

# Excerpts from *Tropic of Cancer* by Henry Miller

Compiled by Phillip W. Weiss

People are like lice – they get under your skin and bury themselves there. (12)

I want the whole world to be out of whack, I want everyone to scratch himself to death. (12)

For a hundred years or more the world, our world, has been dying. (26)

The world is rotting away, dying piecemeal (26)

How the hell can a man write when he doesn't know where he is going to sit the next half-hour? (32)

One can sleep almost anywhere, but one must have a place to work. (32)

The city sprouts out like a huge organism diseased in every part, the beautiful thoroughfares only a little less repulsive because they have been drained of their pus. (40)

And it was good, that little pussy of hers! (43)

But the principal thing was a *man*. A man! That was what she craved. A man with something in between his legs that could tickle her, that could make her writhe in ecstasy, make her grab that bushy twat of hers with both hands and rub it joyfully, boastfully, proudly, with a sense of connection, a sense of life. (45)

Who wants a *delicate* whore! (47)

A man, when he is burning with passion, wants to see things; he wants to see everything, even how they make water. (47)

I'm a bit retarded, like most Americans. (49)

I don't give a fuck any more what's behind me, or what's ahead of me. I'm healthy. Incurably healthy. No sorrows, no regrets. No past, no future. The present is enough for me. Day by day. Today! Le bel aujourd'hui. (50)

The room is swimming with love and turtle piss and warm lilacs and the horses are galloping like mad. (56)

Fuck your two ways of looking at things! (59)

Her veins are bursting, I tell you, and your talk is all sawdust. (59)

**You can't put a fence around a human being. (59)**

**You don't know how palatable is a polluted woman, how a change of semen can make a woman bloom! (60)**

**The little well was slimy with excrement, which in English is shit. (62)**

**A meal is never complete without music. (62)**

**I have been ejected from the world like a cartridge. (63)**

**Looking into the Seine I see mud and desolation, street lamps drowning, men and women choking to death, the bridges covered with houses, slaughterhouses of love. (64)**

**The people who live here are dead; they make chairs which other people sit on in their dreams. (64)**

**An artist is always alone – if he is an artist. No, what the artist needs is loneliness. (66)**

**The morgue of poetry. (67)**

**Sleep, Napoleon! It was not your ideas they wanted, it was only your corpse! (67)**

**And God knows, when spring comes to Paris the humblest mortal alive must feel that he dwells in paradise. (67)**

**New York even makes the rich man feel his unimportance. New York is cold, glittering, malign. (68)**

**When I think of this city where I was born and raised, this Manhattan that Whitman sang of, a blind, white rage licks my guts. (68)**

**A whole city erected over a hollow pit of nothingness. (68)**

**God knows I am poor enough; it only remains to be a man. (69)**

**After all I'm a man, not a louse. (72)**

**Everything interests me profoundly. Even trifles. (72)**

**My mind is curiously alert; it's as though my skull had a thousand mirrors inside it. (74)**

I can feel the light curving under the vault of my ribs and my ribs hang there over the hollow nave trembling with reverberations. (74)  
 Art consists of going the full length. (76)

It sounds wonderful, the Rue Lafayette, when you're on the other side of the water. (81)

His mind is fixed now on the "fucking business." (87)

India's enemy is not England, but America. India's enemy is the time spirit, the hand which cannot be turned back. Nothing will avail to offset this virus which is poisoning the whole world. America is the very incarnation of doom. She will drag the whole world down to the bottomless pit. (94)

The girls who are unoccupied are sitting placidly on the leather benches, scratching themselves peacefully just like a family of chimpanzees. (95)

Everything is endured – disgrace, humiliation, poverty, war, crime, ennui – in the belief that overnight something will occur, a miracle, which will render life tolerable. (95)

For weeks and months, for years, in fact, all my life I have been looking forward to something happening, some extrinsic event that would alter my life, and now suddenly, inspired by the absolute hopelessness of everything, I felt relieved, felt as though a great burden had been lifted from my shoulders. (97)

I made up my mind that I would hold on to nothing, that I would expect nothing, that henceforth I would live as an animal, a beast of prey, a rover, a plunderer. (98)

At the extreme limits of his spiritual being man finds himself again naked as a savage. When he finds God, as it were, he has been picked clean: he is a skeleton. (98)

As far as history goes I am dead. (98)

I have found God, but he is insufficient. I am only spiritually dead. Physically I am alive. Morally I am free. (98)

No matter what he does or where he goes things are out of joint. (101)

"All I ask of life," he says, "is a bunch of books, a bunch of dreams, and a bunch of cunt." (103)

A young cunt doesn't have to have any brains. But an old cunt, even if she's brilliant, even if she's the most charming woman in the world, nothing makes any difference. A young cunt is an investment; an old cunt a dead loss. All they can do for you is buy you things. But that doesn't put meat on their arms or juice between the legs. (114)

They take good care of you if you're rich. (116)

What good are the fancy ties and the fine suits if you can't get a hard on any more? (117)

Sometimes I lie in bed dreaming about the past and it's so vivid to me that I have to shake myself in order to realize where I am. (129)

Sometimes I get so lost in my reveries that I can't remember the name of the cunt or where I picked her up. (129)

It's good to have a fresh warm body beside you when you wake up in the morning. It gives you a clean feeling. (129)

If she could only make me believe that there was something more important on earth than myself. Jesus, I hate myself! (131)

People think I'm a cunt-chaser. (131)

I know you don't give a damn about me, but you're patient. (132)

There's just a crack there between the legs and you get all streamed up about it – you don't even look at it half the time. You know it's there and all you think about is getting your ramrod inside; it's as though your penis did the thinking for you. It's an illusion! You get all burned up about nothing ... about a crack with hair on it, or without hair. (140)

Lawyer, priest, doctor, politician, newspaperman – they are the quacks who have the fingers on the pulse of the world. (146)

A man can get to love shit if his livelihood depends on it, if his happiness is involved. (148)

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