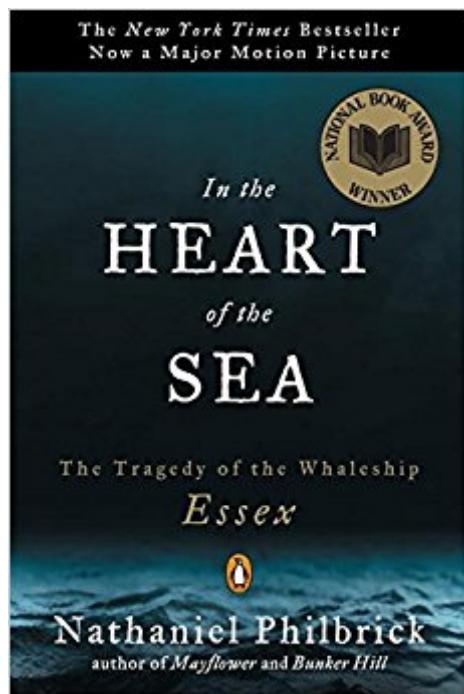


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# In The Heart Of The Sea: The Tragedy Of The Whaleship Essex



## Synopsis

From the author of *A Mayflower* and *Valiant Ambition*, the riveting bestseller tells the story of the true events that inspired Melville's *Moby-Dick*. Winner of the National Book Award, Nathaniel Philbrick's book is a fantastic saga of survival and adventure, steeped in the lore of whaling, with deep resonance in American literature and history. In 1820, the whaleship *Essex* was rammed and sunk by an angry sperm whale, leaving the desperate crew to drift for more than ninety days in three tiny boats. Nathaniel Philbrick uses little-known documents and vivid details about the Nantucket whaling tradition to reveal the chilling facts of this infamous maritime disaster. *In the Heart of the Sea*, recently adapted into a major feature film starring Chris Hemsworth, is a book for the ages.

## Book Information

Paperback: 302 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; Reissue edition (May 1, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0141001828

ISBN-13: 978-0141001821

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.9 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 1,372 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #9,188 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #2 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Animals > Marine Life #4 in Books > History > World > Maritime History & Piracy #6 in Books > Engineering & Transportation > Transportation > History > Ships

## Customer Reviews

The appeal of Dava Sobel's *Longitude* was, in part, that it illuminated a little-known piece of history through a series of captivating incidents and engaging personalities. Nathaniel Philbrick's *In the Heart of the Sea* is certainly cast from the same mold, examining the 19th-century Pacific whaling industry through the arc of the sinking of the whaleship *Essex* by a boisterous sperm whale. The story that inspired Herman Melville's classic *Moby-Dick* has a lot going for it--derring-do, cannibalism, rescue--and Philbrick proves an amiable and well-informed narrator, providing both context and detail. We learn about the importance and mechanics of blubber production--a vital source of oil--and we get the nuts and bolts of harpooning and life aboard whalers. We are spared neither the nitty-gritty of open boats nor the sucking of human bones dry. By sticking to the tried and tested *Longitude* formula, Philbrick has missed a slight trick or two. The epicenter of the whaling

industry was Nantucket, a small island off Cape Cod; most of the whales were in the Pacific, necessitating a huge journey around the southernmost tip of South America. We never learn why no one ever tried to create an alternative whaling capital somewhere nearer. Similarly, Philbrick tells us that the story of the Essex was well known to Americans for decades, but he never explores how such legends fade from our consciousness. Philbrick would no doubt reply that such questions were beyond his remit, and you can't exactly accuse him of skimping on his research. By any standard, 50 pages of footnotes impress, though he wears his learning lightly. He doesn't get bogged down in turgid detail, and his narrative rattles along at a nice pace. When the storyline is as good as this, you can't really ask for more. --John Crace, .co.uk --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

With woody intonation and a suitably somber cadence, Tony Award-winning actor Herrmann reads this chilling tale of the Essex, a whaling ship that was sunk in the middle of the Pacific by an 80-foot sperm whale in 1820. The story would come to mark the mythology of the 19th century as the Titanic did the 20th. Herman Melville, for one, based Moby Dick on certain key elements of the tragedy. In Philbrick's spare, well-paced version, we learn much about how Nantucket's culture was affected by the whaling industry boom, from its economy to its social habits. But the horrific heart of the narrative details the fate of the 20 sailors who attempted to sail several thousand miles back to Chile using only three pathetic open boats. Reaching home 93 days later, only eight sailors survived the ordeal of thirst, starvation and despair. Near the tape's end, Herrmann delivers one of the finest funereal orations ever offered on behalf of seamen. Simultaneous release with the Viking hardcover (Forecasts, Apr. 10). (May) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I knew the outlines of the story of the Essex from reading Leviathan: The History of Whaling in America. What was most interesting to me was the story of how the crew dealt with the event, their tenacity, ability to endure enormous suffering, and willingness to follow leaders, even leaders with very different skill sets. Lots of revealing detail about the community of Nantucket, the construction of the ships, how the crews were assembled of novice and veteran whalers, the sheer enormity of the task of finding, killing, rendering whales and sailing these relatively small, relatively fragile ships thousands of miles into unknown waters. These were courageous, if not desperate, men.

In 1819, the Nantucket based whale ship Essex set off on a two year journey, around Cape Horn

and into the whale rich waters of the South Pacific. With a new captain, first mate and many green sailors, the trip suffered from several minor setbacks (not unusual in the trade), before the Essex was sunk in the first documented case of a ship being attacked by a sperm whale, estimated to be an 85 foot monster. Relegated to whale boats, not suited for long trips on the open ocean, and hampered by trade winds which prevented steering a direct course for South America, the survivors spent three months in their whale boats, suffering through unimaginable bouts with starvation, dehydration, weather and ultimately cannibalism. This work paints a fascinating picture of the people and the culture of Nantucket and the whaling community, the Essex in particular. It is educational and instructive in both the customs of the era and the trade, as well as the psychology involved in disaster response and leadership. I have read numerous accounts of extreme exploration and the privations associated therewith and this treatment is very good in that genre. There are two very good maps and several photos and illustrations which assist the reader in following the narrative. The book is very short, at 230 pages with additional notes and reference material. My only quibble is that the endnotes are not associated with the primary text. A reader will finish the entire book, before even discovering that there are, in fact, notes associated with the text. Being able to read the notes in conjunction with the text would have been instructive.

This was an outstanding account of a traumatic test that these men were thrown into and an amazing telling of events that were part of the inspiration for Moby Dick. I thought this was going to be a story about an epic whale attack, but the attack comes early and, while it was devastating, didn't have the hollywood flair or the fictionalized grandeur of a novel. For a moment I was let down but I soon realized this book wasn't about the whale but about the crew and their uphill, vicious battle to survive the trials that come from being afloat on a lonely, expansive, and unforgiving ocean. I love novels where I can relate to or simply like characters and this book is all the better because these are actual men who are struggling, who have gone to the brink of death, and who have had to slum down to unspeakable acts for survival, do things they would have never thought they would do, all in the name of getting home again. From the explanation of the whaling culture on Nantucket, to the acts of sailing and whaling, to the destruction of their ship, to being afloat, and everything that happens afterward, this is a great read. Following the story of these men is something that I believe most people will enjoy. The raw telling of their culture, the job of whaling itself, and the acts committed in the name of survival are shocking, amazing, and horrifying in some respects, but the no-holds-barred telling of this event was fantastic.

Heck, with over 1,000 reviews already for this book, I will not discuss its merits (or lack thereof). I will just say that I enjoyed it a lot, I suffered with the guys, I suffered for the butchering of the whale, I rooted for the survivors. And I was shocked by the totally absurd and unreal way that Captain Pollard was portrayed in the movie of the same name... Anyway, a gripping reading all the way.

It is a compelling, well-researched true story, but an emotionally grueling read as one follows the long ordeal of the few survivors of the whaling ship Essex, shipwrecked far out in the Pacific, as they attempt to reach the South American coast. It was tremendously ironic to learn that had they chanced a landing on the mostly unknown "Society Islands," which were a week's sail away, they could have recuperated on the now-famous island paradise of Tahiti. Fears of cannibals made the crew overrule their captain's plan to go there, and instead they became the cannibals themselves. Truly horrible. Captain Ahab is not a simple portrait of any of the men on the Essex, but news of the disaster inspired young Herman Melville to begin work on the greatest novel of his career--Moby Dick (Oxford World's Classics). Philbrick's account of the whaling industry is unsparing and brutal, and it made me admire all the more the way Melville could convey the same facts but transform them into high literary art. If Ahab resembles any of the crew, it may be Owen Chase, the First Mate (played by Chris Hemsworth in the recent film adaptation). Philbrick also wrote *Why Read Moby-Dick?*

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