



Moby Dick and Rabelais

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Moby Dick AND RABELAIS

In the light of the recent interest in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, I should like to draw attention to the parallelisms between Chapter XLI, *The Whiteness of the Whale*, in that book and Book I, Chapter x of Rabelais, *Of That Which is Signified by the Colours White and Blue*. The following are the most strikingly similar passages:¹

Moby Dick

" . . and though besides all this, whiteness has been even made significant of gladness" —p. 163

" . . for among the Romans a white stone marked a joyful day—" —p. 163

" . . though in the Vision of St. John, white robes are given to the redeemed, and the four-and-twenty elders stand clothed in white before the great white throne, and the Holy One that sitteth there white like wool—" —p. 164

" . . whiteness . . contributes to the daily state of kings and queens drawn by milk-white steeds—" —p. 164

" . . there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood." p. 164

Rabelais

" . . by white all the world hath understood joy, gladness, mirth, pleasure, and delight." —p. 39

" . . by white, nature would have us understand joy and gladness" — p. 41

" . . In former times the Thracians and Cretans did mark their good, propitious, and fortunate days with white stones—" —p. 39

" With the like colour of vesture did St. John the Evangelist, Apoc. 4. 7, see the faithful clothed in the heavenly and blessed Jerusalem." —p. 40

" . . when any man, after he had vanquished his enemies, was by decree of the senate to enter into Rome triumphantly, he usually rode in a chariot drawn by white horses: which in the ovation triumph was also the custom—" —p. 40

" . . the lion, who with his only cry and roaring affrights all beasts, dreads and feareth only a white cock—" —p. 40

Considering the above, there can be little doubt as to the literary provenience of Melville's chapter.

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¹ Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*; Everyman's Library, E. P. Dutton & Co., New York. *The Works of Rabelais*; translated by Urquhart and Motteux, Chalon Edition, London.