



Into the Future, Henry Miller

Into the Future

TO APPROACH the world of Lawrence two things must be steadily borne in mind: first, the nature of his individual temperament, and second, the relation between such a temperament and the times. For Lawrence was both distinctively unique and at the same time a figure representative of our time.

He stands out among the constellations as a tiny, blazing star; he glows more brilliantly in the measure that we understand our age. Had he not reflected his epoch so thoroughly he would have already been forgotten. As it is, his importance increases with time. It is not that he grows bigger, or that he moves nearer the earth.

No, he remains where he was at the beginning: he remains just a tiny bit above the horizon, like an evening star, but as night comes on, and it is the night which is coming on stronger and stronger, he waxes more brilliant. We understand him better as we go down into the night.

Before me lie the notes from which this book on Lawrence will emerge. They make a huge, baffling pile. Some of them I don't understand myself any more. Some of them I see already in a new light.

The notes are full of contradictions. Lawrence was full of contradictions. Life itself is full of contradictions. I want to impose no higher order upon the man, his works, his thought, than life imposes. I do not want to stand outside life, judging it, but in it, submitting to it, reverencing it.

I speak of contradictions. And immediately I feel impelled to contradict this. For example, I wish to make it clear at the outset that a man like Lawrence was right, right in everything he said, in everything he did, even when what he said or did was obviously wrong, obviously stupid, obviously prejudiced or unjust. (He is at his very best, to illustrate what I mean, in such writing as the studies on Poe and on Melville.)

Lawrence was opposed to the world as is. The world is wrong, always was wrong, always will be wrong. In this sense Lawrence was right, is still right, and always will be right. Every sensitive being aware of his own power, his own right, senses this opposition. The world however is there and will not be denied. The world says NO. The world is eternally wagging its head NO.

The most important figure for the entire Western world has been for two thousand years the man who was the quintessence of contradictoriness: Christ. He was a contradiction to himself and to the world.

And yet those who were opposed to him, or to the world, or to themselves, have understood. He is understood by all everywhere, even though denied. Is it because he was a contradiction? Let us not answer this immediately. Let us leave this question in suspense. . . .

Here, touching on this point, we stand very close to something which concerns us all vitally. We are approaching the enigma from behind, as it were. Let us think a moment calmly. There was Christ, the one splendid shining figure who has dominated our whole history.

There was also another man—St. Francis of Assisi. He was second to Christ in every sense. He made a tremendous impression upon our world—perhaps because, like those Bodhisattvas who renounced Nirvana in order to aid humanity, he too elected to remain close to us. There were these two resplendent figures, then.

Will there be a third? Can there be? If there was any man in the course of modern times who most nearly attained this summit it was D. H. Lawrence. But the tragedy of Lawrence's life, the tragedy of our time, is this—that had he been this third great figure we would never know it.

The man was never fully born—because he was never squarely opposed. He is a bust perpetually bogged in a quagmire. Eventually the bust will disappear altogether. Lawrence will go down with the time which he so magnificently represented.

He knew it, too. That is why the hope and the despair which he voiced are so finely equilibrated. Consummatum est, he cried out towards the last. Not on his death-bed, but on the cross, while alive and in full possession of his faculties.

Just as Christ knew in advance what was in store for him, accepting his role, so too Lawrence knew and accepted. Each went to a different fate. Christ had already performed his work when he was led to the cross.

Lawrence nailed himself to the cross because he knew that the task could not be performed—neither his own task nor the world's. Jesus was killed off. Lawrence was obliged to commit suicide. That is the difference.

Lawrence was not the first. There were others before him, all through the modern period, who had been doing themselves in. Each suicide was a challenge. Rimbaud, Nietzsche—these tragedies almost brought about a spark. Lawrence goes out and nothing happens. He sells better, that is about all.

I said a moment ago that the contradictoriness of Christ brought us very close to something vital, a fear which has us in the bowels. Lawrence made us again aware of it—though it was almost instantly dismissed. What is the essence of this enigma?

To be in the world and not of it. To deepen the conception of the role of man. How is this done? By denying the world and proclaiming the inner reality? By conquering the world and destroying the inner reality? Either way there is defeat. Either way there is triumph, if you like. They are the same, defeat and victory—it is only a question of changing one's position.

There is the world of outer reality, or action, and the world of inner reality, or thought.* The fulcrum is art. After long use, after endless see-saws, the fulcrum wears itself away. Then, as though divinely

appointed, there spring up lone, tragic figures, men who offer their own bare backs as fulcrum for the world.

They perish under the overwhelming burden. Others spring up, more and more of them, until out of many heroic sacrifices there is built up a fulcrum of living flesh which can balance the weight of the world again. This fulcrum is art, which at first was raw flesh, which was action, which was faith, which was the sense of destiny.

Today the world of action is exhausted, and also the world of thought. There is neither an historical sense nor an inner, metaphysical reality. No one man today can get down and offer his bare back as support.

The world has spread itself out so thin that the mightiest back would not be broad enough to support it. Today it is dawning on men that if they would find salvation they must lift themselves up by their own bootstraps. They must discover for themselves a new sense of equilibrium.

Each one for himself must recover the sense of destiny. In the past a figure like Christ could create an imaginary world powerful enough in its reality to make him the lever of the world. Today there are millions of sacrificial scapegoats but not enough power in the lot of them to raise a grain of sand. The world is out of whack and men individually are out of whack.

We are on the wrong track, all of us. One group, the larger one, insists on changing the external pattern—the social, political, economic configuration. Another group, very small but increasing in power, insists on discovering a new reality.

There is no hope either way. The inner and outer are one. If now they are divorced it is because a new way of life is about to be ushered in. There is only one realm in which inner and outer may still be fused and that is the realm of art.

Most art will reflect the death which is taking place, but only the most forward spirits can give an intimation of the life which is to come. Just as primitive peoples carry on in our midst their life of fifty or a hundred thousand years ago, so the artists.

We are facing an absolutely new condition of life. An entirely new cosmos must be created, and it must be created out of our separate, isolate, living parts. It is we, the indestructible morsels of living flesh, who make up the cosmos. The cosmos is not made up in the mind, by philosophers and metaphysicians, nor is it made by God.

An economic revolution will certainly not create it. It is something we carry within us and which we build up about us: we are part of it and it is we who must bring it into being. We must realize who and what we are. We must carry through to the finish, both in creation and destruction. What we do most of the time is either to deny or to wish.

Ever since the beginning of our history, our Western history, we have been willing the world to be something other than it is. We have been transmuting ourselves in order to adapt ourselves to an image which has been a mirage.

This will has come to exhaustion in supreme doubt. We are paralyzed; we whirl about on the pivot of self like drunken dervishes. Nothing will liberate us but a new knowledge—not the Socratic wisdom, but realization, which is knowledge become active.

For, as Lawrence predicted, we are entering the era of the Holy Ghost. We are about to give up the ghost of our dead self and enter a new domain. God is dead. The Son is dead. And we are dead only as these have gone out of us.

It is not death really, but a Scheintot. Of Proust it was said by someone that “he was the most alive of all the dead.” In that sense we are still alive. But the axis has broken, the poles no longer function. It is neither night nor day. Neither is it a twilight. We are drifting with the flux.

When I talk of drift and drifting I know very well that I am only using an image. Myself I do not believe that we are going to drift forever. Some may, perhaps a great part of the world of men and women. But not all. So long as there are men and women the world itself can never become a Sargasso Sea.

What creates this fearsome image is only the awareness in each of us that, despite ourselves, we are drifting, we have become one with the ceaseless flux. There is a force outside us which, because of death, seems greater than us, and that is Nature. We, as living beings, are part of Nature.

But we are also part of something else, something which includes Nature. It is as this unrealized part of the universe that we have set ourselves up in opposition to the whole. And it is not our will but our destiny which has permitted such an opposition to come into existence. That force which is beyond us, greater than us, obeys its own laws.

If we are wise we try to move within those laws, adapt ourselves to them. That is the real element of livingness, as Lawrence might say. When we refuse to move with the movement of that greater force we break the law of life, we drift, and in the drift Nature passes us off.

Where the great spiritual leaders have succumbed was in the conflict between these two forces, epitomized and symbolized by their own lives. Each spiritual gain has been signaled by a defeat at the hands of Nature.

Each spiritual gain meant the upsetting of the equilibrium between these opposing forces. The distance between one great figure and another is only another way of estimating the time required to obtain a new and satisfactory equilibrium. The task of each new figure has been to destroy the old equilibrium. Nothing more. Nothing less.

Today it is vaguely felt that we are in a period of transition. To what? To a new equilibrium? On what fulcrum? On what are we to find a point of rest? Lawrence saw that the fulcrum itself had been smashed. He felt

the tide carrying him along. He knew that a new order was establishing itself.

Against this new cosmic order he set up no opposition. On the contrary, he welcomed it. But as an individual he protested. He was not fully born. Part of him was stuck in the womb of the old. Half out, alive, fully conscious, superconscious, in fact, he voiced the agony of that other half of him which was dying.

It could not die quickly enough for him, even though in that partial death his own individual death was involved. He saw that the greater part of the world was dying without having been born. Death in the womb—it was that which drove him frantic.

It is no idle figure I use when I say that only the upper half of him emerged. The head and the heart. A blinding consciousness he had, and a tender bleeding heart. But a potent figure of man he was not.

He had only the sustaining heart—and the voice, which he used to the fullest. But he had a vision of what was to come, and in the measure that he was able to, he identified himself with the future. “Only now,” he said, “are we passing over into a new era.” He spoke about it over and over, cryptically, symbolically: the era of the Holy Ghost.

I notice that he expressed the idea when writing to some one about the Renaissance. He had apparently just finished reading Rolland’s essay on Michelangelo. “The world is going mad,” says Lawrence, “as the Italian and Spanish Renaissance went mad. But where is our Reformation, where is our new life?” And then he added: “One must live quite apart, forgetting, having another world, a world as yet uncreated.”

The use of the word “forgetting” is worthy of attention. Whereas Proust was able successfully to live apart, remembering, creating his own very real, fictive world, Lawrence was never able to live apart, neither to forget. Proust, by a complete break with the outer world of reality, was able to live on as if dead, to live only in the remembrance of

things past. Even then it was not an absolute break. A thin, almost invisible cord connected him with the world.

Often it was an inanimate object which, through his exaggerated sensory faculties, brought him with a shock to the reality which he had buried deep within himself. It was not a remembering in the usual sense. It was a magic revival of the past through means of the body. The body re-experienced the joys or the sorrows of the buried past.

From a trance-like state Proust thus roused himself to a semblance of life, the powerful reality and immediacy of which was greater than in the original experience. His great work is nothing but a series of these traumatic shocks, or rather the expression of their repercussions.

For him, therefore, art took on the metaphysical aspect of rediscovering what was already written in the heart. It was a return to the labyrinth, a desire to bury himself deeper and deeper in the self. And this self was for him composed of a thousand different entities all attached by experience to a mysterious seed-like Self which he refused to know.

It was a path, a direction, exactly the opposite of Lawrence's. It was an effort, one might almost say, to retrace his life and, by collecting all the images of himself which he had ever glimpsed in the mirror, recompose a final seed-like image of which he had no knowledge. The use of sensation here is entirely different from Lawrence's use of it—because their conception of “body” was entirely different.

Proust, having totally divorced himself from his body, except as a sensory instrument for reviving the past, gave to the human individuality thereby an entirely irreligious quality. His religion was ART—i.e., the process.

For Proust the personality was fixed: it could come unglued, so to speak, be peeled off layer by layer, but the thought that lay behind this process was of something solid, already determined, imperishable, and altogether unique.

With this conception of a personal ego Lawrence had no patience. What he saw was an endless drama of the self, a whirlpool in which the individual was finally engulfed. Lawrence was interested in the development of man as a unique spiritual blossom.

He deplored the fact that man, as MAN, had not yet come into his own kingdom. While emphasizing the unique quality of the individual, he placed no value on uniqueness in itself. What he stressed was the flowering of the personality. He was impressed by the fact that man is in a state of infancy, psychologically speaking.

Neither the dynamic attitude of the West, anchored in the will, in idealism, nor the attitude of the East, anchored in a fatalistic quietism, seemed satisfactory to him as a way of life. They were both inadequate. "Man as yet is only half-born," he said. "No sign of bud anywhere."

His first significant work, *The Crown*, is concerned primarily with an attempt to make clear the meaning of the Holy Ghost. It is his way of referring to the mysterious source of the self, the creative instinct, the individual guide and conscience. In the realization of its meaning he visualized the resolution of the god problem, an end to the vicious dichotomy of demon-angel, god-devil, an end to the alternate belittlement and aggrandizement of the personality.

What he is searching for continually is the true self, that central source of power and action which is called the Holy Ghost, the mysterious, unknowable area of the self out of which the gods, as well as men, are born. His idea of a union with the cosmos meant then the restoration of man's divinity.

The old cosmos, he says in *Apocalypse*, was entirely religious and godless. There was no idea of "creation" or of "separateness" or "God versus world." The cosmos was, is, and will be. It is we who have grown apart, insisted Lawrence.

And it is in this growing apart that we have developed the extreme notions of the self, of the personality, and of God. The great sense of guilt which burdens man—and particularly the artist—springs from the deep realization that he is split off from the cosmos, that in a part of him he has made himself God and in another he has made himself human, all-too-human.

All this brings me to the present. We are facing an absolutely new condition of life, one that is almost unbearable, at least for a sensitive being. That such an antagonism always existed I have no doubt: the artist was always in conflict with the world, with the world in which he found himself.

The fact that there are artists means that life is well-nigh insupportable. And yet, in the past there was always a thread of communication between the sensitive and the insensitive. There were forms and symbols, mythologies which served as alphabets and which enabled the uninitiated to decipher the divine script of the artist.

Today the very thread, language, seems to have snapped. Powerless to communicate his vision, the artist loses his belief in himself in his role or mission. Whereas before his escape from the pain of living was through art, today he has no escape except to deny his own validity.

Today all the hierarchies have broken down: in every field of human endeavor we are faced with chaos. There is no choice, only to surrender. Surrender to the flux, to the drift towards a new and unthinkable order.

That Lawrence understood, that he revealed the trend, and that he offered a solution is what I wish to make clear. But to understand this it is necessary to recognize the peculiar nature of his temperament and the relation of such a temperament to the times.

The problem of an immediate and personal solution to the all-besetting difficulties of the times may then be seen to resolve itself into a much broader and much more human problem of destiny.

That we have a destiny, each and all of us, seems of more importance right now than the question of an immediate solution of life's problems. For it is in the very establishment of a relation between oneself and the cosmos that a new quality of hope will arise, and with hope faith.

We must ask ourselves how it is that faced with a crushing destiny there are some of us who, instead of shrinking or cowering, leap forward to embrace destiny. There are some of us, in short, who in assuming a definite attitude towards the world seek neither to deny, nor escape, nor to alter it, but simply to live it out. Some more consciously than others. Some as though they saw it written in the stars, as though it were tattooed on their bodies.

There exist today all over the world a number of modern spirits who are anything but modern. They are thoroughly out of joint with the times, and yet they reflect the age more truly, more authentically, than those who are swimming with the current.

In the very heart of the modern spirit there is a schism. The egg is breaking, the chromosomes are splitting to go forward with a new pattern of life. Something is germinating, and those of us who seem most alien, most split, most divorced from the current of life, are the ones who are going forward to create the life as yet inchoate.

This, no doubt, is mysticism—and it should remain so. We who are affected cannot make ourselves clear. We are clairvoyant because we see with other eyes. What is there to communicate when the slender thread which bound us to the world is broken?

With what, then, can we hope to communicate? With the pure spirit! This is the era when the apocalyptic visions are to be fulfilled.

We are on the brink of a new life, we are entering a new domain. In what language can we describe things for which as yet there are no names? And how describe relations? We can only divine the nature of

those to whom we are attracted, the forces to which we willingly yield obedience. In short, we can only make ourselves felt. That we are here, that is the all-important.

When I speak of a hope and a faith I ask myself what evidences are there, what justification for such language? I think again of the Renaissance and how Lawrence was obsessed with it. I see how we ourselves stand before the future, divided between hope and fear.

But at least we know that there is a future, that the moment is momentous. We stand now as we do sometimes in our own individual humdrum lives, thrilled by the thought of the morrow, the morrow which will be utterly unlike today, or yesterday. Only the rare few are privileged to regard the future with certainty, with hope and with courage.

They are the ones who are already living into the future: they experience a posthumous joy. And this joy is no doubt tinged with cruelty. In bringing about the death of an old order a sort of sadistic pleasure is awakened. Another way of putting it would be to say that the heroic spirit is rekindled.

The so-called moderns are the old and weary who see in a new collective order the gentle release of death. For them any change is welcome. It is the end which they are looking forward to. But there is another kind of modern who enters the conflict blindly, to establish that for which as yet there is no name.

It is to this order of men that Lawrence addressed himself. The Apollonian show is over. The dance has begun. The coming men are the musicians of the new order, the seed-bearers, the tragic spirits.

It is of the utmost importance also to realize that the process of dissolution is quickening. Every day the difference between the few and the many becomes sharper. A great yawning fissure divides the old from the new. There is still time perhaps to make the jump, but each day the hurdle becomes more perilous.

The tendency so marked in Lawrence's work—to divide the world into black and white—becomes more and more actualized. It was one of the great distinguishing features of Dante's work. It was inevitable. It marks the great split in the mind, the angel's superhuman effort, as it were, to discover the soul of the new.

During this process, which is nothing short of a crisis of consciousness, the spirit flames anew. Whatever is valuable, whatever is creative, must now reveal the pure and flaming spirit. The poet is bound to be oracular and prophetic.

As the night comes on man looks out towards the stars; he no longer identifies himself with the world of day which is crumbling, but gives himself to the silent, ordained future.

Abandoning the cunning instruments of the mind with which he had vainly hoped to pierce the mystery, he now stands before the veil of creation naked and awe-struck.

He divines what is in store for him. Everything becomes personal in a new sense. He becomes himself a new person.

The world of Lawrence now seems to me like a strange island on which for a number of years I was stranded. Had I made my way back to the known, familiar world I should perhaps talk differently about my adventure.

But this world is gone for me, and the island on which I was marooned serves as the sole remaining link, a memory which binds me to the past. This then will serve as a log of my strange adventure—if my memory does not fail me.**

* In Louis Lambert Balzac uses this dichotomy in the opposite way, but the meaning is the same.

**** Fragment from The World of Lawrence.**

The end