learns that the older son has remained loyal to him, and he blesses Monime and this son.

**Monime** (moh-NEEM), the young woman Mithridates loves. She is in love with Mithridates’s son Xiphares, but she determines to remain faithful to Mithridates in spite of this. After he tricks her into revealing whom it is she really loves, she refuses to marry him. She tries to kill herself and is glad when Mithridates sends a servant to poison her. Monime is finally united with Xiphares, with Mithridates’s blessing.

**Xiphares** (gzhee-fah-REHS), Mithridates’s son, who shares his father’s feelings of enmity toward the Romans. He has been in love with Monime since the first time he met her. He says nothing about his love until his father is reported to be dead. Xiphares suffers greatly when he discovers that his brother also loves Monime and that his father, who is still alive, is returning. Xiphares finally routs the Romans and succeeds to the throne, with Monime as his queen.

**Pharnace** (fahr-NAHS), Mithridates’s other son, also in love with Monime. He sides with the Romans against his father. Pharnace refuses to marry the daughter of the Parthian king, with whom his father wishes to make an alliance.

**Arbate** (ahr-BAHT), Mithridates’s confidant, who tells him that Pharnace is in love with Monime.

**Phoedime** (feh-DEEM), Monime’s loyal friend and confidante.

**Arcas** (ahr-KAHS), a servant, charged with giving poison to Monime.

---

**The Mixquiahuala Letters**

*Author:* Ana Castillo  
*First published:* 1986  
*Genre:* Novel  
*Plot:* Epistolary  
*Time:* The 1970’s and 1980’s

**Teresa**, a Mexican American woman married to Libra. She is bored with her marriage. She meets Alicia during a summer trip to Mexico while in search of her roots and her purpose in life. She wants to be a writer and keeps notebooks of her daily impressions. Having met Alicia, she becomes a virtual nomad, going through a series of painful separations from men she once trusted. Unlike Alicia, who has a light complexion despite her gypsy background, Teresa is dark and has attractive Indian features, indicative of her ancestry. The rivalries as well as the close friendship between Alicia and Teresa result from differences in skin color, appeal to men, and temperament. What unite the friends are their many shared experiences and their dedication to their own art.

**Alicia**, a New York artist whose ancestry goes back to Spain through a grandmother who is from Andalucía and is part gypsy. Alicia’s parents come to the United States and adopt the prejudices of that country toward people of color, forgetting that, through Alicia’s father, they are related to gypsies. In her rebellion toward her parents, Alicia goes through a sexual quest, always involving herself with men with dark complexions. She helps Teresa get over her first husband and initiates her into a similar erotic quest, one that ends with Teresa’s second and very happy marriage in the conformist reading of the novel. Alicia’s nomadism and sensuous lifestyle result in a life devoted to art and personal isolation from society.

**Libra**, Teresa’s first husband. A high school dropout, Libra makes numerous attempts to start a business but is always duped by his associates. He is a weak person who is easily intimidated by men with strong personalities. It is clear that Libra will never achieve anything in life. He is inconsiderate to women, even his wife. Teresa’s bohemian life and search for herself is a direct response to Libra’s opinions and way of life.

**Rodney**, Alicia’s black boyfriend. He represents defiance against her racist father. Alicia becomes pregnant by Rodney and has an abortion that results in unintended sterilization. She takes a trip to Mexico to get over the shock of her sterilization and entrusts Rodney with the care of her New York apartment. Only to find on her return that Rodney has been taking his black girlfriend there for romantic trysts. This begins a series of sentimental and erotic mishaps that serve as indications that the only spiritual fulfillment Alicia will find will be through her career as an artist.

**Alexis Valladolid**, a flamenco singer and distant gypsy relative of Alicia who goes to New York in search of stardom. He moves in temporarily with Alicia and shortly thereafter begins a stormy relationship with Teresa when she arrives for a short visit. When Teresa moves back to Chicago, Alexis follows her. They move in together, and Teresa becomes pregnant and eventually goes through an abortion. That leads to their separation and mutual manipulation, until Alexis leaves her when assured of a contract in a local nightclub. They come in contact again five years later in the same nightclub, while both are involved with different people. Alexis represents the artist who loves only his music, allowing nothing and no one to interfere with his art. Teresa is envious of Alexis, admiring his dedication and his passion, but feels inadequate in her many failed attempts to excel in her craft as a writer while simultaneously searching for a man’s love. The
hurt caused by Alexis and his abandonment brings Teresa back to reality. She abandons a bohemian life when she meets someone who finally, in the conformist reading, gives her the stability she always sought, through marriage, a son, and a home.

**El Gallo**, a close gypsy friend of Alexis Valladolid who accompanies him on his trip to the United States. Estranged from his wife, El Gallo becomes Alicia’s lover and live-in companion, thus helping Alicia endure the pain caused by the news that Rodney is having a child with a black girlfriend. El Gallo eventually leaves Alicia when he decides to return to Spain and his wife.

**Vicente das Mortes**, Teresa’s Brazilian boyfriend, who abandons her after he develops an interest in Alicia. He appears only in letter 38.

**Abdel**, an anguished Vietnam veteran from New York who is a mediocre artist. He meets Alicia in art school while Alicia is trying to forget and transcend her past love affairs through the attainment of a degree. Abdel befriends Alicia and confesses his many problems with the wife he is divorcing. He soon moves in with Alicia. Their love affair becomes a struggle because of Abdel’s insecurities and expressed envy of Alicia’s artistic talent. Letter 40, read only in the conformist reading, reveals the end of this relationship. Abdel becomes a nuisance, particularly when he destroys Alicia’s paintings and sculptures. Alicia decides to throw him out of her life. As a form of revenge, he commits suicide in Alicia’s apartment while she is attending school one evening; ironically, Alicia had just changed her mind about Abdel and decided to try to make their relationship work.

---

**Mobile: Study for the Representation of the United States**

**Author:** Michel Butor  
**First published:** Mobile: Etude pour une representation des Etats-Unis, 1962 (English translation, 1963)  
**Genre:** Novel  
**Locale:** The United States and Mexico  
**Plot:** Antistory  
**Time:** From the precocolonial period to the early 1960’s

The United States, a different state being discussed in each chapter. The novel has no characters in the accepted sense. The reader is presented with a map of the United States and then, as the title suggests, is led from city to city and from state to state, with signs at state lines welcoming the visitor. Mobile is written in the fashion of a quilt, with the reader moving along the roads of the United States in cars of every make (Studebaker, Cadillac, Nash, Edsel, Chevrolet, Oldsmobile, Volkswagen) and color (from pink to orange, from white to black). As in any quilt, there are repetitions, such as the hellos of friendly Americans and descriptions of Audubon’s birds. The traveler may stop and get any flavor of ice cream at the next Howard Johnson motel. The United States is a New Europe composed of New Europeans—German, French, Irish, Hungarian, and Spanish—who read newspapers in their own language in their own neighborhoods. The immigrants move west, befriending the Indians or attacking and making them mobile. Persecuted, the New Europeans become the New Persecutors. Mormons flee the Midwest and settle in Salt Lake City. Religions abound in the new society, Episcopalian, Baptist, Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Christian Science among them. The Italians are here as well. Giovanni da Verrazzano discovers New York, a patchwork now composed of the Upper West Side, Fifth Avenue, Little Italy, Macy’s, and Bloomingdale’s. Washington, D.C., is the capital of the United States, the pantheon of the country’s gods, and the center of the only religion to be truly practiced. The buildings are a shimmering white. Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin form part of the American pantheon, with their respective monuments in Pennsylvania and Virginia, and their own monumental writings. The reader is shifted about, from name to name and flavor to flavor, from colonial times to standard time (Eastern, Central, Mountain, and Pacific) and to time fixed in one space: the museum of colonial homes in Shelburne, Vermont. The museum holds quilts and Impressionist paintings, showing the presence of the French. The quilt is filled with shifts, designs, and colors. The author’s name, in the manner of a painter’s signature or Alfred Hitchcock film appearance, is inscribed (butor is a French word meaning “bittern” or “boor”) many times in this patchwork.

—Peter S. Rogers

---

**Moby Dick: Or, The Whale**

**Author:** Herman Melville  
**First published:** 1851  
**Genre:** Novel  
**Locale:** The high seas  
**Plot:** Adventure  
**Time:** Early nineteenth century

**Ishmael**, a philosophical young schoolmaster and sometime sailor who seeks the sea when he becomes restless, gloomy, and soured on the world. With a newfound friend, Queequeg, a harpooner from the South Seas, he signs aboard the whaler Pequod as a seaman. Queequeg is the only person on the ship to whom he is emotionally and spiritually close, and this