



BOATS ATTACKING WHALES.

The Hunt for Moby-Dick

Written and Presented by
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A Lone Star Production for BBC *Arena*



Arena: The Hunt for Moby-Dick

In this feature-length adventure documentary, four years in the making and filmed in England, America, and the Azores, acclaimed writer and authority on whales, Philip Hoare, confronts man's relationship with the whale and brings it into startling new focus through *Moby-Dick* - a 19th century novel that resounds with 21st century relevance. In its story of Captain Ahab's obsessive pursuit of the great White Whale on the high seas, Philip Hoare draws parallels to the current 'war on terror', from 9/11 to Iraq.

In just one hundred years man has moved from dramatic battles when whalers pitted themselves against the greatest predator on earth, to the sense of awe we now feel as we witness the gentle giants which still populate the open ocean. Yet those issues of human history and natural history remain vividly apparent. Barely a week goes by without a whale-related story in the national and international media – from the whale which swam up the Thames to the controversial whaling still carried out in the Southern Ocean. Now, embarking on his own odyssey like Herman Melville's ambiguous hero, Ishmael, Hoare asks: What lies behind our perennial fascination with the whale? What is the truth behind *Moby-Dick*, and how does it reflect on our modern world?

Among all the great whales, it is the sperm whale which remains the most abiding mystery. Unlike the placid, plankton-eating baleen whales – such as the blue whale, the fin back and the humpback – it has huge ivory teeth set in a ferocious jaw. It is the only whale able to swallow a human being. It is a natural submarine, able to hinge its ribs and collapse its lungs to dive two miles deep, for up to two hours. But it was also an industrial resource. The oil in its pugnacious head, so prized in the 18th and 19th centuries as the fuel which lit the world until the discovery of petroleum. It is still used in space

technology to lubricate the Hubble space telescope. America's empire was founded on whaling. At its height, a fleet of 70 ships were bringing back oil and blubber worth \$70 million to the American economy. These were factory ships, equivalents of modern oil tankers, fuelling the Industrial Revolution. They were also exterminating entire species.

In an epic journey which takes him from his hometown of Southampton to the whaling ports of New Bedford and Nantucket and finally to the islands of the Azores – where whales were still hunted up to the 1980s - Hoare enters a world haunted by the past – by a bloody trade characterised by extreme violence – and foreshadowed by the future. In Melville's tyrannical, demented Captain Ahab – obsessively pursuing the whale which bit off his leg – he sees the pattern of modern dictators; and in the ominous shape of the hunted whale, an analogy for the threatened modern world.

Hoare stands at the desk where Melville wrote his masterpiece, looking out to a New England mountain whose snowy brow reminded him of the great monster of his book. He visits the last remaining whaleship, the *Charles W. Morgan*, to see what conditions on board were really like. He visits whaling museums in New Bedford, Nantucket, and Hull, to try and ascertain the true shape of the whale. Off Cape Cod, he watches humpback whales, living leviathans. And out in the mile-deep waters of the Atlantic, he has his own extraordinary encounter with the legendary sperm whale itself. In doing so, the writer takes us closer than ever before to the truth behind *Moby-Dick* and our fearful, eternal fascination with the whale.





Philip Hoare

Philip Hoare's books – which include biographies of Stephen Tennant and Noel Coward - have appeared on best seller lists on both sides of the Atlantic, and been acclaimed by reviewers such as Simon Callow, John Waters, and Ian McKellen. W.G. Sebald chose *Spike Island* (2001) as his 'Book of the Year', calling it: 'An astonishing book not only for what it contains but also for its synoptic vision and for its wonderful prose style'.

England's Lost Eden (2005) was admired by *The Observer's* Robert McCrum: 'There is no mistaking the depth and authenticity of Hoare's scholarship or the uncanny alertness of his intuitions. No one...could fail to be thrilled and quite possibly entranced by this remarkable volume'.

Philip Hoare lives in Southampton, but regularly visits Cape Cod, where, as a member of the Center for Coastal Studies, he assists on its Humpback Identification Program.

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