

23. I refer to the long commentary on the Biblical story of the Flood which plays such a crucial role in *The Rainbow* (Ch. xi, 'First Love'). Ursula's adolescent sexual experience is intimately related to her religious experience.
24. D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, p. 297.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 298.
26. E.M. Forster was already writing about the motor car in 1908 as if it were an alien mechanical monster that would destroy civilisation; but the Italian Futurist, Marinetti, a few years later, gave an ecstatic account of the violent erotic power of the internal combustion engine. Before motoring became commonplace, a man at the wheel (as in Shaw's *Man and Superman*) was often represented as a god-like creature. Cf. my essay on *The Wind in the Willows*, 'Uptails All', in *Leisure in Art and Literature*, eds. Barrett and Winifrith, London: Macmillan, 1990).
27. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, p. 295.
28. A full-length study of Lawrence's debt to esoteric thought is long overdue.
29. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, p. 259.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 347.
31. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, p. 348. 'Quick' has (of course) the Biblical sense of 'living' ('the quick and the dead'), and the whole phrase means dying to the old life, and being reborn (in the sacrament of marriage), as well as the enhanced sense of life given by the fact of death, of which the War gives everyone a heightened awareness. The talk of 'Egyptians' and their 'darkness' connects with Birkin as Pharaoh, as well as with the curious fact (discussed at length by Freud in *Moses and Monotheism*) that the Israelites learned of monotheism, and of a belief (which they did not accept) in the afterlife, from some Egyptian cults.
32. The quotation links the two novels unequivocally.
33. D.H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, p. 163.
34. Naoko Shoda, *A View of Marriage: The Existence of Feminism in Lawrence's 'Women in Love'*, Graduation Thesis submitted to the English Department of Kyoto Women's University.
35. Cf. T.R. Wright, *D.H. Lawrence and the Bible*, pp. 168-9.

Drowning Ishmael: D.H. Lawrence and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*¹

Stephen Adams

D.H. Lawrence, Kurt Daniels wrote in a 1923 review of *Studies in Classic American Literature*, too often 'falls victim to his own metaphors'.² Certainly the allegorical ambitions of the *Studies* require that Lawrence approach his texts selectively and incautiously; the originality of his readings derives largely from this absence of caution. When Lawrence turned in a sour temper to Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* in the winter of 1923, he chose to read it as an allegory of materialism; a curse on the head of an America to which he had become deeply antagonistic. In the thin air of Taos, New Mexico, Lawrence saw in the *Pequod's* pursuit of the white whale a metaphor for the civilised white consciousness' attempt to subordinate and destroy the deeper impulses of its sensual being. The undoing to which this fatal obsession must lead is manifested for Lawrence in the destruction of the *Pequod* and the drowning of her crew. If Lawrence eludes the inconvenient survival of Ishmael, alone among the *Pequod's* isolatoes, perhaps we are inclined to put it down (in Daniels' words) to Lawrence's willingness to make 'the argument fit the phrase'.³ Yet Lawrence's earlier writing on *Moby Dick* contains the same seemingly incautious presumption, despite his significantly different allegorical ambitions. The first draft of the essay, written in 1918 when America was still a hopeful metaphor of regeneration for Lawrence, also strangely ignores Ishmael's resurrection. In the light of Lawrence's broader interpretation of American literature at this time, this is no small omission. Making just this point in his contribution to the Cambridge life of D.H. Lawrence, Mark Kinkead Weekes writes:

the essay peters out without making the major point: that it is the white whale and Ishmael that survive into the future, while the monomaniac undoers and would-be triumphalists are undone, dissolved away in the salt-waters of the End.⁴

There is a curious explanation for Lawrence's apparent oversights: one that begins with a corrupted 1851 text of *Moby Dick* and brings together an obscure piece of Melville literary history with one of Lawrence's most ambitious pieces of allegory and philosophy. Lawrence fails to make the point of Ishmael's survival not out of omission, but because he thinks Ishmael drowns along with Ahab; and not because he has fallen victim to his own metaphor, but because of a publishing error half a century before.

The Whale was first published in England by Richard Bentley in 1851. In this Bentley edition a printer's error had omitted the epilogue to the text, in which Ishmael surfaces and his lonely survival is revealed. Kevin Hayes notes that much of the critical response to *The Whale* in England in 1851 was unequivocal in its unease at a first-person narrator who dies at the conclusion of his tale.⁵ Ishmael's death was attributed to authorial eccentricity and, as in America, the novel largely dropped from view. While Melville retained a very small readership for the remainder of the nineteenth century, largely among enthusiasts of maritime fiction, there would be no other English edition until the turn of the twentieth. Then, after reading the novel in the United States, the poet John Masefield was instrumental in having it included in an Everyman library edition in 1907. Although this edition took the American title *Moby Dick* it reproduced the corrupt Bentley text of 1851, again without an epilogue. Because the text was only one volume in a series of fifty, the omission was critically overlooked and the corrupt text again passed into circulation. Hayes notes that as late as the mid-twenties E.M.

Forster is still under the misapprehension that the narrator of *Moby Dick* does not survive the telling of his tale.⁶

Lawrence was almost certainly led astray by the same corrupt text. In a letter from Zennor to S. S. Koteliansky dated 17 June 1916, Lawrence makes it clear he has been deeply affected by a reading of *Moby Dick*, and refers specifically to the Everyman edition.⁷ Curiously, although he would lose this copy, and request another from London correspondents the following January, he seems to have replaced his original corrupt edition with another version without an epilogue. Certainly, as Kinkead-Weekes points out, he makes no reference to Ishmael's survival in 1918, and in the 1923 edition he explicitly refers to Ishmael's drowning:

The *Pequod* went down. And the *Pequod* was the ship of the white American soul. She sank, taking with her negro and Indian and Polynesian and Asiatic and Quaker and good business-like Yankees and Ishmael: she sank all the lot of them [*italics added*].⁸

In terms of Lawrence's metaphorical use of the novel this raises some interesting issues. In 1923, in the more widely read version of the essay published in *Studies in Classic American Literature*, Ishmael's death is metaphorically important for Lawrence because it completes the jeremiad Lawrence wants to deliver on Ahab's monomania, a mania in which Lawrence regards Ishmael (and Melville himself) as complicit. In both the 1918 manuscript and the 1923 edition of the essay, Lawrence regards Ishmael as essentially involved in Ahab's monomaniacal attempt to subordinate and undo his deeper sensual consciousness, but Lawrence's attitude to Ishmael changes significantly between 1918 and 1923. In 1918, Ishmael is redeemed by his unaffected love for Queequeg, an interpretation characteristic of a period – that of his friendship with William Henry Hocking – when Lawrence was thinking deeply about homoamorous relationships. The same

longing for a deep bond between men would appear in his 1917 revisions of the relationship between Birkin and Gerald in *Women in Love* and his contemporaneous writing on the relationship between Natty Bumpo and Chingachgook in Cooper's Leatherstocking novels. In 1923 however, like Melville himself, Ishmael has come to manifest for Lawrence both the hated constructed consciousness of the American democrat (on his ship of races) and the deeper – and deeply repressed – tide of blood-being. In his clumsy attempts to justify his affection for Queequeg in 1918 he is an amusing and sympathetic 'sophist'; by 1923, like Cooper and Crèvecoeur, he has become a cynical and contrived hypocrite:

Human things are only momentary excitements or amusements to the American Ishmael. Ishmael the hunted. But much more Ishmael the hunter. What's a Queequeg? What's a wife? The white whale must be hunted down. Queequeg must be just KNOWN, then dropped into oblivion.⁹

The 'major point' for Lawrence in 1918 might well have been that 'Ishmael alone survives', had he known it to be so. His omission of this fact seems only really explained by the likelihood that he did not know of Ishmael's survival. By 1923 however, the major point has become not that Ishmael survives, but that he *drowns* and so completes the metaphor Lawrence has contrived for his reading of *Moby Dick*'s central theme. Lawrence's defective text has enabled the darker allegory demanded by his rising antipathy to the United States. The subjection of the blood-consciousness to the ideal-consciousness must end in undoing: the American Ishmael must drown. Of course, had Lawrence known of Ishmael's survival in 1923 his intent in this instance is unlikely to have changed; he was committed at that time to a reading of *Moby Dick* that could have survived the inconvenient sparing of the 'civilised hypocrite'. Indeed, we cannot know

if Lawrence's misconception had been corrected when he sat down to revise the essay in 1923 and the spirit of that revision process was anyhow not one of attention to critical detail. The fact that Lawrence, who commonly rewrote revised versions of his work in their entirety, did not alter his extensive quotations from Melville between versions despite radically altering his own comments suggests that he may not have had a copy of the novel with him in New Mexico and had perhaps not returned to it after his initial readings.

It is not the intention here to suggest that Lawrence's exposure to a flawed Melville text constitutes anything more than a curiosity in his philosophical and literary development. Nevertheless, Ishmael's drowning no doubt appealed to Lawrence's critical imagination (it would have been, and indeed remains, an unusual narrational device) and assisted a complex reading of the novel that would ultimately provide the first and most original contribution to the Melville revival. In drowning Ishmael Lawrence seems in this instance to have fallen victim not to his own metaphor, but to one of the unfortunate accidents of literary history.

Endnotes

1. I am extremely grateful to Professor Mark Kinkead-Weekes for his critical comments on an earlier draft of this essay.
2. *New Republic*, October 23, 1924.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D.H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile 1912–1922*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 45.
5. K.J. Hayes (ed), *The Critical Response to Herman Melville's 'Moby Dick'*, Greenwood Press, 1994, p. xvi.
6. *Ibid.*, p. xix.
7. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton (eds.), *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, vol. ii, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 615.
8. D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, London: Penguin, 1977, pp. 169–170.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 156.