

Whales Weep Not!

D. H. Lawrence, 1885 - 1930

*They say the sea is cold, but the sea contains
the hottest blood of all, and the wildest, the most urgent.*

*All the whales in the wider deeps, hot are they, as they urge
on and on, and dive beneath the icebergs.
The right whales, the sperm-whales, the hammer-heads, the killers
there they blow, there they blow, hot wild white breath out of the sea!*

*And they rock, and they rock, through the sensual ageless ages
on the depths of the seven seas,
and through the salt they reel with drunk delight
and in the tropics tremble they with love
and roll with massive, strong desire, like gods.
Then the great bull lies up against his bride
in the blue deep bed of the sea,
as mountain pressing on mountain, in the zest of life:
and out of the inward roaring of the inner red ocean of whale-blood
the long tip reaches strong, intense, like the maelstrom-tip, and comes to rest
in the clasp and the soft, wild clutch of a she-whale's fathomless body.*

*And over the bridge of the whale's strong phallus, linking the wonder of whales
the burning archangels under the sea keep passing, back and forth,
keep passing, archangels of bliss
from him to her, from her to him, great Cherubim
that wait on whales in mid-ocean, suspended in the waves of the sea
great heaven of whales in the waters, old hierarchies.*

*And enormous mother whales lie dreaming suckling their whale-tender young
and dreaming with strange whale eyes wide open in the waters of the beginning and the end.*

*And bull-whales gather their women and whale-calves in a ring
when danger threatens, on the surface of the ceaseless flood
and range themselves like great fierce Seraphim facing the threat
encircling their huddled monsters of love.*

*And all this happens in the sea, in the salt
where God is also love, but without words:
and Aphrodite is the wife of whales
most happy, happy she!*

*and Venus among the fishes skips and is a she-dolphin
she is the gay, delighted porpoise sporting with love and the sea
she is the female tunny-fish, round and happy among the males
and dense with happy blood, dark rainbow bliss in the sea.*

Dawn Watch

An hour before sunrise, I am at the helm. Guiding us to the whales. Finding them, only by their songs. The ocean is smooth, like a glass bell. Each whale a clapper, charming, ringing out, below and around me, like some forgotten belfry.

Turning

The whales turn and listen.

Plunged and sound, and rise again, hanging over sotherly darkening deeps.

Flowing like breathing planets in a sparkling world of living lights.

Queequeg and I

Herman Merville, *Moby Dick* 1851

It was a cloudy, sultry afternoon; the seamen were lazily lounging about the decks, or vacantly gazing over into the lead-colored waters. Queequeg and I were mildly employed weaving what is called a sword-mat, for an additional lashing to our boat. So still and subdued and yet somehow preluding was all the scene, and such an incantation of revery lurked in the air, that each silent sailor seemed resolved into his own invisible self.

Thus we were weaving and weaving away when I started at a sound so strange, long drawn, and musically wild and unearthly, that the ball of free will dropped from my hand, and I stood gazing up at the clouds whence that voice dropped like a wing. High aloft in the cross-trees was that mad Tashtego.

As he stood hovering over you half suspended in air, so wildly and eagerly peering towards the horizon, you would have thought him some prophet or seer beholding the shadows of Fate, and by those wild cries announcing their coming.

"There she blows! there! there! there! she blows! she blows!"

The Voyage Home

Paul Halley & Roger Payne, 1987

Rejoice! We're finally out at sea again with all our ties to land cast off. The last of it went under with the sun. The night surrounds us now, the sail softly pulling. The others lie asleep below. Only the stars appear to keep me company on this mute and vacant sea. Though all is featureless and bare, when last I checked the chart it showed that near at hand lie unseen, unnamed ocean glades where humpback whales glide and sing. All of their majestic, glacial pace. Great, gentle cloudlike beings drifting with currents too slow to sense.

As we approach their range, our boat bows and curtsies in graceful, mazy arcs. I lean my back against the helm and watch the mast sweeping across vast fields of stars. Infinite mindlessness. I would not trade this hour for anything I know. Rock me gently, Ocean. I'm coming home.

A long, dark wire winds and coils down through the midnight ship to a listening point beneath the keel. Up, out of the dark waters pour wild arias, cantatas, magnificats, recitatives and requiems, whose boiling echoes are tumbling and cascading around the cathedral vaults of the sea – a mad welter of resonance, the seething, irrepressible contrabass, mezzo soprano, falsetto of whale song – the wildest, most joyous music of all. All night long we are borne along by that music.

The watches rotate and shift. Each lone helmsman takes his turn, and each by dawn is changed forever.