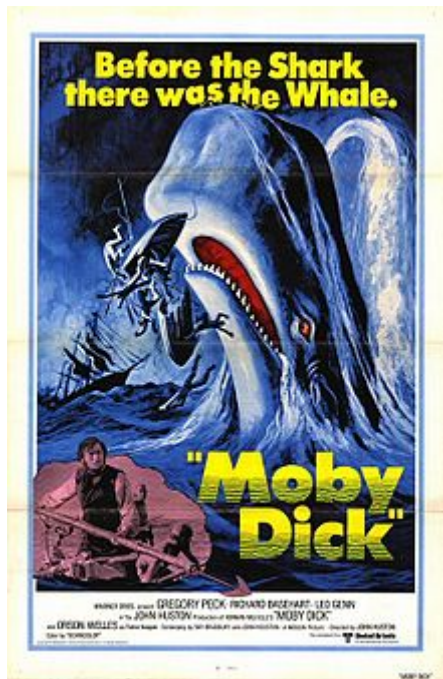


Moby Dick (1956)



1976 theatrical re-release poster

TOMATOMETER

All critics

84%

Average Rating: 7.1/10

Reviews Counted: 19

Fresh: 16

Rotten: 3

Top critics

80%

Average Rating: 0/10

Reviews Counted: 5

Fresh: 4

Rotten: 1

Critics Consensus: It may favor spectacle in place of the deeper themes in Herman Melville's novel, but John Huston's *Moby Dick* still makes for a grand movie adventure.

AUDIENCE SCORE

73%

liked it

Average Rating: 3.5/5

User Ratings: 8,233

Movie Info

Previous film versions of *Moby Dick* insisted upon including such imbecilities as romantic subplots and happy endings. John Huston's 1956 *Moby Dick* remains admirably faithful to its source. "Call me Ishmael" declares itinerant whaler Richard Basehart as the opening credits fade. Though slightly intimidated by the sermon delivered by Father Mapple (Orson Welles in a brilliant one-take cameo), who warns that those who challenge the sea are in danger of losing their souls, Ishmael nonetheless signs on to the *Pequod*, a whaling ship captained by the brooding, one-legged Ahab (Gregory Peck). For lo these many years, Ahab has been engaged in an obsessive pursuit of Moby Dick, the great white whale to whom he lost his leg. Ahab's dementia spreads throughout the crew members, who maniacally join their captain in his final, fatal attack upon the elusive, enigmatic Moby Dick. Screenwriter Ray Bradbury masterfully captures the allegorical elements in the Herman Melville original without sacrificing any of the film's entertainment value (Bradbury suffered his own "great white whale" in the form of director Huston, who sadistically ran roughshod over the sensitive author throughout the film). Cinematographer Oswald Morris' washed-out color scheme brilliantly underlines the foredoomed bleakness of the story. *Moby Dick*'s one major shortcoming is its obviously artificial whale-but try telling a real whale to stay within camera range and hit its marks. ~ Hal Erickson, Rovi

Rating:G

Genre:Action & Adventure , Classics , Drama

Directed By:John Huston , Franc Roddam

Written By:Ray Bradbury , John Huston

In Theaters:Jun 27, 1956 wide

On DVD:Jun 19, 2001

Runtime:116 minutes

Studio:MGM

[www.rottentomatoes.com]

Moby Dick

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Moby Dick is a 1956 film adaptation of Herman Melville's novel *Moby-Dick*. It was directed by John Huston with a screenplay by Huston and Ray Bradbury. The film starred Gregory Peck, Richard Basehart, and Leo Genn.

The music score was written by Philip Sainton.

Plot

Set in 19th-century New England, the story follows the whaling ship *Pequod* and its crew. Leading them is Captain Ahab, who was almost killed in an encounter with the "great white whale", Moby Dick. Now he is out for revenge. With the crew that has joined him, Ahab is out to destroy the huge sea mammal, but his obsession with vengeance is so great that he cannot turn back, eventually leading to the death of Ahab and all of his crew, save his newest able seaman, Ishmael.

Cast

- Gregory Peck as Captain Ahab
- Richard Basehart as Ishmael
- Leo Genn as Starbuck
- James Robertson Justice as Captain Boomer
- Harry Andrews as Stubb
- Bernard Miles as The Manxman
- Noel Purcell as Ship's Carpenter
- Edric Connor as Daggoo
- Mervyn Johns as Peleg
- Joseph Tomelty as Peter Coffin
- Francis de Wolff as Captain Gardiner
- Philip Stainton as Bildad
- Royal Dano as Elijah
- Seamus Kelly as Flask
- Friedrich von Ledebur as Queequeg
- Orson Welles as Father Mapple
- Tamba Allenby as Pip (uncredited)
- Tom Clegg as Tashtego (uncredited)
- Ted Howard as Perth (uncredited)
- Iris Tree as Bible woman (uncredited)
- John Huston as the voice of Peter Coffin and a Pequod lookout (uncredited)

Peck was initially surprised to be cast as Ahab (part of the studio's agreement to fund the film was that Huston use a "name" actor as Ahab). Peck later commented that he felt Huston himself should have played Ahab. Ironically, Huston had originally intended to cast his own father, the actor Walter Huston in the role, but his father had died by the time the film was made. Peck went on to play the role of Father Mapple in the 1998 television miniseries adaptation of Melville's novel, with Patrick Stewart as Ahab.

Welles later used the salary from his cameo to fund his own stage production of *Moby Dick*, in which Rod Steiger played Captain Ahab.

The *Pequod* was portrayed by, appropriately, the *Moby Dick*. Built in England in 1887 as the *Ryelands*, the ship came into the hands of the film industry in the 50s, and was also used in *Treasure Island*. It was destroyed by fire in Morecambe, England in 1972.

The schooners used were *Harvest King* and *James Postlethwaite*, both from Arklow, Ireland.

Gregory Peck, comparing his performances in this film and the 1998 *Moby Dick* miniseries, said he liked the miniseries better because it was more faithful to the novel.

Production

During a meeting to discuss the screenplay, Ray Bradbury informed John Huston that regarding Melville's novel, he had "never been able to read the damned thing". According to the biography *The Bradbury Chronicles*, there was much tension and anger between the two men during the making of the film, allegedly due to Huston's bullying attitude and attempts to tell Bradbury how to do his job, despite Bradbury being an accomplished writer. Bradbury's novel *Green Shadows, White Whale* includes a fictionalized version of his writing the screenplay with John Huston in Ireland. Bradbury's short story "Banshee" is another fictionalized account of what it was like to work with Huston on this film. In the television adaptation of the story for *The Ray Bradbury Theater* the Huston character was played by Peter O'Toole and the Bradbury surrogate by Charles Martin Smith.

Huston had always wanted to make a film of *Moby-Dick*, and wanted to cast his father Walter as Ahab. Unfortunately, Walter had died in 1950, before the film was financed. The film was bankrolled by brothers Walter, Harold, and Marvin Mirisch, who financed Huston's *Moulin Rouge*. The Mirisches made a deal with Warner Bros. in order to release the film. Under the agreement, Warners would distribute *Moby Dick* for seven years, after which all rights would revert to the Mirisch brothers' company, Moulin Productions.

The film began shooting in Wales at Huston's request. Parts of the movie were shot at the sea in front of Caniçal, a traditional whaling parish in Madeira Islands, Portugal, with real action of whaling, done by whalers of Madeira Island. It was also filmed in Las Canteras beach, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Canary Islands, Spain. Captain Alan Villiers commanded the ship for the film.

Many exterior scenes set in New Bedford were shot on location in Youghal, Co. Cork, Ireland. The town has a public house, originally called Linehan's and at that time owned by Paddy Linehan, whose exterior appears in the movie. It was renamed Moby Dick's shortly after filming by Mr. Linehan. It is still owned and run by the Linehan family and boasts a fine collection of photographs taken of the cast and crew during the making of the film. While there, John Huston used the bar as his headquarters to plan each day's filming. The town's harbor basin, in front of Moby Dick's bar, was used to stand in as New Bedford's harbor, and some local people appear as extras in the ship's departure scene. Youghal's nineteenth century lighthouse also appears in a scene of the *Pequod* putting to sea (at sunset) on her fateful voyage.

A myth that was put to rest in cinematographer Oswald Morris' autobiography, *Huston, We Have A Problem*, is that no full length whale models were ever built for the production. Previous accounts have claimed that as many as three 60-foot rubber "white whales" were lost at sea during filming making them "navigational hazards". In fact the titular whale shown in the film was constructed by Dunlop in Stoke-on-Trent, England. Moby Dick was 75 ft long and weighed 12 tons, and required 80 drums of compressed air and a hydraulic system in order to remain afloat and operational. However the

artificial whale came loose from its tow-line and drifted away in a fog. Peck confirmed in 1995 that he was aboard the prop. According to Morris, after the prop was lost the *Pequod* was followed by a barge with various whale parts (hump, back, fin, tail). 90% of the shots of the white whale are various size miniatures filmed in a water tank in Shepperton Studios in London. Whales and longboat models were built by a special effects man, August Lohman, working in conjunction with art director Stephen Grimes. Studio shots also included a life-size Moby jaw and head - with working eyes. The head apparatus which could move like a rocking horse was employed when actors were in the water with the whale. Gregory Peck's last speech is delivered in the studio while riding the white whale's hump (a hole was drilled in the side of the whale so Peck could conceal his real leg).

The film's problems were further escalated by rising costs. The film went overbudget, from \$2 million to around \$4.4 million, which crippled Moulin Productions; *Moby Dick* was ultimately sold to United Artists in order to recoup some of the Mirisch brothers' debt (Warners still distributed the film, corresponding to their original licensing agreement). *Moby Dick* did not recoup its budget upon its initial release.

Peck and Huston intended to shoot Herman Melville's *Typee* in 1957, but the funding fell through. Not long after, the two had a falling out. According to one biography, Peck discovered to his disappointment that he had not been Huston's choice for Ahab, but in fact was thrust upon the director by the Mirisch brothers to secure financing. Peck felt Huston had deceived him into taking a part for which Peck felt he was ill-suited. Years later, the actor tried to patch up his differences with the director, but Huston, quoted in Lawrence Grobel's biography *The Hustons*, rebuked Peck ("It was too late to start over," said Huston) and the two never spoke to each other again. Nevertheless, Huston's daughter Anjelica confirmed in a 2003 *Larry King Live* interview that her father had "adored" Peck.

In the documentary accompanying the DVD marking the 30th anniversary of the film, *Jaws*, director Steven Spielberg states his original intention had been to introduce the Ahab-like character Quint (Robert Shaw), by showing him watching the 1956 version of the film and

laughing at the inaccuracies therein. However, permission to use footage of the original film was denied by Gregory Peck as he was uncomfortable with his performance.

At the age of four, Anjelica Huston met Peck dressed as Ahab when she visited the set of her father's film. Decades later, she and Peck would meet again and become close friends with each other until the latter's death.

Reception

The film has an 84% rating on Rotten Tomatoes, with the consensus that "It may favor spectacle in place of the deeper themes in Herman Melville's novel, but John Huston's *Moby Dick* still makes for a grand movie adventure."