

The magic of letters or why do we read?

Everybody reads: letters or postcards from friends, newspapers, manuals, or instructions from authorities. In this part of the world, reading is a cultural technique that enables us to find our way around the world.

When I read books, I travel to foreign worlds. The magic of the letters casts a spell over me: while reading, I gain insight into new worlds, take part in the fate of people completely unknown to me and marvel at the world they inhabit. This is how I broaden my horizons considerably without ever having to step outside of my apartment or getting on a plane. So, reading is rather convenient for me.

One book that fascinates me is the novel “Moby Dick”. Everyone is probably familiar with the story of how the whaling ship Pequod is hunting the ominous white whale Moby Dick. And everyone probably recalls the dramatic end when Moby Dick sinks the ship and the crew with it. This novel is much more than an exciting adventure story. “Moby Dick” tackles many, timeless questions. We can interpret the whaling ship as a symbol of the state. By the way, this image harks back to antiquity: the ship of state. How should it be organized? Does it take a sole captain, an autocrat? Or shouldn't be more people responsible as leaders? And what should a collective do when its leadership has lost its mind and threatens to drag it into the abyss, just as Captain Ahab does in the novel.

By the way: the German edition of Moby Dick was published by Manesse in 1944. This was certainly no coincidence, as World War II was raging – sparked by a dictator named Adolf Hitler. Fortunately, World War II was long ago, and in Europe a war between the states has become unlikely. However, the question of how the state should be politically composed, though, is still topical. As citizens, it is our call. And when we decide, as citizens, we will also draw lessons from some of the works that have shaped us.

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