



In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex

By Nathaniel Philbrick

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From the author of the forthcoming book, *Valiant Ambition*, the riveting and critically acclaimed bestseller, soon to be a major motion picture starring Chris Hemsworth, directed by Ron Howard, premiering on December 11, 2015

Chris Hemsworth, Cillian Murphy, Ben Whishaw, and Brendan Gleeson will star in a new film based on this National Book Award-winning account of the true events behind *Moby Dick*.

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*—and now, its epic adaptation for the screen—will forever place the *Essex* tragedy in the American historical canon.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

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, *Amazon.co.uk*

From Publishers Weekly

In 1821, a whaling ship came upon a small boat off the coast of Chile containing two deranged men surrounded by human bones that they alternately chewed and clutched to their shriveled bodies. The two were survivors of one of the most well-known marine disasters of the 19th century: the sinking of a 240-ton Nantucket whaleship by an 80-ton sperm whale. A maritime historian, Philbrick recounts the hellish wreck of the *Essex* (which inspired Melville's *Moby-Dick*) and its sailors' struggle to make their way to South America, 2,000 miles away. Of the 20 men aboard the two boats, only eight would remain alive through the ravages of thirst, hunger and desperation that beset the voyage. With a gracefulness of language that rarely falters, Philbrick spins a ghastly, irresistible tale that draws upon archival material (including a cabin boy's journal discovered in 1960). Philbrick shows how the Quaker establishment of Nantucket ran a hugely profitable whaling industry in the 18th and 19th centuries and provides a detailed account of shipboard life. A champion sailboat racer himself, Philbrick has a particular affinity for his subject. His fastidious, extensive notes and bibliography will please historians, but it's his measured prose that superbly re-creates a cornerstone of the early American frontier ethos. 16 page photo insert not seen by PW. 15-city author tour; foreign rights sold to nine countries. (May)

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From School Library Journal

YA-In 1819, the *Essex*, a Nantucket whaleship carrying a crew of 20, began what all thought would be a normal, two-year voyage. Instead, after a year and a half of near-disasters, the ship was rammed by a sperm whale and sank in the Pacific. All hands got off in three whaleboats and were at sea for three unbearable months of short rations and little fresh water, leading to the death by starvation of some and the killing of others to provide food. One boat disappeared and the two remaining eventually became separated. When rescued off the coast of Chile, only five men were still alive, including the captain and first mate, as well as

three rescued later from an island. Philbrick brings the era to life, giving readers a rounded picture of the whaling industry and its society. Relying mainly on two survivors' detailed accounts, one of which has just recently been found, he fleshes out the tale in an exciting manner that sweeps readers along. He includes modern medical knowledge of the physical and mental effects of starvation on humans. The book concludes with tales of other shipwrecks, a description of how the survivors lived the rest of their lives, and an introduction to the recent work of the Nantucket Whaling Museum. The contrast between today's touristy island paradise and yesterday's hard life will not be lost on teens.

Judy McAloon, Potomac Library, Prince William County, VA

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Dolores Stiger:

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