scribe; he is sort of an office worker. He has a very, low paying, very monotonous, very routine kind of an office job and whenever his boss gives him something to do, he says I would rather not. It becomes like a comedy but is it really a comedy? And then he spends some 30, 40 years in the same office, going through the motions of life. Whenever he is given something extra to do

(Refer Slide Time 47:54)



Professor: he says I would rather not. Now what does it, and then one day he quietly and silently dies. And that's it. Now what is Melville telling you about human condition? He is talking of those multitudes of men who go through the motions of life, absolutely yeah, with

nothing exciting has ever happened to this man. It is just like going through the life, doing nothing important, nothing special; nobody will ever remember you when you die and just you have never partaken in the action of life and for Herman Melville; going to the sea is taking part in real action. That is the reverence he gives to this way of life. Therefore you should know Herman Melville is a writer of sea. You know that? Are you aware of that? He has written several so-called nautical novels. There was something called Typee and something called Omoo and all those, so several novels describing the sea life, the lives of the sea farers, men at sea.

(Refer Slide Time 49:14)



Professor: Alright, so we are talking about, these are all landsmen of weeks days pent up in lath and plaster—tied to counters. Now, week days pent up in lath and plaster, what kind of an impression, what kind of a language is this? These men pent up in lath and plaster.

Student: (())

Professor: Lath are those machines, na, industrial machines kind of here, you keep hearing these lath machines all the time, yeah?

Student: Wooden plank

Professor: Wooden plank and also, yeah, yeah in machines, in carpentry, in plaster and also, they have also in a way turned into, like in today's language we call mechanical, robotic people, Ok, automatants. This is what these people have turned into. Ok, so the idea has been there since the early days, the early times of industrialization, that men who work there in factories and all, they have actually turned into sort of mechanical existence where as the

men, the real men, the more authentic American hero who can realize his selfhood is the one who is more attuned, with nature. Ok

(Refer Slide Time 50:37)



Professor: But look! here come more crowds, pacing straight for the water, and seemingly bound for a dive. Strange! Nothing will content them but the extremist limit of the land; loitering under the shady lee of yonder warehouses will not suffice. No. They must get just as nigh the water as they possibly can without falling in. And there they stand—miles of them—leagues. Inlanders all, they come from lanes and alleys, streets and avenues—north, east, south, and west. Yet here they all unite. Tell me, does the magnetic virtue of the needles of the compasses of all those ships attract them thither?

Once more. Say you are in the country; in some high land of lakes. Take almost any path you please, and ten to one it carries you down in a dale, and leaves you there by a pool in the stream. There is magic in it. Let the most absent-minded of men be plunged in his deepest reveries—stand that man on his legs, set his feet a-going, and he will infallibly lead you to water, if water there be in all that region. Should you ever be athirst in the great American desert, try this experiment, if your caravan happen to be supplied with a metaphysical professor. Yes, as everyone knows, meditation and water are wedded forever.

(Refer Slide Time 52:09)



Professor: Now what sense of water, what sense, how is he establishing the nature of this novel? What are the words that give you the clue? What kind of a novel is it? What kind of work are you going to be introduced to, water and sea, as, as what? Thirst for adventure also, don't you find a spiritual quality about water? Yes, yeah so water is almost associated with everything that is spiritual, and moral and religious. Religious not in a narrow, conventional way but in a more, you know, all encompassing way. Water has no religion, Ok but water has all, water is all spirituality. Ok, water leads to some kind of a communion with nature and therefore the relevance of water.

But here is an artist.

(Refer Slide Time 53:13)



Professor: He desires to paint you the dreamiest, shadiest, the quietest, most enchanting bit of romantic landscape in all the valley of the Saco. What is the chief element he employs? There stand his trees, each with a hollow trunk, as if a hermit and a crucifix were within; and here sleeps his meadow, and there sleep his cattle; and up from yonder cottage goes a sleepy smoke. Deep into distant woodlands winds a mazy way, reaching to overlapping spurs of mountains bathed in their hill-side blue. But though the picture lies thus tranced, and though this pine-tree shakes down its sighs like leaves upon this shepherd's head, yet all were vain, unless the shepherd's eye were fixed upon the magic stream before him.

(Refer Slide Time 54:04)



Professor: Read this passage and what do you find again? Why this reference to shepherd?

Student: Water

Professor: Again about water. Why so much of description, why this so much of long winding sentences, this kind of language again, again we come back to the same idea, magic stream before him, go visit the Prairies in June

(Refer Slide Time 54:30)



Professor: Where are the prairies, if you know your geography, high school geography?

Student: Central America

Professor: Where?

Student: Central

Professor: Central America, Ok and there are pampas in Southern America, so these are the

(Refer Slide Time 54:52)



Professor: Go visit the Prairies in June, when for scores on scores of miles you wade knee-deep among Tiger-lilies—what is the one charm wanting?—Water—there is not a drop of water there! Were Niagara but a cataract of sand, would you travel your thousand miles to see it?

Student: What he says about water, it is the image of the (()) fact of our life

Professor: Exactly, yes, yeah

Why is almost every robust healthy boy with a robust healthy soul in him, at some time or other crazy to go to sea? Why upon your first voyage as a passenger, did you yourself feel such a mystical vibration, when first told that you and your ship were now out of sight of land? Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and own brother of Jove? Surely all this is not without meaning.

So again, the mystical power

(Refer Slide Time 55:58)



Professor: yeah the metaphysical nature of water, Ok. Water's character is well established, not just as a life giving force but also as a deeply spiritual force which also shapes our personalities, Ok, what we are. So what is the idea behind all this now? What sort of image is presented to us, of water and the seafaring life? The seafaring life and water image, what is he trying to establish?

Student: Spiritually higher

Professor: Spiritually higher than any other way of life. This is the respect they give, these people, the crew because Ishmael is soon going to be a part of the crew, he is going to go aboard Pequod captained by the dreaded Captain Ahab, Ok, because this is the, why I am trying to establish the entire thing because from here, this is his reverence for water and the seafaring way of life. This is what he thought of. He put it on the pedestal. Everything good or everything positive in life is related to water, in other thing but once Moby-Dick and once Captain Ahab step into his life, then all those established notions are shattered.

And then you have seen the conflict between Starbuck and Captain Ahab, Ok, because Ahab has got nothing, he doesn't have reverence and spirituality in his mind. What does he have, vendetta, Ok. In other words, do you think Herman Melville is talking about something deeper? He is putting, he is sort of pitting spirituality versus forces of destruction and vendetta, yes.

Student: There are also uncivilized (())

Professor: You will find

(Refer Slide Time 58:08)



Professor: several uncivilized creatures, beings also

(Refer Slide Time 58:10)



Professor: on board. They too don't support Ahab but then you know what? At one point Ahab has made them pledge unwavering allegiance to his commitment to vendetta and

somehow they have all, you know it's also one of the foremost novels that talks about the cult of personality. Cult of personality, how certain people are constructed as larger-than-life creatures, larger-than-life beings, Ok, we almost turn them into heroes. But isn't a dangerous way, a dangerous philosophy to believe so much in these so-called heroes and icons? It also talks about that.

Ahab is present, therefore one of my earlier questions to you was that, why do we take so much time to get introduced to Captain Ahab and you said, because the writer wants to build up the suspense, to create an image, to build up an aura about him. This is what the novel is all about, aura building also. Ok, so when this man, where see, Ishmael starts as a child of nature, do you agree with me here? He has nothing except reverence, almost reverence for nature especially water but then what happens when you come under the spell of this absolutely fascinating being called Ahab and then you go along with him. And then what do you do to yourself? You destroy yourself. This is what the novel is all about. But then, in several digressing kinds of passages;

(Refer Slide Time 59:57)



Professor: and still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus... anyone who doesn't know the story of Narcissus? Again the water imagery, who because, he could not grasp the tormenting mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned but that same image, we ourselves see, in all rivers and oceans it is the image of the ungraspable phantom of the life and that is the key to it all.

(Refer Slide Time 01:00:27)



Professor: So again, water in that, deeply spiritual entity; Ok

(Refer Slide Time 01:00:38)



Professor: come to one of the last two concluding paragraphs of the same chapter? In between I expect you to read and then we will be discussing it. I will be connecting this chapter with the next chapter on Ahab.

For me it is Page 6, but I am sure you have something else. Ok, there is something na, It came in as sort of brief interlude and solo between more expensive performances. I take it that this part of the bill must have run something like this. “Grand Contested Election for the Presidency of the United States. “WHALING VOYAGE BY ONE ISHMAEL. “BLOODY BATTLE IN AFFGHANISTAN.”

Bloody battle of Afghanistan were at the back of the American mind, even in early nineteenth century, Ok but why? Why is he seeing this something like this? It is not really that he is seeing, right? He is reading that in his mind. Someday this bill board will come flashing, “Grand Contested Election for the Presidency of the United States. “WHALING VOYAGE BY ONE ISHMAEL. “BLOODY BATTLE IN AFFGHANISTAN.” So Ishmael is going to be at the center stage one day for his, all these escapades. It will be as important an event as presidential elections and battles in Afghanistan. How prophetic! And that's what, that's the place in the sun; again you are talking about the Great American Dream.

This is what he aspires to be. This is what his desire is. This is what is his ambition. He doesn't want any Sondra. Ok, so let's forget now Clyde Griffith and his world. Ok, that's not what this is all about, whaling voyage by one Ishmael, and so important. He wants to be identified with this.

Though I cannot tell why it was exactly that those stage managers, the Fates, put me down So again we are talking about the Fate, did I write somewhere here? Yes, Fate, so Fates is important part of a whaling voyage, when others were set down for magnificent parts in high tragedies

Ok, people had all of us, you know again Shakespearean idea; all of us are? Life is a?

Student: Stage

Professor: Stage and all of us are?

Student: Actors

Professor: Players, so this is what his theater of life. when others were set down for magnificent parts in high tragedies, and short and easy parts in genteel comedies, and jolly parts in farces—though I cannot tell why this was exactly; yet, now that I recall all the circumstances, I think I can see a little into the springs and motives which being cunningly presented to me under various disguises, induced me to set about performing the part I did, besides cajoling me into the delusion that it was a choice resulting from my own unbiased freewill and discriminating judgment.

(Refer Slide Time 01:03:56)



Professor: Comment on this, I think I have discussed it enough. You should be able to comment on this. It is very interesting.

Student: We think we are doing something (())

(Refer Slide Time 01:04:13)



Student: deterministic ideas,

Professor: Ok

(Refer Slide Time 01:04:17)



Professor: aright, it is all pre-determined? Ok, so role of fate, why of all the dramas that could have taken place in my life, I had to end up on this voyage with Captain Ahab? OK, it is all, we may think that we exercise free will, don't you think, at this age; stage also novel is getting extremely philosophical and anticipating existentialism? Yes or no? After all what is existentialist philosophy? We do talk the conflict between Fate and free will, and everything is pre-determined. So all those conflicts, so this is what Ishmael is talking about, an unlettered, so called uneducated man, but there is so much of wisdom in him.

(Refer Slide Time 01:05:12)



Professor: Chief among these motives was the overwhelming idea of the great whale himself. Such a portentous and mysterious monster roused all my curiosity. Then the wild and distant seas where he rolled his island bulk; the undeliverable, nameless perils of the whale; these,

with all the attending marvels of a thousand Patagonian sights and sounds, helped to sway me to my wish. With other men, perhaps, such things would not have been inducements; but as for me, I am tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote. I love to sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coasts. Not ignoring what is good, I am quick to perceive a horror, and could still be social with it—would they let me—since it is but well to be on friendly terms with all the inmates of the place one lodges in.

By reason of these things, then, the whaling voyage was welcome; the great flood-gates of the wonder-world swung open, and in the wild conceits that swayed me to my purpose, two and two there floated into my inmost soul, endless processions of the whale, and, mid most of them all, one grand hooded phantom, like a snow hill in the air.

(Refer Slide Time 01:06:36)



Professor: Ok, from now, from this point itself, the hero is being built up. So this is the story, and this is, so what is this, now comment on the narrative technique. Do you think all this event had already taken place and now Ishmael is, sort of, I live to tell my tale?

Student: Survivor

Professor: One of the survivors, yes

Student: Survivor's tale

Professor: Yes and he is telling you, he lived to tell you the tale. Ok, otherwise what was it that sort of drove me to take part in this particular voyage; I was destined to confront this whale and this man, yeah. And that was my destiny.

(Professor – student conversation ends)

(Refer Slide Time 01:07:22)

To be continued...