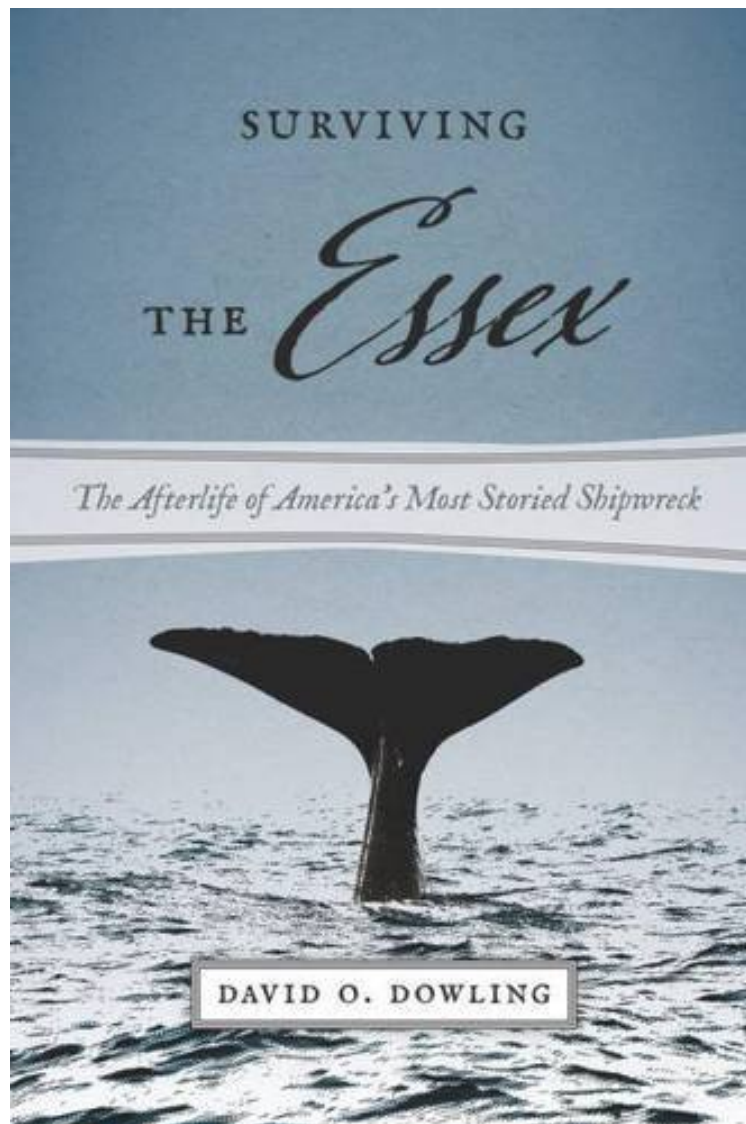


(Free read ebook) Surviving the Essex: The Afterlife of America's Most Storied Shipwreck (Seafaring America)

Surviving the Essex: The Afterlife of America's Most Storied Shipwreck (Seafaring America)

David O. Dowling

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David O. Dowling : Surviving the Essex: The Afterlife of America's Most Storied Shipwreck (Seafaring America) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Surviving the Essex: The Afterlife of America's Most Storied Shipwreck (Seafaring America):

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A revelatory, well-written bookBy Henry PorterSurviving the Essex

is a deeply researched and sophisticated book about the layers of myth-making that have grown up around the most well-known shipwreck in the whaling industry. Dowling understands that there is no single story of the Essex: there are multiple, conflicting stories that a good scholar can peel away to reveal much not only about 19th century America, but about our own preconceptions in the new millennium. Other commentators have compared *Surviving the Essex* to Nathaniel Philbrick's excellent book *In the Heart of the Sea*, a book I very much admire. The comparison is unavoidable. Philbrick does a superb job putting together a gripping narrative, the kind of narrative that . . . well, would appeal to the readers of adventure stories and the makers of Hollywood movies. Dowling writes in a different key, one attuned to the complexity of such narratives and the way their drama always contains a personal, philosophical, or financial agenda. (I should say that Dowling admires Philbrick enormously and does not take apart his narrative in the way that he does the 19th century texts *In the Heart of the Sea* was based upon.) Both books are indispensable. *Surviving the Essex* is a revelatory book of outstanding scholarship and will appeal to anyone interested in American maritime history. It has opened my eyes to the many stories that comprise the Essex tragedy and, in the process, it has humanized the much misunderstood (and misrepresented) Captain Pollard. That Melville and Emerson both saw enormous dignity in the captain should make us all grateful to Dowling for restoring to history a gracious example of how to live after disappointment and defeat. As for readability, I spent a very happy afternoon with *Surviving the Essex* and finished in time for a couple of IPAs watching the sunset.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A whale destroying a vessel is a cornerstone of American ...By Nicholas Yanes

A whale destroying a vessel is a cornerstone of American culture and literature, and it begins with the whaling ship, the Essex. From Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*; or, *The Whale* to Ron Howard's *In the Heart of the Sea*, the Essex's legacy continues to sail long after its tragic voyage. However, an element of the story that has been overlooked for centuries, is how the survivors of the Essex battled for control of this narrative. This is where David Dowling's *Surviving the Essex* comes in. By exploring the conflicting accounts of the Essex's end produced by its survivors, Dowling is able to illuminate how these stories were designed to not only profit from an audience hungry for this type of story, but how they were created to build their professional reputations and justify the actions they took to survive. For anyone interested in the intersection of U.S. nautical and literary history, *Surviving the Essex* provides a critical insight into the unexplored aftermath of the Essex and its encounter with the unknown.

2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Not Written for a General Audience

By Steven M. Anthony

Having read and enjoyed Nathaniel Philbrick's non-fiction work, *In the Heart of the Sea*, I applied for a complimentary copy of this book, ostensibly a follow up to Philbrick's in exchange for an honest review. 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. *In the Heart of the Sea* was a gripping account of this event and highly educational with respect to the culture of whaling in general and of the Nantucket trade in particular. *Surviving the Essex* not only follows the major actors in the drama as they continue with their lives and careers, but indulges in copious amounts of pop psychology and assumption with respect to the two major players, Captain George Pollard, Jr. and First Mate Owen Chase. Herman Melville also makes an appearance, as the Essex tragedy purportedly served as a template for *Moby Dick*. The author clearly has decided that Captain Pollard has been badly represented in relation to the tragedy and takes every opportunity to put him in a good light. In order to do so, he must necessarily assign blame elsewhere and Owen Chase is his scapegoat. Certainly, it may be true that Chase played a large role in the tragedy, but in my opinion, the author overplays his hand in this regard, resorting to an enormous amount of undocumented assumption and hindsight to not only place the blame on Chase for selecting the disastrous post-accident decision to steer for South America instead of the possibly cannibal infested islands of French Polynesia (didn't the final decision rest with the Captain?), but also to blame him for the sinking itself. In doing so, the author resorts to all sorts of pop psychology mumbo jumbo. Putting aside the actual material content of the work, however, the biggest problem with the book is that it is simply not very interesting and reading it is something of a chore. It is written more in the style of a psychology textbook than the entertaining and educational experience that Philbrick's book was.

SPOILERS. To summarize, Captain Pollard turned out to be very comfortable in his own skin, despite the Essex disaster and another sinking that immediately followed, becoming a well-respected and productive member of the Nantucket community (though a night watchman and not a whaler). Chase, on the other hand, though becoming enormously successful and wealthy in his whaling career, led a tortured existence and ultimately went insane. Chase, the author argues, is the model for Melville's Captain Ahab, and not Captain Pollard.

Surviving the Essex tells the captivating story of a ship's crew battered by whale attack, broken by four months at sea, and forced out of necessity to make meals of their fellow survivors. Exploring the Rashomon-like Essex accounts that complicate and even contradict first mate Owen Chase's narrative, David O. Dowling examines the vital role of

viewpoint in shaping how an event is remembered and delves into the ordeals submerged history the survivors lives, ambitions, and motives, their pivotal actions during the desperate moments of the wreck itself, and their will to reconcile those actions in the short- and long-term aftermath of this storied event. Mother of all whale tales, *Surviving the Essex* acts as a sequel to Nathaniel Philbrick's *In the Heart of the Sea*, while probing deeper into the nature of trauma and survival accounts, an extreme form of notoriety, and the impact that the story had on Herman Melville and the writing of *Moby-Dick*. Hardcover is un-jacketed.

As many readers know, *Moby-Dick* was inspired by the shipwreck of the whaling ship *Essex* in 1820. As David O. Dowling discusses in *Surviving the Essex*, the wreck of the *Essex* was an early example of prurient tabloid scandal, capturing the imagination of readers eager, then as now, for stories of heroism and villainy in the face of moral dilemmas. *The Washington Post*