Studies in Classical American Literature

D.H.Lawrence

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People lie, tales do not. Never trust the artist, trust the tale, Lawrence remarks. Thus the proper function of a critic, he explains, is to save the tale from the artist who created it. There are many myths rampant, one is that the Pilgrims went to America in search of religious freedom. Bullshit, although Lawrence would not express himself this way back in the 20's, they came to get away. To get away from themselves mainly. People still come to America for those reasons, to get away from everything, in particular from everything they are and have been. I would say very true, was that not why I came to the States almost fifty years later. Not to pursue a career in mathematics, the ostensible reason, but to get away and create as a consequence a new persona. To a large extent I succeeded and success exerted its price, namely a deep nostalgia for what I had been, thus propelling me back to search for what I had been, but this time only a partial success at most. Lawrence is a very opinionated writer, and as a consequence he not seldom hits the nail on its head, or at least seduces us to interpret things as if he done that precisely.

What is freedom? In fact such a negative concept and does not exist in a void. Freedom means in a deeper sense the freedom to believe, or as Lawrence puts it, obeying a deep inward voice of religious belief. He calls it Obeying from within. In fact people are most free when they are most unconscious about their freedom.

Lawrence does not like Benjamin Franklin, maybe because he is too much of a reasonable person taking such a prosaic attitude to life, so typical of the pragmatic American mind. He makes fun of Franklin's list of virtues, the last item being on humility with the exhortation to imitate Socrates and Jesus. Is not Franklin competitive, Lawrence muses, to compete with Jesus and Socrates trying to out-humble them. Is that really a sign of true humility to put yourself on the same level?

Of Hector St John de Crvecœur I have never heard, but he has caught that author's attention because of his nature worship; charming at times, hypocritical at others. But with Fenimore Cooper Lawrence gets into gear. I did not know that earnest Lawrence could display such lightweight humor as he does when discussing Fenimore Coopers so called White Novels. It is all about an American family abroad who meets up with a fellow compatriot by name of Dodge, whom they find insufferable, but are too polite to acknowledge it. And so is Fenimore Cooper himself, feeling his snobbishness, but not feeling entitled to it. This is a bit tiresome thinks Lawrence. Why this hypocritical fixation on democracy and the democratic sense of equality? If a man feels superior he should have it out with himself; class, education, money does not make a man superior, Lawrence claims, he is superior by himself alone. If you feel it, why beat around the bush and not own it? If you do not you are just reduced to a mere snob.

But the White novels are just a prelude, Cooper comes into play only with his Indian novels. Cooper loved America, but of course you can only do this at a distance, Lawrence notes, preferably with the whole of the Atlantic between you and your object of desire.

Placed on American soil, it hurts. It is filled with demons, tense with latent violence and resistance. Cooper is merely sentimental when he talks about the white man and the red man being blood-brothers. It cannot be because they are like streams meeting but flowing in opposite directions. The spirit may change, and that is necessary, but to do so you have to shed your old skins, and the White men are not yet ready to do so. Or will they ever be ready? Cooper did not, he was comfortable in his old skin, and could hence safely imagine a new gorgeous skin.

When I lived in the States I felt that the American landscape was not only different from the European; stranger and wilder of course, but above all with no real connection to the Americans who nowadays live there, the White Men, the impostors, who had never really though centuries of myth, built up a deep relation to the landscape, but were impostors, squatters, not really at home, not grown out of it. In Sweden, I imagined, my forefathers had lived here, at least back to the early iron Age, maybe even earlier. They belonged, they had in a deep sense appropriated it. Lawrence has similar ideas, but it takes him much more time and effort to express them, and as usual he says the whole thing over and over again; not mechanically, mind you, but as a form of incantation, as if his thoughts have got stuck, and you can watch him being stuck, struggling to get loose again, just as when you think of something mathematical, going around and around in circles, not because you like to do so, but because you are trapped, and desperately trying to change your approach ever so little in the hope of finding the solution, the right expression, that is struggling to be found and articulated. If you cannot sympathize with this process, Lawrence is indeed intolerably tedious. 'The American landscape has never been at one with the white man. There it is, at least a provisional statement.

In the novels the Indians get infatuated by the young white women, who may be infatuated in their turn, but in the end they cannot bring themselves to marry their suitors. It just cannot be done. And lucky they are those red men, such marriages would come to no good.

Now Poe is something entirely different. As the author puts it: 'Poe has no truck with Indians and Nature'. He is obsessed with his own psychology. And as such he is more of a scientist than an artist. But there is a limit to everything, including that of love, and that Poe cannot really accept. As Lawrence points out: 'The central law of all organic life is that each organism is intrinsically isolate and single in itself', and this 'is true of every individual organism from man to amœba'. Once the isolation is broken down, there ensues confusion and death. There are two loves, Lawrence preaches, sacred and profane, spiritual and sensual. In sensual love, the author professes, there is almost total fusion but not quite, there is always an invisible wall that maintains the isolation, the central law is not broken. Spiritual law on the other hand does not engage the blood, it deals with the nerves. There is no mingling of blood, instead there is a unison of nerve vibrations. Carry it too far and it will snap and there will be death. Man insists on being a master of his own fate, obviously too grand an ambition, and furthermore he insists on *oneness*, being seduced by the ecstasy of spiritual love he wants it all the time, he positively wants his nerves to be vibrating in unison with another being. And in doing so, he finds himself in unison with the entire universe. Talk about ambition. But it cannot be, it contradicts the central law of organisms.

Poe had experienced the ecstasies of extreme spiritual love, and he wanted those ecstasies all the time. That indeed, he was told, was life. He went on and on in a frenzy. He tried alcohol, and every drug he could lay his hands on, and every person any human being he could lay his hands on; and in the end there was his wife, his cousin, a mere girl. It was the most nervous of nerves in unison, and it broke, as the pitch got higher and higher, till the blood-vessels of the girl broke, and the blood flowed freely. You can call it love if you want, Lawrence remarks, but Love can be terribly obscene. From this we conclude that it is easy for a man to kill what he loves, because to know a living thing is to kill it. To try to know a living thing is to try and suck the life out of it. Of course this ties up with the mysteries of life and soul, as Lawrence must have understood. Does not the notion that we can recreate human intelligence through mechanical means by programming, destroy the mystery, and thus kill it, and not only it, but the soul itself, because what in the soul goes beyond intelligence? It all boils down to a few simple principles and once those are mastered, the soul of man is dead. Lawrence than invokes the Holy Ghost. Has God not said that those who sin against the Holy Ghost will not be forgiven? The Holy Ghost is that which is within us, the thing that prompts us to be real. Never to push our cravings too far. And above all to make us laugh, when laugh we should. Not to take anything too earnestly, for deadly earnestness is always a bit too ridiculous. But Poe could not laugh.

He invokes both William James and Conan Doyle, strange bedfellows indeed, to confirm that a spirit can exist after death. Persist because of its own volition. He then expounds on incest, because incest provides no resistance to the unison of nerve vibrations. And this leads us to the horror of the House of Usher. That the character Roderick Hudson was convinced that the house had a special atmosphere which defined the destiny of his family. That they were as souls moulded by the very stones which made up their place. But, Lawrence intones, as long as the soul is alive it moulds and does not get moulded. It is the souls that interprets and imbues with life all what is inanimate around us and make it partake of our life. It is the soul that endows everything around it with the subtlest form. The moulder can only be moulded when the soul is dead. People are moulded by their surroundings only when they have lost their integral souls. The brother and sister Usher would love and live without resistance, they wanted no resistance to merging and becoming one, so they ended up dragging each other into death. They died because the Holy Ghost says that you may not be as one with another being. Poe was doomed. He died wanting more love. The love killed him. A ghastly love that was but a disease; but he wanted to make his disease attractive and he succeeded. This is the duplicity of art, Lawrence concludes, American art in particular. I guess he was no fan of Poe.

Hawthorne, the blue-eyed darling wrote sweet romances such as 'the Scarlet Letter'. But appearances deceive, Hawthorne knew a few disagreeable things, but he was careful to hide them, letting them out in small disguised pieces. This is American art, nice and smooth on the outside, but the inner core so devilish and destructive. The Scarlet letter is about sin. And sin is about knowing. About wanting to know. The wanting to know comes before the sin, not doing the sin. You sin only when you know you sin. There is no such thing as an unconscious sin, Lawrence claims. It is the knowing that makes a sin a sin. Acts in innocence are never sinful, it is consciousness and the need to know that makes sins emerge. This is of course clearly stated in Adam and Eve, and the insight does of course

not come with Lawrence. The desire to know leads to downfall and expulsion. As we all know after their lie was exposed Adam and Eve were suddenly aware of their nakedness, something that they had not noticed before. They felt disgusted with themselves, and they felt a shame, and this shame of their own bodies, stripped of innocence, constituted sin. Against knowing, the mind-knowing, the author predictably sets up blood-knowing, against consciousness, mind-consciousness he sets up blood-consciousness. Instinct and intuition are superior to insight and reason. Reason has a goal and a purpose, while instinct and intuition have none. They just are, they do not direct but confirm, they do not confront but support, they do not change but preserve.

Americans killed the belief in the spirit but not the sensations connected to it. They love the sensations, they love the sensations of love, the lovey-dovey aspect of it. They love understanding too, even more than they love love. How much do they not understand, Lawrence continues, but it is all just a trick of self-conceit, he concludes.

The Scarlet Letter. It is perhaps the most colossal satire ever penned, Lawrence muses. There you have the pure-pure parson Dimmesdale and at his feet the beautiful Puritan Hester. And what is the first thing that happens? The first thing she does is to seduce him, and the first thing he does is to let himself be seduced. Lawrence explains, and continues with the second thing, namely to hug their sin secretly and gloat over it. And above all to try and understand. Always this understanding. This is the myth of New England. Dimmesdale was seduced gloatingly, but in Fenimore Cooper, the Indians refuse to be seduced by the white women. But Dimmesdale was so pure, so pure of a fool. The American Psyche. The greatest triumph a woman can have, especially an American woman, is the triumph to be had in seducing a man, especially a pure man. And he gets the greatest thrill in giving away, of not resisting, but falling. But keep up appearances, keep pure, and above all look pure. To seduce a man, and to have everybody know of it, yet to keep up appearances of purity. That is the great triumph of woman. And Lawrence goes on and on, as he does once he has found a vein to follow. When Hester Prynne seduced Arthur Dimmesdale it was the beginning of the end. But from the beginning of the end to the end of the end is a hundred years. What does he mean by that? As with Hester, woman becomes the nemesis of a man. She bolsters him up from the outside, she destroys him from the inside. And he dies hating her, as did Dimmesdale. Lawrence notes. And a devil she is and a devil she will be, and most men will succumb to her devilishness. And Hester Prynne was a devil. Even when she went so meekly around as a sick-nurse, a devil she was. She asks in the bitterness of her heart whether the child that was conceived was for good or for ill. For ill, Lawrence replies to her, yet he asks her not to worry, as Ill is as necessary as Good. Malevolence as necessary as benevolence. It can be turned against falseness. Falseness has to be bitten and bitten until it is bitten to death. Hence Pearl, the ill fruit of their sin. And then there is the third party to this adultery, there always is. There is Chillingworth, her first husband. He is a magician, an alchemist, lung-furred coat and a twisted shoulder, in short a healer, and Lawrence invokes both Roger Bacon and Francis Bacon (does he confuse the two?) as predecessors. Chillingworth is no Christian, no selfless aspirer, he is a male authority, with no belief in God nor spirit, just guided by his belief in his intellectual confidence. He is of the old intellectual tradition and belief in male authority. But you cannot keep a wife by the force of an intellectual tradition

and the authority given to it. No wonder Hester took to seducing Dimmesdale, Lawrence infers and he concludes grandiosely: It is a marvellous allegory. According to him it is one of the greatest allegories to be found in all of literature. Its marvellous under-meaning and its perfect duplicity. Nathaniel Hawthorne, the American wonder-child blessed with his allegorical-insight. But alas even children of wonder need to grow up. And sin too becomes eventually stale.

Sin is a queer thing, as it is not the breaking of a commandment, but the breaking of ones integrity. Hester and Arthur sinned by thinking that what they did was wrong; had they not thought so but had had the courage of their passion there would have been no sin even if the desire had been but temporary. But with no sin what would have been the joy of the game? The blood does not sin, only the mind, I guess one can conclude from the author's drift. A thing that you really believe in cannot be wrong, Lawrence argues, because belief cannot be willed, it is, I gather, beyond the mind; a belief comes from the Holy Ghost within. But of course there are spurious belief. A belief that you can do no wrong is an example. Then there are, Lawrence adds, half-spurious belief, those are the worst. It is not clear why, but the statement has the taste of truth.

The Scarlet Letter and the Blithdale Romance are the two books by Hawthorne that Lawrence studies, devoting a chapter each to them. The first he thinks is the most important, the second deals with another American myth, the wholesomeness of manual work. The Blithdale Romance[1] is about a commune living self-sufficiently on a farm. The initiative is surprisingly modern I would say, it is one thing to conceive of such sentimental ventures in the industrial society of the 20th century, quite another thing in an essentially rural society of the 19th century. But let us now invite Lawrence on the stage again.

You cannot idealize hard work, the author states, and this is why Americans have invented so many machines and contrivances of all sorts just to avoid the necessity of physical work. So in the book the idealists left off brook-farming and took on book-farming. How much nicer is it not to write a book than dig a ditch, one is tempted to comment. Man is made up of a dual consciousness, Lawrence proclaims, but the two halves are in opposition to another, at least most of the time, and you get to learn how to change from one consciousness to another; and here the Holy Ghost will help you, Lawrence adds somewhat unhelpfully. And then he warns you not to let one consciousness dominate the other, and also that different tasks involve different consciousnesses. When you do hard manual work you use one consciousness, when you do mental work you use another. You cannot do hard physical work with a mental consciousness, that is tantamount to idealize the work, and it does not work. The harder a man works at brute labor, the thinner his idealism, the darker his mind; and conversely, the harder he works at mental labors, such as idealism and transcendental occupations, the thinner the blood, the more brittle the nerves. You cannot idealize brute labor without becoming undone as an idealist. This leads to his next author who is actually identified with his only book - Two years before the mast.

As a child I heard about the book, probably through other books, thus I never held it in my hand and it remained a faint peripheral image with fuzzy contours set in the distance. I had almost forgotten about it until the faint memory of it sprung back to my

[1] reviewed in XX

mind seeing it in this book. Unlike the previous authors, whose praise is just grudgingly given with many a caveat, this is a book more to the liking of Lawrence.

'Europe has been loved by blood love. That has made it so beautiful' Lawrence writes. And he goes on that the American landscape may have been made beautiful by Fenimore Cooper, but that is a dream-beauty done from a distance. Much can be said for Thoreau as well, but his love has been strictly local, set under a lens so to speak, and thus become anatomized. You cannot idealize the soil, Lawrence hammers in, but you can try, and the only way you can succeed is by failure. So much for that. But of course failure is also a kind of success, without it there cannot be any success at all. Then Lawrence goes on with another hobbyhorse (sometimes you think that all his chapters on different American authors are just arbitrary chunks of one long diatribe of an unstoppable flow of a stream of consciousness, the same pet obsessions occurring over and over again as he would be forgetting where he is and what author he is actually supposed to expound upon). 'We must repeat' he writes: KNOWING and BEING are opposites and antagonistic states. The more you know, the less you are, and the more you are the less you know. One wonders what one would prefer. To be or to know? According to Lawrence you cannot have both, at least not both to their full measure. The goal is to know how not-to-know. I guess Lawrence has been at it for a long time, and by strict logic the more he knows of that, the less he is ignorant.

Dana became witness to a flogging on the ship. One of the seaman got on the captain's nerves and the latter had him flogged. Another seaman, a Swede by the name of John incidentally filled with righteous goodness tried to intervene but is flogged too. Dana watches it all and becomes sick with disgust; but he does not act, he just watches and gets filled with the passionate sweetness of wrath and indignation. Lawrence finds it puerile. Why should he care? Let the captain have his flogging. It is just natural and good. The captain needs to let out some steam, and the seaman who is being flogged, yes good is done to him as well. To get upset is just another form of this idealization. 'Whatever made him vomit?' Lawrence asks, 'what is wrong with a flogging?'. After all on a ship there has to be a master, otherwise everything would go to hell. There is command and obedience, that is the rule on the sea. Without command no obedience, without obedience no command. A strange reciprocity. It builds up tensions, true; and it polarizes too as well; true too. The flogging is like a storm, it has to be, it has to let itself run out, just as a storm needs to spend itself. But why flogging? Can one not just reason? You could as well ask thunder to stop in its tracks, not to strike, but just to quietly steal away. It does at times, but then you do not like it. It becomes muggy, muggy, muggy, with sluggy, inert, dreary skies. You do not like that. The flogged seaman has now a clear day of intelligence. The blood in him has run quicker, the nerves are regaining their vividness. And the captain has had his release, a new ease in his authority. Spare the rod and spoil the physical child; the child of flesh and blood. Use the rod and spoil the ideal child. The child not of blood but of spirit. Pure idealized spirit, which does it no good I guess. And John the Swede? Justice is a great and mainly thing, Lawrence preaches, but Saviourism is despicable. So much for John the Swede. But there are different kinds of justice, Lawrence reminds us. There is hot and there is cold. The cold justice is an abomination, mechanical in its execution. A foul thing indeed. But warm true justice makes every fiber of the heart quiver. You cannot

afford to be cold when you deal with real justice. Being a captain is hard, very hard. It is much harder to command mechanically than it is to obey mechanically. One gathers to give order mechanically is to lose control, and you are not comfortable doing it. But losing control while obeying is a blessing, it abstracts the pain away, as well as your presence, but when you are in command you need to be present. Dana's captain, Lawrence tells us, was of the old-fashioned kind, he gave himself away in a fitness of heat. He should have been more wary, Lawrence remarks, having two idealists on board. John the Swede and Dana himself. Men who did not understand the rule that governs a ship, but allowed themselves to hate masters, without whom they would perish on a ship. And was that flogging really that terrible? Terrible enough to make you vomit? Was it not constrained within proper limits? The seamen understood spontaneous passionate morality not the artificial ethical. Did not that busybody the John the Swede merely muddy the otherwise clear waters? And so he goes on. Yet one must admit that he has a point. For the state to execute a criminal is a cold, rational act devoid of any passion. It is mechanical derived not from the blood, to use Lawrencian terms, but from an ideal spirit of the law. It is rational and hence uncaring. But a passionate act of murder of a murderer, from an individual directly connected to the victimization of the act, is that somehow not more understandable and forgivable? It is hot not cold, done out of the boiling of the blood, not by cold deliberation. Is not this the kind of point Lawrence is making? Over and over again, hammering it in.

'So Dana sits and Hamletizes by the Pacific - chief actor in the play of his own existence' Lawrence summarizes. The Pacific is the glamorous world for Dana, while the East coast is his spiritual home, his world of actuality, scientific, materially real; Lawrence specifies. Dana is a knower, a servant of civilization. But there is indeed romanticism in the old sailing ships on the sea. Dana could not have been inured to it, if he had been would he then embark on his two years on the sea? The ship which went with the wind, how ecological in our retrospect, was replaced by the ship that was propelled by steam. There was no machinery on the old ships, but the new ships of steam are intricate machines. Indeed the machine is the heart of the new ship, and as the heart deeply hidden in the body, not on glorious display as the sails. 'The more we intervene machinery between ourselves and the naked forces the more we numb and atrophy our own senses' Lawrence comments and continues 'Every time we turn on a tap to have water, every time we turn a handle to have a fire or a light, we deny ourselves and annul our being'. The machine is the great neuter, it takes the miracle of life from us, Lawrence explains. We do not know what we lose with our labor-saving appliances. And Lawrence ends with praise: Dana's small book is a very great book. It contains a lot of knowledge about great things. After all we need to know a lot before we know that knowing is nothing.

Melville was a modern Viking, according to Lawrence, who warns that blue-eyed people are not quite human. There is something curious about them, classical humans are brown-eyed, thus they belong to the old world. Blue-eyed people tend to be too keen and abstract. Melville is like a Viking going home to the sea, encumbered with age and memories. And a sort of accomplished affair, almost madness. So far Lawrence. Melville was a northerner, sea-born. So the sea claimed him. We are most of us, who use the English language, water-people, sea-derived. Maybe, one is tempted to add, without too much conviction.

So let us set out on the Pacific Ocean. This is something quite different from the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, in fact I believe about as large as those two combined. In fact one may find a half-Earth which consists almost exclusively of water, Pacific Ocean water. The Pacific Ocean is older than the other two, and inhabited by people sparsely spread out. People who have slept throughout history, but as consciousness is inevitable, sleep must have been filled with dreams, Lawrence continues. The Pacific holds the dreams of immemorial centuries. The sea of the vastest of blue twilights and perhaps the most wonderful of dawns. Samoa, Tahiti, Raratonga, Nukuheva: the very names are a sleep and a forgetting. According to scientists, Lawrence remarks dryly, people of the South Seas live in the Stone Age. It seems absurd to him to classify people according to their implements, but there might be something to it, he adds. The idea of Stone Age people rather appeals to him.

Melville hated the world, he was born hating it, so no wonder he looked for heaven, in fact for paradise. Choosingly. Unchoosingly he was mad with his hate of the world. So here he is in Nukuheva with the cannibals, the dreaded cannibals; but they are gentle with him, he is in a kind of Eden. He has found his Noble savages, he loves his savage hosts, he finds them gentle and laughing, such sweet lambs compared to his white brethren at home. The ugliest beast on Earth is the white man; Lawrence quotes Melville. Of course the Marquesans were immoral, and they were cannibals. He kind of liked the immoral part, but dreaded the cannibalism, on the other hand they were quite reserved about the latter, so it did not need to bother him too much, yet he choose to be horrified. Lawrence would not have been horrified, he rather prefers the cannibals way of dealing with blood and sacrament, more up-front and more direct than the Christians. Lawrence likes that. And there he was Melville, right in the paradise, tripping around naked, and having his girl, sweet Fayaway, naked as well, and putting flowers in his hair. Lots of food, no need for clothes, why was he not happy, why did he want to leave, why did he pine for his mother and his home? The home of white beasts. Oh God why was he not happy? Lawrence is very exasperated by him. Why wasn't he? Why not? Because he was not. It is hard to make a man happy, it takes much more than a paradise. Those savages whom you profess to love and not despise, savages who do not make you feel superior at all. Yet, yet there is a wide gulf between them and you. A gulf in time and being. They are beautiful, they are like children, they are generous, but that is not all, they are more than that, they are far off. Far off indeed. In their eyes there is an easy darkness of the soft uncreate past. In a way they are uncreate. They are uncreate, they have been asleep all those centuries, while we have been struggling. Struggling bitterly through civilization. But we cannot go back, for all their physical beauty they are behind us. Centuries and centuries behind us in that struggle of the soul into fullness. Do they not have souls, one is tempted to ask Lawrence his opinion on. Are they like the mermaid in Andersen's story blessed with health, beauty and an extended sojourn in paradise, but without souls, without immortal souls? There she is Fayaway. His woman. With her hair knotted, and her eyes dark, inchoate and slightly sardonic. I like her too, she must be nice. Very nice, very gentle, very loving. She is soft, she is warm, her flesh is like warm mud. But I would not like to touch her, Lawrence almost shouts. I could not go back that far. She is like a reptile out of the saurian age. Far, far back in time. Too far away to touch. We cannot go back, we

just cannot go back, back to the savages. We cannot turn our currents backwards. Back towards their soft warm mud of a twilight. We can sympathize with them, in fact very much, but we cannot go back. A renegade could do that, but a renegade hates life. He wants the death of life, he wants life dead. So that is what they are, those reformers and idealists who glorify the savages of America, they are death-birds, life-haters. In short renegades. And there you are, Lawrence ads triumphantly: go back to the savages and your soul will decompose. And Melville felt that and he escaped. The savages wanted to detain him, but he would have killed everyone of them, if that was what it would take not to be contained. Away from them he wanted, at whatever price. All those beautiful generous souls he had professed to have loved. But what where they to him compared to his soul? And escaped he did, back to home and mother, and no sooner was he back to his mother and home before he started to pine for the very Paradise he had escaped from. The Past, the Golden Age. We all feel it, the nostalgia. We want it back but we cannot, we don't want it when we get it. Do we not? Try the South Seas.

Love is never a fulfillment. Life is never a thing of continuous bliss. There is no paradise. Fight and laugh and feel bitterness and bliss: and fight again. Fight, fight. That is life. And those are the words of wisdom of Lawrence.

Melville is at his best when he is reckless, when he takes life as it comes. When he is careless about his actions, careless of his morals, ideals and everything. But Melville would never abandon himself to either despair or indifference, he always cared. By the time he was twenty-five his wild oats had been sown and his reckless wanderings were over. By the time he was twenty-five he was back to home and mother, to fight it out. To fight it out at close quarters, for you cannot fight it out running away. When you have run away a long way from home and mother you realize that the earth is round, and if you keep running you will eventually end up at the same doorstep you started from. A proud savage-souled man does not yearn for any perfect lovey-dovey fulfillment in love, no such nonsense. Each soul should be alone. And in the end the desire for a 'perfect relationship' is just a vicious unmanly craving. So far D.H.Lawrence. Has he just had one of his fights with Frieda?

Melville was at his core a mystic and an idealist (to Lawrence 'idealist' is a dirty word)

Perhaps so am I (an attempt at some modesty and probing into his own self)

And he stuck to his ideal guns. (poor guy)

I abandon mine. (Lawrence has moved on)

And Lawrence goes on ranting mixing the incisive insight with pure rubbish availing himself of a seductive intonation, letting his waves of insight and expression, beat against the shore, indefatigably. Over and over again, being spent and revived unremittingly.

What does he have to say about Melville and Moby Dick? A lot one figures, at least in bulk if not necessarily in substance. And here we go again.

Of course Moby Dick, the huge white sperm whale, is a symbol. But a symbol of what? Melville himself most probably did not know, Lawrence speculates. The whale is huge and warm filled with blood. Why did not the savages of the South Seas worship the whale when they worshiped sharks and crocodiles? The whale is not wicked, Lawrence explains, he is neither fish, fowl nor serpent, he is a warm-blooded mammal who happens not to bite. The savages wanted their gods to bite. But gentle and big he is nevertheless hunted. Hunted, hunted, hunt. Moby Dick is, if anything, about the big Hunt. It is a

great book, Lawrence acknowledges, although at first you are put off by the style. It reads like mere journalism, it all appear so spurious at first. You feel that Melville is trying to put something over you. This won't do. You do not accept that. Melville, even as in such a great book as Moby Dick, preaches and holds forth, as if he is not quite sure of himself. It is all so amateurish. But the artist was so much greater than the man. The man is a rather tiresome New Englander, just over there with Emerson, Longfellow, Hawthorne and their ilk. All sententious idealists I presume. But he was a deep, great artist, Lawrence reiterates. But he was a real American, he warns, meaning that he always felt his audience in front of him. But when he forgot about it and gave us his sheer apprehension of the world he turned out to be simply wonderful. But Americans, he complains, they never take off their spiritual get-up. Their ideals are like armor which has rusted in and cannot be taken off. But the book is wonderful, too deep even for sorrow, profound beyond feeling. He wanted to get metaphysically deep, and he got deeper than metaphysics. It is a surprisingly beautiful book, he claims once again, with an awful meaning and some bad jolts. Then Lawrence proceeds to give us extracts from the books with short comments. Lawrence likes the book but is very dismissal of its author. Small-brained but compensated with a spinal-cord capable of great, magnificent imagination. Whatever is meant by that. True and sound reflexes? Melville knew that the white race was doomed. The soul of the white race doomed, its great white epoch doomed as well as was he himself, the great idealist doomed, his spirit doomed. So what is Moby Dick if not the deepest blood-being of the white race, the deepest blood-nature of us all of the white race.

When everything is said and done, it is a great book in spite of itself, a very great book indeed, the greatest book the sea ever wrote. It moves awe in the soul. So far Lawrence on Melville. Let us finally look at how he looks on Whitman.

Walt Whitman ached with amorous love. It takes a steam engine to ache with amorous love, Lawrence remarks. Whitman was really too superhuman. The danger of being superhuman is that you becomes too mechanical. As a steam-engine? What does it really mean being mechanical? Lawrence offers an explanation. Life is discriminate, it shies instinctively away from some matter, and it is unaware of or least it ignores the bulk of matter. But matter gravitates towards all matter. In that it is helpless and mechanical. Lawrence certainly does not gravitate to all men, he confesses. Some he can suffer to shake hands with, most he would not even touch with a long pole. But Whitman merges with everyone, he has broken down his own individuality. I reject nothing, says Walt (to adopt the first name use that Lawrence avails himself of), but if so, counters Lawrence, you may as well be a pipe open at both ends. I embrace all, I weave everything into myself, Whitman claims. Do you really, Lawrence asks rhetorically, if so not much can be left of yourself. This awful Whitman (no Walt here) a post-mortem poet, who is leaking all over, his private soul oozing out in cosmos. Selfcenteredness seems to be the issue. Furthermore, Lawrence states that his poems - Democracy, En Masse, One Identity - are but long sums in addition and multiplication of which the answer is invariably Myself. It is all nothing but an empty Allness. Was Walt an Eskimo? Of course not, they must be outside Walt's egg of Allness. But Walt would not accept that, he was everything and everything was in him. Period. He was like a driver of a car at night, his road illuminated by the headlights, and only things within that headlight, were real. His headlight was his

fixed idea of Allness.

What about females? He wanted to merge with them too, but as all men discover, you cannot merge with a woman, although you can go a long way doing so. Yet you cannot manage the last bit, so if you are intent on merging, you better give up women. And so what is left? Death of course. You can merge with death, in fact eventually you will. It is, if anything, the ultimate merge. One way of doing so is to merge with men, love your own kind. That is merging at the brink of death. Whitman is the great poet he is precisely because he was willing to go that extra mile, to take the last few steps. Death, the last merging, was his goal of manhood. Lawrence then confesses that Whitman meant a lot to him. Whitman was the poet who broke away, who went to the end. He had many followers, but none could go beyond him, because the road he had chosen was a dead-end. Ahead of him was nothing but death. Death at the edge of the great precipice. No way down from there. It was a dead end.

The essential function of art is moral. Not aesthetic, not decorative, not meant for entertainment and amusement. Not a mere past time and recreation. But moral. The essential function of art is moral. But, Lawrence continues, a passionate and implicit morality. A morality that tends to the blood, not the mind. It is the blood that changes first, the mind trots on afterward in the wake. All American Art is essentially moral. The art of Hawthorne, Poe, Emerson, Longfellow, Melville. What engages them is the moral. The moral issue. Not the old moral, but the new. The problem is that they do not really know with what to replace the old moral with. Thus they may pay lip-service, so to speak, to a moral, all their passions are set to destroy. This is their essential flaw, their duplicity in upholding what they deep down repudiates. But here Whitman enters. He was the first to smash the old moral. The old moral that held that the soul of man is something superior, something above the flesh. Even Emerson held on to the old superiority. Even Melville could not quite get over it. Whitman was the first to seize the soul and put it down where it belonged, among the potsherds. There! he said to the soul, stay there! Stay there where you belong. Stay in the flesh, stay in the limbs, stay in the lips and belly. Stay in the breast and in the womb. Stay there! Stay in the dark limbs of Negroes, stay in the vaginas of the prostitutes, stay in the decomposing flesh of the syphilitic, stay in the marshes and on the Open Road. The soul is neither above or below it is a wayfarer on the Open Road. The soul comes to its own, not by meditating, not by praying, not by fasting, not by exaltation, only by taking the Open Road. Not through charity, not through sacrifice, not through good works, not even through love. The morality of Whitman was of the soul on the Open Road, meeting other souls, and never trying to save them. Just the soul on the Open Road not trying to save itself, just living its life on the Open Road.

Yet he could not quite carry it out to the end. He just could not quite break out of the love-compulsion. He just could not kick the habit of charity and love. Sympathy, said Whitman. If he only had stuck with it. Sympathy meaning feeling with others not for them. He could not refrain from having passionate feelings for the slave, the prostitute and the syphilitic. He was not leaving the soul free to roam along the Open Road. Whitman walked along the road and saw her slave, a Negro slave. Is he not my brother he cried out. He is like me. He is bleeding, so I am bleeding. This was not sympathy, no the sympathy with, but merging. If Whitman had really sympathized, Lawrence argues, he would have

said instead. This Negro suffers from slavery. He soul wants to be free. Yes he has wounds, but those are the price of freedom. There is a long road from slavery to freedom. I can help him if I will. But I am not going to shoulder his burdens, I am not going to become a slave, nor have his wounds inflicted on me. But I am prepared to fight the forces which enslave him, would he want my help. But I cannot alleviate his sufferings, those are his, he has a long way to go to be free, and he will suffer along. When Whitman embraces an evil prostitute: that is not sympathy. She has no desire to be embraced with love, so if you are truly sympathetic you try not to do so. The leper loathes his leprosy so if you sympathize with him, you do so to. The evil prostitute who wants to inflict men with her syphilis, she feels hate, and you should feel hate too, if you sympathizes with her. You should share her hate, but only your soul can tell you where to direct it. The soul sympathizes with the soul. Only the mind is capable of great perversions. Only the mind tries to drive my soul and body into uncleanness. So much for Lawrence on Whitman.

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