

Excerpts from *Tropic of Cancer* by Henry Miller

compiled by Phillip W. Weiss

If any man ever dared to translate all that is in his heart, to put down what is really his experience, what is truly his truth, I think then that the world would go to smash, that it would be blown to smithereens and no god, no accident, no will could ever again assemble the pieces, the atoms, the indestructible elements that have gone to make up the world. (249)

The world is pooped out; there isn't a dry fart left. (249)

It is the obscene horror, the dry, fucked-out aspect of things which makes this crazy civilization look like a crater. (249)

Do anything, but let it produce joy. (252)

But above all, the ecstasy! (252)

They were all mired in their own dung. (253)

When I reflect that the task which the artist implicitly sets for himself is to overthrow existing values, to make of the chaos about him an order which is his own, to sow strife and ferment so that by the emotional release those who are dead may be restored to life, then it is that I run with joy to the great and imperfect ones, their confusion nourishes me, their stuttering is like divine music to my ears. (253)

I am inhuman! (254)

Side by side with the human race there runs there runs another race of beings, the inhuman ones, the race of artists who, goaded by unknown impulses, take the lifeless mass of humanity and by the fever and ferment with which they imbue it turn this soggy dough into bread and the bread into wine and the wine into song. (254)

I know that I spring from the mythological founders of the race. (255-6)

If I am inhuman it is because my world has slopped over its human bounds, because to be human seems like a poor, sorry, miserable affair, limited by the senses, restricted by moralities and codes, defines by platitudes and isms. (256)

I am pouring the juice of the grape down my gullet and I find wisdom in it, but my wisdom is not born of the frappe, my intoxication owes nothing to wine.... (256)

I want rivers that make oceans such as Shakespeare and Dante, rivers which do not dry up in the void of the past. (256)

Let us have a world of men and women with dynamos between their legs, a world of natural fury, of passion, actions, drama, dreams, madness, a world that produces ecstasy, and not dry farts. (257)

Away with lamentation! Always with elegies and dirges! Away with biographies and histories, and libraries and museums! Let the dead eat the dead. (257)

Yes, I said to myself, I too love everything that flows: rivers, sewers, lava, semen, blood, bile, words, sentences. (257)

For me it was just a transfer from one purgatory to another. (259)

Stone sober as I was, I was still smarting from old insults and injuries. (266)

If you want bread you've got to get in harness, get in lock step. Over all the earth a gray desert, a carpet of steel and cement. Production! (266)

The earth is parched and cracked. Men and women come together like broods of vultures over a stinking carcass, to mate and fly apart again. (267)

I felt like a hired man, like a jack-of-all-trades, like a hunter, like a rover, like a galley slave, like a pedagogue, like a worm and a louse. I was free but my limbs were shackled. (270)

... they belonged to that category of colorless individuals who make up the world of engineers, architects, pharmacists, teachers, etc. (273)

They were zeros in every sense of the word, ciphers who form the nucleus of a respectable and lamentable citizenry. (273)

There's something obscene in this love of the past which ends in breadlines and dugouts. Something obscene about this spiritual racket which permits an idiot to sprinkle holy water over Big Berthas and dreadnoughts and high explosives. Every man with a bellyful of the classics is an enemy to the human race. (274-5)

I don't believe a fucking thing these bastards are trying to shove down our throats. (275)

There were calories but no cuisine. (276)

After a week it seemed as if I had been here all my life. (279)

Who am I? What am I doing here? (282)

He's just a piece of living manure. And he knows it. (283)

The night hung close, dagger-pointed, drunk as a maniac. (285)

The fire is out. A silence so intense that it sounds like Niagara Falls in my ears. (286)

The thought of such absolute privacy is enough to drive me mad. (286)

The silence descends in volcanic chutes. (286)

Like a squirrel cage and shithouse combined. (288)

A whore is never too tired to open her legs. (291)

Typical Anglo-Saxon crisis. An eruption of morals. (293)

It was fairly obvious that she was just a little whore. (295)

He wanted to see what it was like in the nuthouse. (296)

I suppose it wouldn't have been a very good recommendation of he had committed suicide. (297)

He looked sound as a berry to me. (299)

He hadn't expected a wallop like that, and it stung. (302)

We were getting black looks all around. (302)

People were stopping to listen in, to take sides, as they do in street brawls. (303)

She had him terrorized. (305)

It was a beautiful day, warm, clear, sunny – one of those days when Paris is at its best. (305)

He was just like a child – like a child who is beaten every day and doesn't know any more how to behave, except to cower and cringe. (306)

When I see her mending my shirts I could club her. Always mending, mending. Saving, saving. (306)

I don't want to be reasonable and logical. I hate it! I want to bust loose, I want to enjoy myself. I want to do something. (306)

It's better to make mistakes than not to do anything. (306-7)

You can't become a European overnight. (307)

We're Americans and we've got to remain Americans. (307)

He would have died for France – a year ago. (307)

When he said France it meant wine, women, money in the pocket, easy come, easy go. It meant being a bad boy, being on a holiday. And then, when he had had his fling, when the tent top blew off and he had a good look at the sky, he saw that it wasn't just a circus, but an arena, just like everywhere. (307)

We're just a pack of children. Senile idiots. What we call life is a five-and-ten-cent store romance. (308)

That cheap optimism which turns the stomach of any ordinary European? It's illusion. No, illusion is too good a word for it. Illusion means something. No, it's not that – it's delusion. It's sheer delusion, that's what. (308)

We're pulling the whole world down about our ears. (308)

He just let everything gush forth. (309)

I was determined to ship him off, even if I had to fold him up and put him in a valise. (311)

Beautiful money! (311)

A pleasure to handle such money. (311)

My trousers were bursting with coins and bills. (312)

I had promised a lot of things – but that was only to keep him quiet. (315)

The thing is never to be too anxious. Everything comes in due time. (316)

Inside me things were running smoother than any Rolls Royce ever ran. (317)

It's a wonderful thing, for a half an hour, to have money in your pocket and piss it away like a drunken sailor. (317)

I wondered in a vague way what had ever happened to my wife. (318)

Christ, before my eyes there shimmered such a golden peace that only a neurotic could dream of turning his head away. So quietly flows the Seine that one hardly notices its presence. It is always there, quiet and unobtrusive, like a great artery running through the human body. (318)

Source: Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, 1934. Grove Press, New York, 1961.