L’ ECRITURE MASCULINE

By

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(Under the direction of Dr. Carl Rapp)

ABSTRACT

Henry Miller was not the godless vulgarian that many assume him to be—his real project was self-liberation and self-realization. He ultimately wanted to effect a union of art and life by using the creative powers of writing to reveal and write an inner, repressed self in his auto-novels. This could only be achieved through a direct address and discussion of the corrupted spirituality of his American society, and Miller actively tried to bring about the demise of the American master narratives of industry and bourgeois culture through this honest examination of all of the details and facets of life, including the “vulgar” and “obscene.”

INDEX WORDS: *Tropic of Cancer*, Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn*, *Black Spring*, self-liberation, Romantic artist, Hegel, censorship, obscenity, life as art, utter honesty, Truth, master narratives, *The Rosy Crucifixion, Sexus*, New York writers.

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# DEDICATION

*To all my professors, who taught me what I do and do not believe*

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## INTRODUCTION—HENRY MILLER, ANTI-AMERICAN

What was Huntington Cairns trying to save us from? Back in the mid-1930's, Cairns was the attorney whom the U.S. Customs office in Washington, D.C., consulted about which books could be legally imported into the United States. His judgment determined whether or not a book printed on foreign soil was too obscene or prurient for the American public. He was, in short, the unofficial censor of the U.S., at a period in this country's history when that was a very interesting job to have. For Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* had just been published in France, in 1934. Here was a book with little regard for what the American public thought was too obscene, too prurient. To no one's surprise, Cairns recommended that *Tropic of Cancer* be banned from American soil, making it a crime to import it from Europe.

But the irony in this situation, which speaks volumes about the ambivalent literary reputation and reception of Miller in the last century, is that the author of *Tropic of Cancer* found in Cairns one of his earliest and most devoted fans. Though obliged to recommend the outlawing of Miller's first published auto-novel, Cairns freely expressed to Miller his high opinion of its literary merit, and the two became steadfast friends and correspondents for many years.[1] While he knew that he held in his hands a bold and important work of American literature, Cairns knew just as well that it was too much for the America of 1934 to swallow.

But why? What is it about Henry Miller that has had much of America raising its hackles not just at the time of his arrival on the scene of letters, but for over 65 years? Of course there was the issue of his obscene language; such an endless stream of four-letter words had not seen widespread circulation in America, much less had such graphic

depictions of sexual encounters. Even today, this remains the extent of most people's knowledge of Miller—"Oh right, the guy who wrote the dirty books." But even for those who took the time to read Miller (and not just the excerpted sound bites with earthy words that took center stage at his many obscenity trials), there still lingered a fundamental distrust, a suspicion that went even beyond the titillating sexcapades and the profanity.

Ronald Gottesman describes this natural aversion of the courts and reading public, the "powers-that-be" in literary matters, as an objection to what they believe are Miller's "attitudes" or "beliefs." Gottesman cites "his immorality [...] his lack of patriotism, his anarchism, his fascination with excrement, snot, and other bodily waste products, his blasphemy, his challenge to such social institutions as law, education and religion," for starters.[2] So it wasn't just the superficial issues of obscene words or sexual subject matter that the legal courts and the Puritanical court of public opinion were objecting to—the self-appointed guardians of public morality were equally responding to Miller's attack on a materialistic, capitalist American machine and the values that upheld it, and still do. Going over the transcripts from Miller's obscenity trials in the early 60's, one can't help but see that the white elephant in the courtroom is the spirit of anarchy which Miller's autobiographical novels represent, not his use of words normally reserved for behind closed doors.

Miller was taking some unpopular stances in his early auto-novels, *Tropic of Cancer, Black Spring,* and *Tropic of Capricorn*, and he continued to do so in his later books, *The Rosy Crucifixion* series and his books of essays. But censure of Miller's views and tastes did not come from just the conservative segments of the English-speaking public, as we might assume. Henry Miller did not sit well with the prevailing academic and literary tastes of the time either. An early critical overview (sometimes

favorable) by Herbert J. Muller in the *Kenyon Review* in 1940 chides Miller for his anti-intellectual and anti-social proclivities, as well as his disregard for "all formal disciplines," presumably meaning his rejection of novelistic form and convention. An American critical establishment just getting used to the idea of a *Ulysses* was hardly in the mood for a *Tropic of Cancer* just yet.

But mostly academic criticism has focused on Miller's perceived lack of values, when they have focused on him at all. Robert Creeley conveys how Miller's writings have "constituted a large part of that 'other' literature that the university did not teach, not only because a part of it was significantly outlawed as 'obscene,' but because all of it did not conform with the ruling academic taste of the period either in its modes of composition or in its judgment of what to value."[3] For confirmation of this perception and an estimation of its currency even today, log on to the message boards at the Henry Miller Memorial Library in Big Sur, California, forum.henrymiller.org. The chief complaint and subject of discussion among the several extremely articulate and cogent Millerians in cyberspace is Miller's continued neglect by academia. They cite as causes both a fear of teaching the obscene and wariness towards Miller's anarchic agenda on the part of academics—a group which ostensibly professes to have little or no interest in maintaining the status quo, but seems from the point of view of these Miller devotees to be doing little to incorporate this challenging and talented literary voice into the mainstream. And this tendency was only more pronounced when Miller first appeared several decades ago.

But these pronouncements seem a little murky, would seem to call for a better understanding of just what "the ruling academic taste" of the day was, in order to understand exactly how Miller was opposing or defying it. Regenia Gagnier has aptly described the literary tastes of the early-to-mid twentieth century literary establishment in

her study *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920.* She delineates the liberal-minded rise of "bourgeois subjectivity" in literary history from Romanticism to postmodernism, a figuration of selfhood that reigned in literary expression, especially in genres that intersect with autobiography. As Gagnier's social analysis shows, the distinction between bourgeois subjectivity and literary value eroded during this time, to the point that "both consist of a belief in creativity, autonomy, and individual freedom," which Miller embodies to an extreme degree; "self-reflection as problem-solving, especially in writing"—again, a good fit; "and a progressive narrative of self, especially in relation to family and material well-being."[4] This third point is where Miller ran afoul of the establishment. He "doesn't give a flying fuck" about narratives of material or familial success; in fact, he openly denies the worth of these narratives and champions their demise.[5] But this is just the beginning of where Henry Miller and the literary establishment of his day differ.

Mary Kellie Munsil suggests that Miller's "sin" was in blurring the line between artist and protagonist. The Henry Miller of *Tropic of Cancer* was widely supposed (and widely proclaimed by the author) to be the Henry Miller of flesh and blood. Indeed, in a somewhat piqued response to an early (again, mostly favorable) review by the critic Edmund Wilson in the *New Republic*, Miller wrote in a published letter to the magazine that Wilson had completely missed the point of the book: "The theme of the book, moreover, is not at all what Mr. Wilson describes: the theme is myself, and the narrator, or the hero, as your critic puts it, is also myself [...] I have painstakingly indicated throughout the book that the hero is myself. I don't use "heroes," incidentally, nor do I write novels. I am the hero, and the book is myself."[6] Clear enough.

But in deliberately obscuring that distinction between "hero" and writer, Miller was crossing a line that challenged people's sensibilities, to the point of offending many.

How much worse was the insinuation that the narrator of *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn*, not to even mention the later *Sexus*, had *actually done these things he was describing?* This is the implication that has made Miller's obscenity that much more difficult to swallow. Munsil writes specifically about how Miller and other sexual autobiographers (such as Erica Jong for *Fear of Flying*) have faced hostile *ad hominem* attacks for committing this transgression, and gently goads Miller and Jong's attackers with their own alarmed inference, "what if others might try [these things], too?"[7] But she's right—these experiences are much more threatening to the official public discourse when the implied fact of their *actual* occurrence in *reality* accompanies them.

While Munsil confines her analysis to the audience's reaction to sexual passages in autobiography, we can just as easily extend this insight to encompass Miller's free expression of counter-hegemonic ideas and practices. The author of the *Tropics* is not just "playing" with the idea of someone bumming around Paris or New York and railing against the repression of a "dead," automatized society. He's not just *imagining* the filth and sordidness of the daily life of an emotionally hollow dissident. In a very real way, he is *recording* those experiences, those thoughts, and if he is having them in response to, and as a result of, his environment, it's very likely that others out there are, too. This adds to our understanding of the vehement response that Miller's stances and ideas encountered as his books reached a wider audience—their very realness made them more threatening.

This highlights what can be a dangerously narcotizing effect of artistic media. Those in power (or the forces of power, if you prefer) surely need there to be some sort of outlet for the pressure they exert on us (or those subjected to power, if you prefer). Or, if this seems too cartoonishly malevolent, perhaps it's just that those interested in the status quo need a space to contain forces which threaten to challenge "the way things are done."

Whatever forces are involved, art runs the risk of becoming a terminus, a "safe" zone—in other words, an area to relegate provocative or threatening ideas. There are those who think that the TV show *The Simpsons*, a biting social satire and critique, whose codes and implicit messages are those of a subordinate, counterculture ideology, serves the power structure[8]—by siphoning off our dissenting energy in laughing at society's ills, such works might keep us from taking to the streets and demanding that these social flaws be remedied. The key is that there be *some* outlet for the cognitive dissonance that stems from recognizing injustice and hypocrisy, so it does not escalate into full-scale protest and revolution. If counter-hegemonic ideas are contained in a "wild" or "imaginative" arena like art (with all its dismissive connotations of irrationality), they can be much easier to marginalize or ignore—"What will those crazy artists think of next?" Miller may be attaching these challenging ideas to life, his life, so that they must be taken more seriously, as serious and demanding critiques of our society and as representing a more insistent demand for change.

This is just the kind of aesthetic move we've come to expect from Henry Miller. Is he doing it self-consciously, or did he just luck into this artistic gesture by some surrealist flight of fancy? His intentions, to the degree that they can be ascertained at all, are debilitatingly hard to extract from the voluminous, sometimes contradictory, maze of his massive body of prose. Part literary buffoon, part serious-minded aesthete, part dedicated philosopher of self-liberation, Miller certainly wrote extensively about his project and about his beliefs concerning what art must accomplish and must be (in both his auto-novels and many critical essays). But are his literary feats the product of a serendipitous wisdom or a planned, knowing assault on literature? Surely the truth is somewhere in between, and while we can't go back and determine his state of mind or aims in writing, we can certainly describe the effects his project has had on American and

world literature—and by extension, our conceptions of self-hood and what it means to be an American.

Miller's consuming and evolving project took up a notable tradition of social criticism and self-liberation. He wrenched the torch of human freedom-through-art from the likes of Emerson, Whitman, and Joyce. In many ways he criticized these masters who came before him and made him possible, even while lovingly acknowledging their influence and his undying admiration for their efforts. If he was harsh, it was because he felt they had not gone far enough—they had not given the master-stroke that would topple the offending edifice (be it Literature or a spirit-crushing civilization). If he was impatient, it was because he felt that his predecessors had still allowed themselves to be dictated to by the powers-that-be, and in so doing, had not yet given rise to an unfettered expression of the human soul. What exactly this entails, and what its effects may presumably be, are the subject of this study. Perhaps we can come a little closer to understanding, not what Miller was trying to do, but what he did.

## CHAPTER 1—ALL OF LIFE IN ART

One of Henry Miller's most lasting and important contributions to literature was his unending advocacy of the idea that all of life needs to be included in art. He was, quite simply, going to tell it like it was. Kenneth Rexroth noted early on that Miller offends largely because he refuses to lie about life.[9] Part of this involves exposing the dissent within or underneath "polite" public discourse. But an even greater part comes from exposing that which is not even talked about at all—the taboo. It's difficult for those of us who weren't alive at the time to realize just how seriously these things were taken, how natural and unquestioned the codification into law of the taboo was. But we get a sense of the taboo's power at the time by realizing just that—it was a crime to air the taboo in print. Books were banned and burned, publishers and writers thrown in prison. James Laughlin, who later published many of Miller's American editions through New Directions press, reported to Miller that his offices at the Harvard *Advocate*, where he was editor, were ransacked by Boston police in 1936. An entire issue of the *Advocate* was seized and burned simply because it contained an expurgated version of the first ten pages of Miller's essay " Aller-Retour New York." The criminal case was dropped only because Laughlin bribed the ambitious young district attorney with choice football tickets to the Harvard-Yale game.[10] It wasn't just intellectually brave for Miller and artists like him to be taking a stance against censorship, it was also quite dangerous to their personal liberty, in a very real sense.

But Miller felt that such a strict enforcement of the taboo produced a distorted and incomplete apprehension of the world and our place in it. Rexroth deftly describes how "the real difficulty of communication comes from social convention, from a vast

conspiracy to accept the world as something it really isn't at all."[11] Miller knew that the key to breaking down this social convention was exposing society's "dirty little secrets" for all to see, and so he set himself to "burrow[ing] into life again in order to put on flesh."[12] He saw a pressing need to make society acknowledge its own real interests and practices, in order to return us to the proper spheres of human values and activity. By officially denying some parts of human experience, particularly the taboo, Miller realized, the hegemony was more easily able to deny the validity of the private self, with its private or alternative interpretations of reality, or narratives, and thus "keep people down." Alternative narratives were often based on just this kind of cultural data—that which was not talked about publicly—and often had greater authority precisely because they could offer a fuller picture of reality.

Along these lines, Hélène Cixous called for a particular kind of experimental and autobiographical "feminine writing"—*l'ecriture feminine*—to reconnect the world of matter and empirical data to our abstracted intellectualizations of it, as a way of undermining the authority of what she took to be incomplete hegemonic/patriarchal narratives. Notably, some male authors, like James Joyce, also practiced this "feminine writing," whose real aim was simply to restore the truth of women's experience to our discursive narratives, through "writing the body feminine." Well, Miller, too, would have sympathized with this project, since he himself had set out to restore the truth of "obscene," sexual, and taboo experience to our discursive narratives three decades earlier, through his own autobiographical writing of the body—*l'ecriture masculine*.

In this model, where Miller returns to the details of experience in order to render a portrait of life more fully and accurately, we see the influence of his nearest literary predecessor, Joyce. From Joyce's dictum at the end of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*—"Welcome O Life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of

experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race"[13]—we get the first explicit indication of Joyce's similar faith in the full details of experience as necessary for a proper understanding of the world. Then, with *Ulysses*, there can be no doubt—it is wholly comprised of "the reality of experience" that he set out to encounter in *Portrait*. The events of one day are sufficient material to forge a conscience, provided that all of life is admitted in its formulation—the masturbatory, excretory, procreatory, and alimentary not excluded. Joyce has taken all of life and connected point to point—art to organ, music to word, thought to action—in the creation of his vast artistic gesture toward reality and truth.

Ezra Pound was among the first to connect Miller and Joyce along these lines in a 1935 letter to T.S. Eliot. He speaks of *Cancer* as "presumably the only book a man could read for pleasure," one which, "if not out Ulysseeing Joyce" was at least "more part of permanent literature than such ½ master slime the weakminded, Woolf female" had written.[14] Never one to sugar-coat his observations, Pound. But we appreciate his recognition of what Miller had accomplished all the more, seeing how he can caustically dismiss the none-too-minor accomplishments of Virginia Woolf. George Orwell more clearly outlined the affinity between Miller and Joyce a decade later, in his much-needed critical nod to Miller's accomplishments, "Inside the Whale." Orwell writes, "What Miller has in common with Joyce is a willingness to mention the inane squalid facts of everyday life." And later: "The truly remarkable thing about *Ulysses*, for example, is the commonplaceness of its material [...] his real achievement has been to get the familiar on to paper."[15] Miller has picked up from Joyce, and to some degree Proust as well, the value of painting a portrait with all the details and colors in the spectrum.

Joyce's influence on Miller cannot be denied. All his life, Miller consistently expressed his admiration for Joyce as a great writer—even at the ripe old age of 80 in *My*

*Life and Times*, he is still listing Joyce as one of "the big writers," along with his favorites Dostoievsky and Lawrence.[16] More to the point, *Ulysses* makes the "list of 100 books that influenced me the most" at the end of his 1952 book *The Books in My Life*.[17] In 1937, in one of his many schemes to raise money to survive in Paris, Miller proposed to sell to collectors interested in literary rarities several books which he had critically annotated in his own hand. *Ulysses* was one of these nine, along with books by Emerson, Nietzsche, and Dostoievski.[18] Furthermore, Miller's clear debt to Joyce is not just apparent in his extra-literary commentary. In the frenzied close to a late chapter of *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller invokes his literary mentor, and the focus on the details of experience that Joyce bequeathed him:

> "I love everything that flows," said the great blind Milton of our times. I was thinking of him this morning when I awoke with a great bloody shout of joy: I was thinking of his rivers and trees and all that world of night which he is exploring [in *Work in Progress*]. Yes, I said to myself, I too love everything that flows: rivers, sewers, lava, semen, blood, bile, words, sentences. I love the amniotic fluid when it spills out of the bag. I love the kidney with its painful gall-stones, its gravel and what-not; I love the urine that pours out scalding and the clap that runs endlessly; I love the words of hysterics and the sentences that flow on like dysentery and mirror all the sick images of the world [...] even the menstrual flow that carries away the seed unfecund. I love scripts that flow, be they hieratic, esoteric, perverse, polymorph, or unilateral. I love everything that flows, everything that has time in it and becoming, that brings us back to the beginning where there is never end: the violence of the prophets, the obscenity that is ecstasy, the wisdom of the fanatic, the priest with his

> rubber litany, the foul words of the whore, the spittle that floats away in the gutter, the milk of the breast and the bitter honey that pours from the womb, all that is fluid, melting, dissolute and dissolvent, all the pus and dirt that in flowing is purified, that loses its sense of origin, that makes the great circuit toward death and dissolution. The great incestuous wish is to flow on, one with time, to merge the image of the beyond with the here and now. A fatuous, suicidal wish that is constipated by words and paralyzed by thought.[19]

It's difficult to get the full effect of Miller's inclusiveness, and his voluminous prose, without quoting extensively. But we can get a better picture of the esoteric and comprehensive scope Miller was hoping to attain by considering this passage in its entirety. Notice how much importance he places on each detail in the mosaic of life, and how each has a role in our understanding of the complete picture. This is behind his stated desire to dive back into life's experience—"I just wanted to see and hear things." [20] As Miller made clear in "Reflections on Writing," he felt that his achievements came about through "the very accurate rendering by my seismographic needle of the tumultuous, manifold, mysterious, and incomprehensible experiences which I have lived through."[21] Late in life, he told how he was "like a reporter at large" during his early Paris years, constantly collecting details in his notebooks. "I made notes of everything. I kept menus from restaurants, theatre programs, everything [...] pasted them right into the notebooks, all sorts of things."[22] He was as obsessively devoted to an accurate collecting of facts as the Irish "blind Milton" he was emulating—a man who once had his brother Stanislaus make a trip round to Eccles Street just to be sure that one of his characters could actually jump over the stoop to break into his own house. Now that's attention to detail.

Jonathan Cott notes Miller's "unparalleled literary ability to delve into the objects and persons of his attention and thereby to allow them to appear in an unmediated radiance."[23] What he's detecting here is Miller's dedication to all objects, details, and minutiae of experience as being equally important to an accurate comprehension of the whole. What seems like an uncanny ability to focus on one detail in particular is more accurately perceived as a willingness to examine all particulars equally—to accord to the "least" detail the same amount of attention usually reserved for the "greatest." Here we find our first signs of Miller's passionate intellectual affair with surrealism.

Andre Breton's surrealist crowd held that we can and should find the possibilities of the "marvelous" in the day-to-day, not just in that which is already pre-supposed to be sacred or sublime. As Miller understood it, this could be achieved by a juxtaposition of unlike things, great and small, in order to "freshen the vision."[24] Though Miller cautioned against the limitations of Surrealism, he was always careful to express his gratitude for this enlightening approach to examining the details of life. This notion—that all content and material should be given equal treatment—is a necessary precursor to another significant gesture of Miller's: the importance of including the "low" and vulgar in any narrative that purports to give an accurate depiction of life.

Miller's treatment of the vulgar and "low" (and for that matter, Joyce's as well) can often be quite humorous—he surely sees the inherent humor in filth. But he's also asking us to seriously include it in our discussions and expressions of human experience, as a part of the whole, in order to arrive at truth. The missing puzzle piece of the vulgar and obscene had previously been treated with kid gloves (again, with Joyce as a notable exception), with only metaphor and vague allusions to base our understanding on. How were we even to know its contours, its shape and form, much less attain any real understanding of the truth about this area of life itself, with only such half-formed and ill-

communicated gestures to go on, Miller asks? He wants for himself, and for us, a fuller understanding.

Richard Kostelanetz has this reply for those who consider Miller to be a "filthy writer"[25]: "This judgment is perfectly appropriate. Many Miller works are deeply concerned with scatology, the filth of human existence. He describes bodily smells, the lice that thrive in cheap hotels, the oppressive dirt of urban life, and our inability to escape from the unseemly. In his desire for a realistic literature, Miller has decided to include the scatological *that has always existed in fact, but rarely in fiction*" (italics mine).[26] This last point is paramount—the seemingly outlandish sordidness of Miller's literary world makes more sense when we contextualize it this way. Here is a man consciously trying to mix fact and fiction. As his fiction becomes more fact-like, the obscene or filthy—that which is normally "kept quiet" or just swept under the rug like a bad habit on Sunday—will be brought out into the light and given its due place in the pantheon of detail in Miller's factual fiction. The "sordid" is not vastly over-emphasized, to the exclusion of anything sublime, as some of Miller's critics have contended—we are just not used to its being equally emphasized, as it is in our daily lives.

Kostelanetz spots this emphasis on filth back in Whitman and Twain as well—two of Miller's great favorites. They too wanted to explore the neglected and forbidden to reach a fuller understanding, and it's worth noting that both were heavily invested in the confluence of autobiography and fiction or poetry. Miller seems to realize, even more than these two predecessors, how the sublime can only be understood or appreciated in light of the profane, or vulgar. And he spots this understanding in Joyce, as well. He writes in *Black Spring*,

> All my good reading, you might say, was done in the toilet. There are passages in *Ulysses* which can be read only in the toilet—if one wants to

> extract the full flavor of their content. And this is not to denigrate the talent of the author. No harm, I say, can ever be done a great book in taking it with you to the toilet. Only the little books suffer thereby. Only the little books make ass-wipers.[27]

Clearly, a certain perspective is called for when a reader is trying to place the meaning and effects of a great work of literature. If you can't maintain this perspective, you will have a terrible time trying to extract its "full flavor." As Erica Jong insightfully recalls, "'I want a classic purity,' [Miller] once said, 'where dung is dung and angels are angels.' He knew that angels could not be angels without dung."[28] Miller wasn't interested in exposing the raw side of life merely for shock value, or to sell a few more books. What he strove for was a clearer apprehension of the Divine, the sublime, the Truth, by understanding it in relation to the *whole* of experience, not the distorted partial view that had previously obtained in American literature.

Miller has even admitted that he possibly tipped the balance between the good and the sordid a little too far on occasion, even for his own sensibilities. But he did so largely out of a belief in the vulgar's healing, restorative, and enlightening powers. Miller writes, "Perhaps one reason why I have stressed so much the immoral, the wicked, the ugly, the cruel in my work is because I want others to know how valuable these are, how equally if not more important than the good things."[29] It is also worth noting that these sorts of ideas were not to be readily found by the reading public elsewhere. If they didn't hear it from him, they might not hear it at all.

Compounding the problem, the occasional imbalance, were the simple facts of the day-to-day existence of a down-and-out expatriate bohemian in Paris. "But my everyday life was full of this objectionable or questionable material," Miller protests in 1971's *My Life and Times*.[30] For Miller at that time, this *was* life. He got off work from the Paris

edition of the *Tribune* at 2 AM (when he was working at all), a time when the only people on the streets and in the cafes were other artists like himself (and his group of friends) and the pimps and whores just wrapping up their evening's work. This is not the setting for a meditative pastoral extolling the virtues of upright living through agrarian values. This is a setting for the diary of a gutter rat, penniless and starving on the Paris streets.

But Miller's occasional emphasis on the sordid never rose to the level of a distortion—the worst that could be claimed was that it was a reparation for past injury to an honest depiction of life. For this was Miller's *sine qua non*—a full and honest depiction of life as he knew it. As the next chapter will explore, Miller's dedication to, and achievement of honesty are unparalleled in creative writing. His search for unflinching detail and exposition of the previously darkened corners of the literary imagination drove that startling directness. People are often taken aback by the immediacy and *reality* of Miller's narrative when they first encounter his writings. John Williams ascribes this to "the compulsive honesty that is possible only to the heroic egoist," and we can sense the accuracy of his gentle chastising. But he also understands the extraordinary humanity that there is to be found in Miller's work, that Miller has given us "in unflinching and crude and graphic terms, written on the page, beyond our evasion, simply ourselves, our selves that we hide from others and too often from ourselves; we see what we have made of ourselves, out of our time and circumstance."[31]

## CHAPTER 2—ART AS HONESTY

Henry Miller left no room for doubt. An earnest desire for *honest* expression lay at the core of his aesthetic project. In 1955, he wrote an important letter to his great friend and supporter, the writer Lawrence Durrell, about Durrell's ongoing correspondence with another great friend and supporter, Alfred Perles (the Carl/Joey of *Cancer*). Perles and Durrell had struck up a literary correspondence regarding Miller's artistic project and intentions, and had shown copies of their letters to Miller (it's instructive to understand that this entire series of correspondence was intended, even as it was being written, to be published). In this letter, Miller sets his friends straight about his aims:

> So, as you hint, I coined this word Truth. The key to my whole work to be the utter truth [...] Whether I *then* knew what later I have come to know absolutely is a question, namely—the words of Jesus, that the truth shall set ye free. If I had only set myself to tell the truth about myself, that would have been fine. But I also wanted to tell the truth about the world, about others.[32]

Miller saw a slavish devotion to truth-seeking as fundamental to his role as an artist and a challenger to the status quo in literature. If surrealist juxtapositions were a source of inspiration to him, we could hardly imagine a more contradictory juxtaposition than to be a seeker of "utter" truth in a medium largely devoted to making fictions. But this was a stated aim of surrealism—to challenge existing assumptions about the seemingly "natural" ways of doing things. More interesting here is the hint that this excerpt gives

about the lesson that the mature Miller seems to have gleaned from his early literary efforts—the self-liberating qualities of directly exploring the Truth in art. This will be the focus of the next chapter on Miller's theme of self-liberation. Before we get into the complexities of Miller's project of self-liberation, however, we need a better understanding of his stated means of achieving it—namely, an honest expression of the self and the world in literary writing.

We certainly don't have to be privy to Miller's mail to get a sense of his core faith in the powers of direct honesty in writing. His books are rife with direct address of this theme. (This is one nice thing about examining Miller—you can always count on him to explain exactly what he thinks about the artist's role in letters, if in fact we take him at his word about his devotion to telling the truth.) From *Tropic of Cancer*:

> 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 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.[33]

What is so striking about this passage is the awesome *force* that the author ascribes to truth-telling. Miller the narrator earnestly believes in the power of a *true* apprehension of reality and human virtue, a force so great that it can topple the oppressive edifices that "civilized" men have created to constrain the human spirit. He called this truth in writing "stronger than all the racks and wheels which the cowardly invent to crush out the miracle of personality." In an almost evangelistic mode, Miller is calling for a more direct expression of truth to impart justice against "the lying, crushing weight of the world."[34] "And what is it we are fighting, we who love truth so much? The lie of the world. A perpetual lie."[35] This theme emerges again and again, too often to be

dismissed—the forces of truth against the lie of the world, linked with a willingness (usually on Miller's part) to speak directly about the deformed nature of modern society and culture.

Nearly every critic who treats Miller speaks admiringly about his "devastating honesty," in some way or another.[36] They often cite his desire to "record all that is omitted in books,"[37] and his letters to Emil Schnellock, a dear friend back home in New York, on the eve of beginning *Tropic of Cancer*: "I start tomorrow on the Paris book: first person, uncensored, formless—fuck everything!" and "I will explode in the Paris book [...] I want to get myself across this time—and direct as a knife thrust."[38] Miller's language as he describes his crusade for truth takes on some oddly epic battle imagery, with exploding and thrusting to be had on every page. The more perceptive among us will also not miss the violently sexualized imagery, with all the animalistic and procreative connotations that this brings to bear. Again from the letter to Durrell: "Yet I do feel that truth is linked to violence. Truth is the naked sword; it cuts clean through"[39] Miller situates himself, and all true artists, at the epicenter of a violent struggle for the "spirit" of the individual and the liberation of the self from oppressive, false narratives about human nature and the aims of civilization.

As truth was his only weapon in this war to describe (and thus define) human virtue, Miller found it necessary to drop the artificial "fourth wall" of the novel and engage in a direct address of the reader. And not in the "lo, dear reader" fashion of some pretentious eighteenth century novelist, either—this was a "man-sized" address (as Durrell famously put it in his first fan letter to Miller), given over to prolonged philosophical musings (some would say ramblings) and extensive discourse on "the nature of things," large and small.[40] This should be overly clear from the passages already cited—he employed this directness often, finding the metaphor and allegory of

traditional novelistic fiction too dull an instrument to express his sharp social critique. How was he to be sure that his readers would know exactly what he meant, unless he hit them over the head with it? Miller didn't trust the narrative medium with every important message, partially distrusting a scheme under which some characters could be seen as expressing an author's "privileged" beliefs, while others were supposed to be decoded as embodying "ironic," or false positions that the author was actually arguing against. The fact that so many critics have had trouble distinguishing the two even in his painstakingly explicit auto-novels (with their minimal narrative and characterization) only reinforces his position.[41] George Wickes described how Miller was disgusted with his earlier literary efforts, before *Cancer*, "unable to express his true feelings, boxed in by too much plotting and form." This led Miller to exclaim to Emil Schnellock, echoing the previous letter, "The hell with form, style, expression and all those pseudo-paramount things which beguile the critics. I want to get myself across this time."[42]

This is typical of the frustration that Miller seems to have felt when adopting literary forms or modes as they already existed. Remember that Miller found it necessary to take leave of surrealism after it had outlived its usefulness for him. He found surrealism to be especially valuable for releasing one's initial inhibitions when first sitting down to write, for getting the mind primed to release what you wanted to say—he realized the need to let loose the superego-like filters and censors of the mind and polite society (one is surprised to find Peter Elbow's free writing technique alive and well in the 1930's).[43] But surrealism lost its luster when it tried to expand and become a movement, a social force, and tried to establish itself as yet another Absolute, another external, demanding force. Miller wrote in his "Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere," "It seems to me that it is a very simple error which the Surrealists are guilty of; they are trying to establish an Absolute. They are trying with all the powers of consciousness to usher in

the glory of the Unconscious. They believe in the Devil, but not in God." Miller went on to cite a lack of faith in truth and inner understanding, and in the powers of discerning reason, as the hollow core which exposed Surrealists to deception and allowed them to be misled by their false god.[44] The surrealists' major influence, Freudian psychology, tells us that dreams and neuroses can give expression to the repressed unconscious, but are not actually capable of liberating it. Just so, surreal artistic expressions, particularly written ones (so much like dreams), make possible manifestations of the unconscious to the conscious. But they also do not allow that extra, liberating step—by themselves, they cannot situate those recently exposed manifestations of the unconscious into the self's coherent framework of meaning. They need the reason and explanations of consciousness and *conscious* expression to do so.

Miller saw this as a shortcoming of surrealism, so he accordingly maneuvered himself into a position where he could still take advantage of the creative disruptions and possibilities of surrealism without falling prey to his own criticism. His early auto-novels are full of surrealist prose flights, especially *Black Spring*. But Miller uses the contextualizing influence of direct address to the reader to make these passages coherent. With direct expression and explanation of the ideas nascent in his surrealistic flights, Miller is able to make use of the powerful creative energy unleashed by expressions of the unconscious. In this, he finds himself able to claim an even deeper and fuller comprehension of the whole picture of human experience. By broadening his already more honest treatment of life to include the salvageable lessons of the unconscious, Miller is better able to depict the entire swirl of competing dimensions which make up human consciousness and experience.

So Miller found both the ultra-formedness of novelistic convention and the ultra-formlessness of surrealist stream-of-(un)consciousness lacking as stylistic modes, when they were employed at the exclusion of others. They need not be discarded altogether—indeed, they still retain their beneficial qualities when Miller makes use of them; surrealism freshened his vision and opened up new creative possibilities, and the devices of the novel—characters, plot, dialogue, etc.—gave his auto-novels the kind of narrative movement that he needed to keep our interest and situate his ideas in reality. But for his wider purposes of challenging the hegemony and giving a more honest rendering of life in art, a plain-talking, heart-to-heart, almost oral discourse is required. The masks and chimeras of fiction's metaphor and allegory are insufficient for this brand of Brooklyn straight-shooting.

Just as Miller felt he had to go beyond the fertile ideas of Surrealism to accomplish what he wanted to in art, this is the point where he felt he must take leave of Joyce's influential aesthetic in order to get "himself" across. With the levels of honesty and fuller "reality" that were becoming possible in Joyce's and Miller's work, to merely "represent" life in allegorical, novelistic fiction would leave too much room for doubt, and in Joyce, says Miller, it had left open the door for a pessimistic, even nihilistic, world-view to take root. He described his differences with Joyce in an essay called "The Universe of Death," written in 1933 at the instigation of Jack Kahane at Obelisk Press, the man who first agreed to publish Miller's work (*Tropic of Cancer)*. The essay was part of a larger critical work on D.H. Lawrence that Kahane wanted Miller to write before Kahane would publish *Cancer*, feeling it would "give Henry the sort of prestige as a thinker which would disarm the critics in advance and force them to take [*Cancer*] seriously."[45]

In the essay, Miller compares Lawrence (and often himself, by strong implication) favorably to his two other literary models, Joyce and Proust. He describes how the latter stop short of the goal—" Proust and Joyce, needless to say, appear more representative: they *reflect* the times. We see in them no revolt: it is surrender, suicide, and the more poignant since it springs from creative sources."[46] So even a fuller depiction of life is not sufficient, it seems—Miller wants more. He decries their unwillingness to make an explicit stand for humankind's better instincts and nobler virtues—which they can clearly see, because they so skillfully depict man's fallen state. While Miller finds Joyce and Proust to be "unequalled" in "their analysis and portrayal of disintegration," this should not be taken as an end in itself. "They are naturalists, who present the world as they find it, and say nothing about the causes, nor derive from their findings any conclusions. They are defeatists, men who escape from a cruel, hideous, loathsome reality into ART."[47] In doing so, they leave their readers focused only on the despairing, dissolute state of modern man, without the perspective or broader understanding that a firmer grounding in the history of human values and possibilities of the human spirit would allow. "Despite the maze of fact, phenomena, and incident, there is no grasp of life, no *picture* of life [in *Ulysses*]."[48]

It becomes the artist's responsibility to supply this cohesive framework, to keep us also mindful of the redemptive possibilities within man, as Miller does so often in his passages of direct address. Without these, Joyce's art becomes a dislocated phantom of existence, "*a sick reality of the mind*" (an extended thesis of the intellect, but a partial one), focused only on the terrifying state that the world has come to.[49] Rather than strive for the liberation of the self from these oppressive forces, Joyce settles for disillusionment as an end in itself. "He is in revolt not against institutions, but against mankind itself [...] from which he has divorced himself."[50]

We certainly sense that at least a part of Joyce sought to free his countrymen from the pernicious bonds of prejudice and religious and imperialist totalitarianism (Stephen Dedalus, tapping his brow: "but in here it is that I must kill the priest and king"[51]), and the materials to do so are most certainly there. He has achieved nearly the same high level of clarity, honesty, and inclusiveness that Miller calls for in the fight against "the lie of the world." In fact, on many occasions, Joyce seems to show a much greater concern for the lot of his countrymen and fellow man than Miller—so why is it he left them no solutions, no blueprint, and merely retreated to the world of intellectualized artistry? The materials for liberation and revolution are not enough—Joyce's Dubliners (both real and fictional) are no better off when he leaves them than when he got there.

Joyce's fundamentally pessimistic rendering of life in *Ulysses* leaves us wanting, staring grimly at a narrow-sighted vision of man's irredeemable state, according to Miller. And we can see where he got this from. Spiritual communion and sustenance have broken down—Bloom has been found lacking as a spiritual father, and Stephen wanders away disgusted, removed and closed-off. (We make little advance into *his* thoughts and beliefs, even as we are given the impression that Stephen holds the key to understanding and saving Ireland from her terrible cultural burdens.) Indeed, Bloom and Stephen's union ultimately fails as they part ways by that pre-dawn garden gate at the end of *Ulysses*. In a letter to his close friend Frank Budgen, Joyce speaks of the aftermath of this disappointing sundering, "Bloom and Stephen become heavenly bodies, wanderers like the stars at which they gaze."[52] In less elegiac words, they return to their solipsistic wanderings. We are asked to believe in the ultimate impossibility of spiritual communion—there will be no meaningful union of like minds in the battle against cultural oppression, even between a son-lacking father and a father-lacking son.

Here we see Joyce reaffirming the notorious arch-rivalry of his personal and intellectual relationships (with Cranly, Mulligan, the real-life Gogarty, even eventually with brother Stanislaus), by intimating that each must go his own way, that the downfall of the existential modern man is his fundamental isolation. The two modes of being in and seeking to ameliorate the world portrayed in *Ulysses*—Stephen's artist/intellectual and Bloom's pragmatic inventor of social welfare schemes—do not blend together to engender the perfect reformer that we have been breathlessly anticipating as a result of the union between Stephen and Bloom. For this is surely the effect of the concentric spiraling of each man toward this intersection, a motion we have painstakingly followed through every crook and cranny of Joyce's mind and every dark corner of Dublin—we as readers desperately want the synergistic marriage of Bloom's pragmatically scientific musings with the fecund artistic sensibilities of young Dedalus. But this was not in Joyce to give us, Miller argues; Joyce lacked the requisite faith in human virtue that is needed to effect a liberation of the self, and by extension mankind. What does he offer in its stead? A disappointing failure of communion and communication, the impossibility of brotherhood or union of souls…a hopeless and irredeemably solipsistic state is life.

Even as we're ultimately left with the life-affirming "Yes!" of Molly, that "great whore of Babylon" in Miller's estimation, this is over-shadowed by its utter unavailability to Bloom or Stephen.[53] (Which is not to say that just because men can't partake in a more enriched, free life, Molly's exuberance is rendered pointless. The greater issue is that Joyce insists that the communion or sharing of those richer modes of life is fundamentally impossible.) Her romantic youth and abundant freedom to do as she wishes only highlight the degree of Bloom's isolation and limitations—her profuse life exists entirely apart from any communion with Bloom. Again we see a failure of union,

as Bloom cannot find a point of entry into the bountiful domain of feminine vitality and the rich materiality of life (symbolized by his cuckolded, celibate state).

Joyce is instead content to live and play within the abstracted world of ideas, of great themes, of intellectualization along mythic lines. He uses language and wordplay for these ends largely, not for the kind of self-liberation that Miller demands. To be sure, his artistic achievements were both impressive and legion. The incredible subtlety of his wordplay and his mixing of prose style and form with meaning arguably set literature forward a hundred years. For instance, his theme of the consubstantial nature of fatherhood, especially spiritual fatherhood, is seen in his characters' interpenetration—"Bloom Stoom," "Bloom for Stephen Blephen," this combination hinting at the continual recreation of the psyche by mixing the old with the new.[54] He managed to establish a direct correspondence between substance and style, in which the form "expresses" or intimates qualities of its subject—Gerty's pulp romance, the newsroom's breaking headlines, the search for meaning in Ithaca's question and answer, the gestation of language and child in Oxen of the Sun—there can be little doubt of Joyce's artistic genius.

But Henry Miller is calling for a new kind of artist. Joyce presumably placed his faith in these "artistic" gestures as being capable of revelation, and thereby sufficient to induce change, which he seems to earnestly desire. But Miller thinks them intellectual hijinks, which, while they do reveal impressive new links between language and myth and the formation of meaning, stop short of the ultimate goal—the liberation of the self from the demands imposed by a corrupt social contract, a dead society. Miller shows us what is essential to this project—a direct treatment of the broader ideas needed to contextualize and situate such forthright depictions of life's sordid and oppressive aspects. Otherwise, we would all be plunged into the pit of despair that Joyce and Proust

are writing from. Like the surrealists, they had lost their basic faith in the self's inner faculty to comprehend truth and human virtue, a faculty which had historically been associated with "revealing" the sublime or Divine. They had lost the power to situate their fuller comprehension of modern life's sordidness within the larger picture of man's ultimate virtue, what Miller in his glorious, life-affirming way calls "the miracle of personality."

If this were just Miller's estimation of his project in relation to Joyce, it would be easier to dismiss. But we find it echoed by one of the more astute literary minds of the day, Ezra Pound, in a 1935 review of *Tropic of Cancer* written for the *Criterion* (but not published by his friend T.S. Eliot, the journal's editor, presumably because he objected to its frank estimations of living English writers[55]). He describes the difficult situation of the literary critic, for whom for twenty years it had "been necessary to praise Joyce and Wyndham Lewis, not in an attempt to measure them, but in a desperate fight to impose their superiority." But with *Cancer*, Pound contends, "The appearance of a full sized 300 page volume that can be set beside Joyce and Lewis gives one a chance and a right to mention their limitations." This is high praise for the first book of a penniless, vagabond expatriate living almost on the streets in Paris, but Pound saw clearly. He cites as proof of Miller's quality his "very strong hierarchy of values," in comparison to "Joyce's foetid Dublin," and gets to the core of the work's important gesture: "As against Joyce's kinks and Lewis's ill-humour we have at last a book of low life "incurably healthy."[56] *Cancer* is healthy because it retains faith in humanity—it does not do us the disservice of relegating us to the dump-heap of history.

Pound agrees with Miller about the importance of maintaining not just a "positive outlook" or "spin" on life, but a faith in something that can only be described as human values. Miller's "values" are based in freedom—freedom of the self from oppressive

forces and freedom of speech and self-expression in writing, both of which combine to give Miller his freedom from "the lying, crushing weight of the world." Miller appeals to his readers with direct expression and expostulation of these concepts, showing his earnest desire to explore, understand, and most of all, communicate these human values. "Truth" is certainly one of them, "creativity" another—"freedom" may be the most important of all. These next few chapters will explore how the weapons of the first two are used to bring about the condition of the last.

## CHAPTER 3—FREEING HENRY MILLER

I've described several "great" themes in Henry Miller's work. Honesty, the necessity of the obscene in art, faith in the human spirit and values—it's easy to get seduced into reducing an author to his "themes," his Cliff's Notes checklist of ideas, in an effort to understand him or locate him in the "story" of literature. But let's not pretend to reduce the richness of any author's work or creative gestures to a few meager sentences, or even pages. Henry Miller means a million different things to a million different readers. No simple snapshot or single idea could capture the essence of a great spirit like his, and he told us as much on several occasions.

Self-liberation. If we were to fall prey to the temptation of distilling Miller down to one all-encompassing artistic gesture, this would be it. No, it can't be that simple or fatuously reductive, but we can move a little closer to the heart of his overall project by understanding how much importance Miller placed on this concept, by realizing what a beacon it was for him during his most productive years. In light of this goal, all his other gestures can be more fully understood. His ambition to liberate the self obviously has its origins in Miller's most fundamental narratives of freedom and truth, assumptions that he came to through the powerful influence of the American Transcendentalists. We'll examine later this curious position of one who is trying to embrace the very American notion of self-liberation in order to defeat some other very American narratives that stem from a corrupted spirituality and culture. But for now, we'll take a good look at how this self-liberation was to be accomplished.

Several critics have tried to equate Miller's self-liberation with his most obvious features, obscenity and sexual explicitness, and have met with varying degrees of

success. The least successful approach has been to attempt some sort of quasi-rational link between somatic or gender-role processes and liberating some version of a normative "essential self." Both Kate Millett and Michael Woolf typify this approach, with Woolf asserting sex as "the central point of a system from which all else flows."[57] Millett, for her part, felt that Miller liberated us only in showing us what a sexual monster he was, and described how he brutalized (what was her assumption of) a normative, "feminine" sexuality, with communication, generosity, and sharing. Woolf, on the other hand, assumes that "sex validates human activity" and describes a "real self" that is "revealed and celebrated in sexual action," assuming a normative self whose natural state is complete sexual freedom.[58] Their analyses are interesting in that, while they do succumb to the temptation of assuming, looking for, and of course finding (or decrying the lack of) their own normative notions of sexuality in Miller, and thus hailing him as a harbinger (or reviling him as a sworn enemy) of their own agendas, they also recognize, to some degree, the real importance of Miller's sexual gesture—both situate Miller's sexual freedom as a reaction to the pervasive Puritan morality of public society. Woolf describes how both Miller and (coincidentally) his most famous critic, Millett (in her autobiographical work *Flying*), "use sexual action to assert an anti-Puritan position, and further see sexuality as a means of liberating an essential self from social constraints and conventions."[59]

While Miller's sexual passages certainly assert an anti-Puritan position (though this was always more Lawrence's gesture than Miller's), the second part of Woolf's formulation is what needs some clarification. Sex would seem to be operating as some sort of release-mechanism, fully capable, in and of itself, of producing self-liberation. Most people have sex—why aren't most people thereby "liberated from social constraints and conventions"? If "sex is seen to liberate the self from the gravity of social or political

obligation," as Woolf formulates it, we should all be similarly free. Or does Woolf mean, more precisely, that some degree of sexual promiscuity is used to achieve this freedom? Even this is problematic. Several of Miller's most promiscuous characters, notably Van Norden in *Cancer*, are his most repressed, neurotic, and decidedly *un*-liberated figures. Van Norden is bound by guilt, indecision, an utter inability to sustain meaningful communication with women, and a complete lack of faith in any hierarchy of values. He is among Miller's most pitiable and ridiculous caricatures. Furthermore, Woolf cites the flights of narrative consciousness that begin when Miller's narrator is engaged in loveless sex as evidence for the transcending, releasing powers of sexual action. But Miller also engages in these flights of prose consciousness when his narrator is walking down the street or staring at a familiar building. Are we to assume that walking produces similarly transcendent liberation of the self?

James Goodwin refines this argument in his own analysis of Miller's use of obscenity, which casts a slightly wider net than just Miller's depictions of sex.

> The obscene [...] belongs to a realm beyond the conventions of literary authorship. Its activities and language, as yet unspoken in the canons of high culture, contained the means of liberation for the writer in Miller seeking independence from his imitative habits. The vulgar and obscene retain a margin of humanity unreconstructed by the materialism and automatism of the machine age.[60]

This understanding of Miller's use of the obscene and sexual, as a conceptual haven less tainted by the distorting influence of the prevailing culture's half-baked narratives, is more in line with Miller's own statements regarding his depictions of sex. Miller denied that the sexual had any special importance in the liberation of the self. He saw the obscene as a fecund area from which he could recover important aspects of man's nature,

yes—but he was not given over to the assertion of some that it was the beginning and end of his liberation of self.

In fact, Miller, in *My Life and Times*, chides Lawrence for placing too much emphasis on the sexual, and thereby distorting his view of humanity.[61] He then clarifies, "I think of sex as a very natural thing, like birth or death. I don't think it has to be given special consideration as a subject. It's a big part of life—the half of life, if you like, but I don't see that we need put such great influence on it. Lawrence did, however [...] Well, I don't think of sex as a liberating force." Miller seeks liberation on a much broader scale than just areas of sexual convention. Keeping in mind Miller's assertion that all of life is *equally* important to a right comprehension of the whole, we must not let ourselves now be swayed by the most shocking elements of that picture, those previously unseen in literary works. To overstress the recently exposed "obscene" in an ecstasy of novelty does a disservice to the larger goal—as Miller said in 1960, "My books are not about sex but about self-liberation."[62]

And Henry Miller comes from a long line of self-liberators. The American literary lineage of transcendental self-reliance and autobiography could almost be admitted into the Daughters of the American Revolution. It has grown as the country has grown, from Benjamin Franklin to Emerson, Thoreau, Twain, and Whitman. The transcendental tradition, which Miller wraps himself in, tied the notion of a rigorously autonomous self to the very nature of consciousness, and then set about to establish this postulation in print. Not content to merely adopt the autonomous self as a primary narrative, they further wished to accord it supremacy and naturalness, and Miller was certainly raised in the shadow of this idea. He displays all the hallmarks of the transcendental tradition—his very prose style and narrative experimentation are an argument in themselves for originality; he surely falls in with the long "line of clear-eyed

Americans who see through calcified propriety and pretense," as Jeff Bartlett asserted; and his commitment to self-reliance was best captured by the sign on his study wall in Pacific Palisades in the seventies: "Don't Look for Miracles—YOU Are the Miracle!" [63] From the transcendentalists, he picked up the theme of freeing the self and wore it like a badge of honor, often like a chip on his shoulder.

John Williams's accurate assessment of Miller is that " he has shown us the degree to which a man can be free, even in the prison of his ideas and attitudes, his time and circumstance."[64] But we have to wonder what this "freedom" entails, what it really looks like. What is it, exactly, that is "freed"? We see many allusions in the Miller canon and the accompanying critical apparatus to a "true" or "essential" self that is liberated in Miller, both in the man and in the writing. What does this look like? Miller himself identified the "true" self with the great book he would write in his head as he rode the trolley or walked across the Brooklyn Bridge every day, going to work in his father's tailor shop. This was back in his early twenties, long before Paris and his writing career. He claimed that none of his subsequent works could even come close to the splendor and force of this first volcanic eruption in his mind, replete with characters, dialogue, and splendorous dramatics. Before he ever gathered the courage to put down the first word, he sensed a repressed (and surprisingly literary) "self" within, crying for expression and freedom, in the very midst of his most confined, conventional years.

It's not this idea's early appearance in Miller's life that is important, but rather the situation that gave rise to it. In Miller's writing, the "true" self is always invoked in relation or opposition to an oppressive external reality; for Miller, an inner understanding of right and wrong (with connotations of the Platonic Good) is the seat of creation for this "true" self. His inner values and beliefs are encroached upon in a way that produces a cognitive dissonance within the self—an internal judgment of injustice—and gives rise to

his feeling of repression. While we can't help but notice the agency of the individual's will here in deciding right from wrong, we also can't miss the fluidity of worldview that is exposed from recognizing two competing narratives of meaning, his and "the world's." Miller constantly engages in this critical judgment of the "master narratives" of his American cultural milieu, and more often than not he finds them to be lacking.

Thus, we can't be looking at a self completely inscribed by, or dictated to by, utterly determinant external narratives—Miller displays too much agency for this. As the next section will explore, Miller cares far too much about the fate of his "true" self to leave it in the hands of such rough and random forces. Miller is adamant about ascribing great creative powers to the artist, and we shall find that these powers ultimately extend beyond the scope of artistic creation, and into the realm of life. The creative powers of the artist are called upon to liberate the "repressed self" within modern man, but this struggle is not easily won. It requires a drastic re-visioning of the self—apart from and in opposition to the "lie of the world."

## CHAPTER 4—CLEARING THE THROAT AT HOME

We spend our lives in the grip of forces beyond our control. At this late date, it is foolish to pretend that men and women don't make profoundly life-affecting decisions based on the stories they have been told about the world. We are beholden to ideas—to what *degree* we are enslaved is the only real question left. As Henry Miller puts it, "In a profound sense, life is servitude. But there's voluntary servitude and involuntary servitude."[65] Miller's guiding light was to act on whatever narratives *his* understanding led him to endorse, to the degree that he could be conscious of them. If you're going to be in service to ideas, you might as well make them *your* ideas, as much as is possible to do so, went his credo. As he explored *his* ideas with an ever-refining sense of truth in his autobiographical writing, he noticed the effect that the act of writing was having on him *and* his ideas. The effect was exacerbated, to be sure, because the subject of his writing was himself and his ideas, but he was nonetheless led to believe in the curiously regenerative powers that "writing the self" could harness. The act of writing became a writing of the self—a privileging or revealing of the private self and one's private, inner values, and thus a simultaneous self-creation, self-realization, and self-liberation.

Regenia Gagnier's study of autobiography in Britain's various social classes around the turn of the last century, *Subjectivities*, offers a useful description of the "'narratives' that shape the way people see their lives" and that, accordingly, shape the way they represent themselves in "discursive autobiographical 'moves.'"[66] All autobiographical "moves," in Gagnier's analysis, are "articulations of participatory and antagonistic social relations," with both modes sometimes occurring in the same text (and writer). While Gagnier doesn't specifically discuss the agency of the autobiographer in

moving from one of these two opposing discourses to the other, she makes it clear that the same writer can be "participatory" in relation to the narrative of her "movement" (Suffrage and Chartism are examples) and at the same time be "antagonistic" to the hegemonic master narratives (for instance sexism and classism)."[67] In other words, autobiographical gestures are largely concerned with endorsing or refuting a particular way or view of life, often doing both at the same time. Through close analysis, these competing narratives can be discerned in autobiographical writing, and are indeed traced by Gagnier through the published diaries and autobiographies of Britain's different classes.

Applying Gagnier's analysis to Miller's autobiographical "moves," we can observe the shifting patterns of antagonism and participation that Miller underwent in his transformation from the pitiable, beaten-down shell of a man at the beginning of *Tropic of Capricorn* to the ecstatic, liberated self we find at the end of *Tropic of Cancer* and in his later writing. These are certainly not static selves, and as such, the patterns of antagonism and participation do not remain the same—for during this time, the intervening catalyst for Miller's transformation has been the writing process. As for participation—though we know Miller is loath to take up with a "movement" as such, he does exhibit changing identifications with specific discourses, or narratives, both through the processes of writing and reading and through the more general processes of social and intellectual interaction. Regarding the obverse—well, surely by now I don't need to demonstrate Miller's antagonism to the *grand récits* of American culture and letters. But the key is that we see in Miller's evolving "persona" evidence of a person who is "re-writing" the narratives of his reality, with whatever degree of conscious agency possible. His identification with particular narratives changes through time, and a key catalyst in this change is the creative powers of the writing artist, "writing" the self.

For one with such a strong faith in truth as an external cultural reality (that is, not dependent on any one person's endorsement or understanding for its existence), Miller ascribed a great deal of power to people to create their own environment. Describing the fallen state of man in 1941's *The Wisdom of the Heart*, he laments, "We are in the grip of demonic forces created by our own fear and ignorance."[68] Miller accords us, then, some power to influence our understanding of the surrounding world. A stronger interpretation is also possible—the power lies in us to make of the world a heaven or hell, the power to fashion our worlds with our narratives. But this may be too much, if not qualified. Miller explored this topic with an extended whale metaphor in "Une Etre Etoilique," an essay from 1939's *The Cosmological Eye* in which he champions Anais Nin's greatest achievement, her *Diary.* Miller defends Anais' goal in writing as the proper one: self-realization; and he goes on to describe the process of unveiling "the secret self" which is achieved by the act:

> We who imagined that we were sitting in the belly of the whale and doomed to nothingness suddenly discover that the whale was a projection of our own insufficiency. The whale remains, but the whale becomes the whole wide world [...] with everything that is wonderful to see and touch, and being that it is no longer a whale but something nameless because something that is inside as well as outside us. We may, if we like, devour the whale, too—piecemeal, throughout eternity. No matter how much is ingested there will always remain more whale than man; because what man appropriates of the whale returns to the whale again in one form or another. The whale is constantly being transformed as man becomes transformed. There is nothing but man and whale, and the man is *in* the whale and possesses the whale [...] One lives within the spirit of

> transformation and not in the act. The legend of the whale thus becomes the celebrated book of transformations destined to cure the ills of the world.[69]

A careful reading of this passage reveals Miller's belief in the transformative powers of the creative human mind. The whale, as a "projection" of our beliefs, becomes our understanding of the world, and becomes indistinguishable to us from the world. A key point is that it is "inside as well as outside us," of our minds as well as outside in the world, and thus within our own creative powers of transformation, of "devouring." What we devour, or transform, becomes in turn a part of the world-view again, "in some form or other." Miller here realizes that each narrative, or piece of the puzzle, is just another substitute for the narrative that preceded it, but also shows throughout his work that some ideas are more liberating and tenable, and thus more "true" for him, than others. This sly allegory for the refining of truth and human values in each person's worldview (or perhaps a collective worldview) demonstrates Miller's understanding of the logistics of re-writing one's narratives, choosing and arranging (one) man's destiny by a judicious and tasteful distillation of truthful ideas. In this formulation, revealing or liberating the self involves the careful refinement of narratives of meaning in which to inscribe one's actions, desires, and beliefs; and it is key that the act of writing is attached, with the end product of "a celebrated book of transformations."

If I seem to be getting hung up here on the difficulty of establishing these moves as conscious gestures, then this is as it should be. That kind of omniscience, of seeing-while-doing, is of course largely absent as we distill our frameworks of meaning. It can more accurately be described, for Miller, as creative forces working *through* or *within* us, through the filter of our understanding, to transform our comprehension of the world into the enlightened pastiche of discursive narratives that we commonly call our "beliefs." As

we shall explore shortly, this model has its roots in the philosophy of Henri Bergson. According to this paradigm, the creative *faculty* within each of us combines our experience and understanding with the challenging new narratives we encounter from all directions, those competing versions of reality that purport to describe or reveal the meaning of our experiences. Just because the process is not patently purposive, however, does not mean that it does not occur.

We need a description of this process of "writing the self" in Henry Miller's work for us to get any further in understanding it, which we'll examine in the next chapter. But to fully explore that subject, we need to understand what happened to bring about this transformation. That is, what were the necessary conditions for effecting such self-liberation through artistry? Miller has related two separate instances of "epiphany" that he understood as key to his transformation. In one, he was sitting in his apartment in Paris looking at a picture of the mystic Mme. Blavatsky when he had a vision of her standing in the room. Immediately after that, "I came to the realization that I was responsible for my whole life, whatever had happened. I used to blame my family, society, my wife [...] and that day I saw so clearly that I had nobody to blame but myself. I put everything on my shoulders and I felt so relieved: Now I'm free, no one else is responsible."[70] You must accept personal responsibility for your own destiny and what you make of the world, Miller asserts—to blame external forces is to declare yourself powerless against their sway. In the bleak landscape of modern society, "it is up to man to save himself [...] Man has to recognize himself as something more than a human being or he'll perish."[71] *More than a human being*—meaning, a God? That which has the power to create or determine reality? It is in that direction, but need not be taken to the extreme, where one could form and re-form one's reality at whim. But the implication of this epiphany is clear: don't fall prey, Miller cautions, to the oppressive lie

of the world, that the master narratives are natural and ineluctable truths about human nature. If you don't accord yourself the power to challenge these "truths," then all hope is lost.

Miller's second epiphany is even more instructive. All the better that it comes in a passage of direct address from *Tropic of Cancer*, giving it the immediacy and vitality of his breakthrough statement. The narrator comes to the sudden realization that "everything American will disappear one day." He identifies this as the catalyst for leaving "the warm, comfortable bloodstream where, buffaloes all, we once grazed in peace." It dawns on Miller that the American way of life, so confident, self-assured, seemingly "natural," is actually contingent, even transient and temporary. In response to this liberating thought, Miller seeks out "an older stream of consciousness, a race antecedent to the buffaloes, a race that will survive the buffalo."[72] This, remember, is the aim of Miller's liberation of the self—to attune yourself to a more lasting and true worldview, one in touch with "higher values" and enlightened human virtue, which are, significantly, tied to the past here, "antecedent" to the American way of life. Also significant is that Miller locates the beginnings of his self-liberation in his realization of the contingency of his American worldview—we see him begin to drop the master narratives of American society in favor of more tenable, lasting, ennobling narratives. But the key is that liberation is somewhat coeval if not synonymous with an understanding of narrative contingency.

The effect of American putrescence on Miller cannot be underestimated. We would likely have never heard of Henry Miller if American life at the turn of the century had not been, in Miller's judgment, so perverse and abhorrent. In his capacity as personnel manager for the New York offices of Western Union from 1923-1927, so richly described at the outset of *Tropic of Capricorn*, Miller saw the lowest rungs of the

social ladder pass through his office, dozens upon dozens, every day. Hearing their hard luck stories, and worse, the outrageous lies of the perpetually unemployable, Miller got his fill of the American, metropolitan variety of human suffering. He tells how he would borrow money from all and sundry, trying to help these unfortunates out, visiting their homes to do so when he could not offer them work.[73] He witnessed first-hand the full effects of the crush of the techno-industrial age and saw the human toll of its birth throes in the second-largest city in the world. He himself had held every crappy job under the sun, and regularly worked eighty-hour weeks at Western Union. The point being, this was not a soft Greenwich village Marxist whining about the prospect of labor—he had lived a hard, exhausting life in the belly of the American economic machine, and he knew from whence he spoke.

Railing against the spirit-crushing effects of his automaton, technological, capitalism-driven age in *Tropic of Capricorn,* Miller called all American activity "velocity exercises in the dark," likening his countrymen's pursuits to a frenzied piano warm-up scale.[74] These are the distinctly American "master narratives" that Miller endlessly railed against—the rise of economic rationality, technopoly, and an increasingly industrial and automatized way of life. He was an early and vocal detractor of what Barthes called "bourgeois consciousness," the owning classes' manipulation of the platitudes of mass culture in modern, corporate America. In Miller's famous outline of his auto-novels' material, set down in one fourteen-hour burst in 1929 (what he called "the beginning of it all") and from which he took his cues for the next thirty years of writing, his list of twenty-four "Ideas" to explore in his writing contains two pithy entries that encapsulate his antagonism: "hatred of industrial life—ugliness" and "ideas of self-sacrifice to labor causes."[75] With his hatred of industry and of automatized labor, Miller

felt intensely the dislocation that modern American capitalism was placing on the liberal, autonomous self.

Later in life, Miller would quote Biblical wisdom to justify the rightness of his early, intuitive rejection of the "senseless insect activity" of capitalism—"consider the lilies of the field—they toil not, neither do they spin," and "man does not live by bread alone," (but rather requires sustenance of the spirit).[76] Modern life, according to Miller, was taking man out of his natural orbit, placing demands on the spirit, demands which had a crushing effect:

> Every day men are squelching their instincts, their desires, their impulses, their intuitions. One has to get out of the fucking machine he is trapped in and do what he wants to do. But we say no, I have a wife and children, I better not think of it. That is how we commit suicide every day. It would be better if a man did what he liked to do and failed than to become a successful nobody. Isn't that so?[77]

But the suicide was not always so metaphorical. Several times, Miller has described in print his own half-hearted suicide attempt in 1928, driven to despair by his frustrated attempts to write and still survive in New York (home of the disrespected artist), and by his maddening love triangle with his wife June and her live-in lover, Jean Kronski. In his autobiographical treatment of the affair at the end of *Sexus*, Miller relates a telling fantasy he had watching a burlesque show on the night he finally married June ("the woman who was to liberate me from a living death"[78]), after leaving his first wife for her. In the fantasy, a dashing soap-box charlatan named Osmanli confronts a "hidden self" that is pushing him to commit suicide.[79] Miller identifies Osmanli as a premonitory projection of himself, a man who, through his virtuoso powers with words, can "sway men, stir their passions, goad them and confound them at will," an ability which has

made him "contemptuous and derisive of his fellow man." Osmanli finds that underneath his easy facility with words and detached exploitation of the "parties, cults, isms, and ideologies" of empty America lies a hollow, hidden core, "a vacuum around which he had built a cathedral of changing personalities."[80] Inside the vacuum, his hidden, repressed self "began to assume the pressure and explosiveness of a vacuum. The bubble was about to burst. He knew it." Osmanli goes on to throw all his material trappings in passing garbage cans in a desperate dash towards a fantastical suicide. The intensity of Miller's repression was reaching a breaking point.

As usual, Miller uses direct address in one of his auto-novels to more fully articulate this struggle within, this time in *Tropic of Capricorn*. Describing how this inner insufficiency and turmoil falls upon him at any and every moment in this double life, he says to the reader,

> Then, as in the middle of the bridge, in the middle of a walk, in the middle always, whether of a book, a conversation, or making love, it was borne in on me again that I had never done what I wanted and out of this not doing what I wanted to do there grew up inside of me this creation which was nothing but an obsessional plant, a sort of coral growth, which was expropriating everything, including life itself, until life itself became this which was denied but which constantly asserted itself, making life and killing life at the same time.[81]

This is typical of the Miller narrator's mindset for any given time during his life in New York. We get a constant double consciousness—yearning to express the truth he holds inside about the fallen men around him, and nearly going mad with the effort it takes him not to shout it at the top of his lungs from the rooftops, or more often, in passersby's faces. When describing his adult life in New York, Miller's general tone and mode of

expression is nearly always one of despair. He seems to say, "If I hadn't given expression to this inner being, I would have eventually more seriously tried to off myself." Perhaps this is part of the cautionary tale that Miller offers: the modern, soul-crushing society is giving us these smoldering volcanoes—men driven almost to suicide through repression of their "natural," or inner desires. They feel a need to create, and create themselves, but cannot find an outlet for that expression, that desire for control, creation, autonomy, and individuality.

This is perhaps the central paradox of the twentieth century American narrative—the simultaneous stressing of both individuality and conformity. "Be an individual, but just like everyone else"…how cruel. The sanctioned expressions of individuality are carefully channeled and pre-ordained, while the individual is pushed and pulled almost to the point of disintegration, left to care for his stifled and discarded inner desires to the best of his own limited ability. The mass of men are leading lives of quiet desperation, and Henry Miller is fucking tired of it! The vulgarity of this formulation expresses the desperation, the seriousness, the passion of what is truly at stake here, as Miller often demonstrated throughout his work.

His growing recognition of the shallowness and poverty of American cultural life may have first roused Henry Miller's dissatisfaction, may have brought it just to the edge of the boiling point, but the death blow came from June. As Miller makes clear in *Sexus*, the source of Osmanli's mad, futile urgency and his ultimate push toward suicide had come years earlier—Osmanli's wife had come home one day and told him she was leaving him, "that she had never loved him," a jolt that started him on his downward spiral. Miller makes it clear that Osmanli was forever branded in this moment—"From the moment she had uttered those few telling words, he knew he would never be able to move from that spot."[82] Indeed, a large part of Miller never did move from that spot, and

spent thirty years of writing trying to come to terms with it. He makes clear the parallel between Osmanli's story and his own a few paragraphs later: "The incredible thing about such hallucinations is that they have their substance in reality. When Osmanli fell face forward on the sidewalk, he was merely enacting a scene out of my life in advance. Let us jump forward a few years—into the pot of horror." [83]

Miller then closes *Sexus* with the harrowing story of his emotional break-up with June. After a great fight and bout of furniture-smashing, Miller stalks out of the apartment. Much later that night, Miller stumbles back into the house and overhears the two women laughing at him, unaware that he has returned. As he eavesdrops on June making love to Jean, he hears June say that she had never loved him, which sends him reeling out into the night, where he is mugged, beaten and nearly shot.[84] This brutal street attack is curiously the only instance of danger Miller ever depicts in his years of walking the streets of New York and Paris, and as such, can be read much more seriously as a convenient physical manifestation of the psychic trauma that June has just inflicted on him. His quasi-fictional body becomes battered and bloody as a way of expressing the enormous pain he felt in his heart; his "back was broken" every bit as much as his cuckolded, emasculated heart. Miller returns to this pain many times over the years, the wound which "killed him in the eyes of the world," and from which he was "born anew."[85] He makes this clear in that letter to Durrell:

> I wanted so much, so much, to become a writer (maybe not to write so much as to *be* a writer). And I doubt that I ever would have become one had it not been for the tragedy with June. Even then, even when I knew I would and could, my intention was to do nothing more than tell the story of my life with her, what it had done to me, to my soul if you like.

> Because it was the damage to the soul, I must tell you, that was the all. (And I doubt if I have made that at all clear in my writings!)[86]

So we must realize that the festering volcano of social and cultural dissatisfaction alone was not a great enough catalyst for Miller to undertake what he did in his writings, to effect a liberation of the self. Indeed, Miller often describes these years with June, years of smoldering under the repression of American culture, as a kind of holding pattern. He was not able to make that final break with the American narrative until it had also destroyed his story of romantic love, the narrative most close to his heart. As Miller said in 1966, "As for love, well, this is something almost sacred to me," continuing with, "the greatest contribution literature can make is to free people sufficiently so that they are able to love."[87] This position is certainly borne out by his auto-novels, as the looming shadow of June's (Mona/Mara) love and the enormity of losing her echo throughout the *Tropics*. We are almost startled when we first hear the callous narrator of *Tropic of Cancer* launch into an enigmatic love paean to his great muse June, telling us how all his art and desire for expression flow from his undying love for her.

The American dream of success was a chimera, a laughable trick—this was cruel, but bearable. One could continue to exist under this level of trickery. But to take away his last remaining solace, his faith in the healing and redemptive powers of romantic love—this was not to be borne. This was enough to set Miller on a path to completely re-vision his worldview, to use all of the powers at his disposal to go around the cruel tricks that his American narratives were playing on him. From *Capricorn*: "Until the time when I would encounter a force strong enough to whirl me out of this mad stone forest, no life would be possible for me nor could one page be written which would have meaning."[88] The devastation from June was that force. The Durrell letter goes on to describe Miller's next action: "And so, on that fateful day in the Park Department of

Queen's county, N. Y., I mapped out the whole autobiographical romance—in one sitting. And I have stuck to it amazingly well, considering the pressures this way and that."[89]

The entirety of his career can, in Miller's estimation, be seen as a process of trying to explain what happened to him, his "tragedy with June," how it affected him (his "soul"), and just as importantly, how he got past it. June had always pushed him to write—she convinced him to quit his day job at Western Union, peddled his prose pieces from door-to-door, even supported his first writing efforts by passing off his work as her own to wealthy Manhattan patrons "interested" in her (to say nothing of her quasi-prostitution work as a taxi-dancer in Broadway's night clubs and dance halls, which supported them for years). The completion of "her" first novel landed them their all-important first trip to Europe, all expenses paid by June's wealthiest fat-cat. Now June gave Miller the final "push" he needed—the state of utter isolation and hopelessness that led him to open up his life to writing, to pore over his wounds in a desperate attempt to right his listing world. In a 1966 interview for *Mademoiselle*, Miller takes advantage of the distance of forty years to situate his response to June's rejection, when he was "destroyed as a person": "Well, I picked myself up and outgrew it, didn't I? I overcame it quickly enough, by saying, 'Listen! I am a person in my own right. I am going to say the hell with this whole mess, this whole country which has been so oppressive to me in so many ways, for so many years, and go to Paris and become myself, concentrate on *becoming*, and write it down for others and myself to see.' That's what I did: I wrote *Tropic of Cancer*."[90]

## CHAPTER 5—WRITING THE SELF IN PARIS

Books played an incredibly important part in the re-writing of Henry Miller. We get a sense of this importance in Miller's many passages of direct address—writers' and thinkers' names roll off his tongue in a boundless play with ideas and intellectual history. His oldest friend, Emil Schnellock, wrote how Miller's vital personality, long before he became a writer, would take on attributes of whatever book or writer he was enamored with at the time: "That day—Knut Hamsun was much on his mind then—he may have been Glahn the Hunter, likening his ups and downs, his vicissitudes, and the intrusions of sudden drama, to his Hamsun hero's plights."[91] The narratives Miller "used" to re-write himself came, more often than not, from the books in his life, be they literary, philosophical, or historical. Miller was intensely aware of this tendency of his, saying in a letter to Alfred Perles, "All during this Paris period prior to tackling Capricorn I had been enjoying, if I might put it that way, the effect of other men's writing. I was open to any and all influences. Especially from the French. I was writing in my head constantly…as they might write, I mean."[92] He understood the debt he owed to the narratives he encountered in various forms, as he shows in his earlier letter to Durrell: "What I can never write enough about are the influences—both men, haphazard meetings, books, places."[93]

Perhaps no book was more important than Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, whose model for the formation of truth and meaning was hinted at in Chapter 4. Miller mentions the book several times in his auto-novels; the most notable instance is his description in *Tropic of Capricorn* of its initial effect on him, back when he first encountered it in New York. Miller claims that this book allowed him to see that an

unbridgeable gap had grown between himself and his New York friends at the time. He realizes by their quite different reaction to the book that his curiosity, wonder, and quest for truth had made him absolutely incompatible with their narrow-minded complacency—"They died comfortably in their little bed of understanding, to become useful citizens of the world." But the book set Henry on fire:

> In this book by Henri Bergson, I am [...] standing on an iron bridge observing a peculiar metamorphosis without and within. If this book had not fallen into my hands at the precise moment it did, perhaps I would have gone mad. It came at a moment when another huge world was crumbling on my hands. If I had never understood a thing which was written in this book, if I have preserved only the memory of one word, *creative*, it is quite sufficient. The word was my talisman. With it I was able to defy the whole world, and especially my friends.[94]

Indeed Miller treats the book itself, the object, as a talisman of his own probity and chosenness as he passes among the sordid throngs of *Capricorn.* And Henry Miller would use his *creative* drive to give to the world "a prolonged insult, a gob of spit in the face of Art, a kick in the pants to God, Man, Destiny, Time, Love, Beauty…what you will," as his famous manifesto from the opening of *Tropic of Cancer* proclaims.[95]

Bergson's ideas played a significant role in bringing this to pass, as they greatly assisted in the re-writing of Henry Miller. Much of the earlier cited Miller passages (including his concept of "the whale" in "Une Etre Etoilique") about creatively shaping one's beliefs and worldview can be directly traced to *Creative Evolution*. As I have described in Miller's writings, he places faith in his inner understanding, or "intuition," to determine the viability and desirability of the many narratives competing for his attention. This is a central tenet of *Creative Evolution*. The intuition is a vital, creative

force (*élan vital)* that assists the intellect in situating and determining knowledge and beliefs. As Petri Liukkonen describes it, "Bergson argued that the creative urge, not the Darwinian concept of natural selection, is at the heart of evolution. Man' s intellect has developed in the course of evolution as an instrument of survival. It comes to think inevitably in geometrical or 'spatializing' terms that are inadequate to lay hold of the ultimate living process. But intuition goes to the heart of reality, and enables us to find philosophic truth. *Élan vital* is immaterial force, whose existence cannot be scientifically verified, but it provides the vital impulse that continuously shapes all life."[96]

A more organic divining process is at work in human knowledge, Bergson argues, than just the purely mechanistic computations of the intellect or logic. Looking at developments in science and philosophy, Bergson saw the importance of the intuitive, as opposed to the systematic or deductive, in making great advances and discoveries, and in shaping our understanding and narratives of the world. The intuition, Bergson realized, often supplied the creative surge needed to make sense of phenomena that no longer make sense when old approaches are applied. If something needs to be understood as a whole rather than as made of parts, intuition provides the guiding light, a vague feeling of rightness or truth which cannot be denied. The experience of life and the shaping of our narrative framework are just such organic wholes, Bergson tells us. Swami Krishnananda describes the importance of Bergson's "intuition" well:

> In intuition we comprehend the truth of things as a whole, as a complete process of the dynamic life of the spiritual consciousness [...] Intuition has nothing of the mechanistic and static operations of the logical and the scientific intellect. Intellect is the action of consciousness on dead matter, and so it cannot enter the spirit of life. Any true philosophy should, therefore, energize and transform the conclusion of the intellect with the

> immediate apprehensions of intuition. Reality has to be lived, not merely understood.[97]

Bergson is not so foolish as to displace the intellect with intuition, but is rather wise enough to note that an unbridled intellect is entirely capable of taking complete leave of reality, in pursuit of its own self-perpetuating and falsifying theses.

From Bergson, Miller drew his faith in the creative capacities of the intuition to shape one's beliefs and reality—but more importantly, he began to extend this capacity into his art. By opening up his writing to the unformed processes of the surreal, the unconscious, and the emotional, and the "un-reconstructed" domain of the obscene and the "low" in neglected experience, and by trusting in the authority of his private, counter-hegemonic narratives to accurately describe the world, Miller was able to realize the powers of the intuition in his writing, especially his writing about himself. This creative faculty must surely also prevail in creative writing, Miller asserts, and the truly earnest soul should have no qualms about manifesting this creative, intuitive faculty in the conceptual domain of art. Henry Miller's life and art met head-on, as he began to "write" the self.

Just as it is possible to say of Bergson's philosophy in *Creative Evolution* that "he presents us with the spectacle of unbridled life creatively shaping, not only its world, but itself in accord with its own telos: the need for eyesight creating the eye, so to speak"—it is equally possible to describe this exact process taking shape in the writings of Henry Miller.[98] The self is seen herein as a product of its own creative processes (or, at the very least, our perceptions of the self are such a product). Henry Miller is likewise creating a self in writing by describing the process of creating that self in writing. When Miller writes that he is "born anew" in writing, or can see in his writing "the secret of my regeneration," he is describing how seeing this new self in print allows him to see the

manifestations of his intuition; in writing, his intuition can reveal the "truth" of his endorsed narratives. He is "revealed" to himself by writing himself, allowing his intuition to make itself known in writing. Whether or not we subscribe to his teleological formulation of self-hood is irrelevant—it is evident that Henry Miller did, and it fueled his desire to make these intuitive processes of self-creation manifest in his writing.

Bergson offers us a key insight into the aesthetic project of Miller's auto-novels. Miller's oft-stated goal of "self-realization" in writing becomes clearer when we can see that, for Miller, the self was something that was creatively shaped by these intuitive processes. Miller was ultimately able to effect a marriage of self-creation and artistic creation as he blurred the lines which separate the two, fact from fiction, in his autobiographical fiction. Why not harness the creative powers of self-shaping we employ on a daily basis in our lives to enhance one's artistic creative powers, and vice versa? Of course this will require an unprecedented injection of the complete self, Henry Miller, into his art in order to achieve this. We see Miller realizing how these two powers commingle in *The Wisdom of the Heart*:

> The artist's dream of the impossible, the miraculous, is simply the resultant of his inability to adapt himself to reality. He creates, therefore, a reality of his own—in the poem—a reality which is suitable to him, a reality in which he can live out his unconscious desires, wishes, dreams. The poem is the dream made flesh, in a two-fold sense: as a work of art, and as life, which is a work of art.[99]

Miller seems to have seen a unique opportunity to find in the confluence of self-creation and artistic creation his best chance at "self-realization," and to effect, once and for all, a self-liberation. "My life itself became a work of art. I had found a voice, I was whole again"[100] This union was achieved in his writing, and the subject material for the two

processes become one was not just his life and himself, but also the actual process itself, the activity of writing one's self.

We can see the truth of this in James Goodwin's perception that "*Tropic of Cancer* is more an autobiography of the writing activity than of the writer's life."[101] Miller claimed that the important thing was that *he* was going through this process in writing, not so much what he managed to achieve as a final result in print. Miller describes how this sets him apart from other writers, who must

> think of many different things to get it right on the head. I don't care if I miss the target or not. I'm writing, that's the important thing. It's not *what* I have written, it's the writing itself. Because that's my life, writing. The pure act itself is what is most important. *What* I say is not so important. Often it's foolish, nonsensical, contradictory—that doesn't bother me at all. Did I enjoy it? Did I reveal what was in me? That's the thing.[102]

This is the end goal for Henry Miller. He wants to reveal his true self *to* himself through writing, and found the most direct route to this self-realization to be a straightforward, semi-philosophical, semi-artistic examination of those exact processes of examining and revealing the self. He doesn't even ultimately care so much about revealing this "true" self to the world, at least not nearly as much as he did about revealing it to himself. Indeed, writing was fundamentally a selfish act for Miller ("Did I enjoy it? Did I reveal what was in me?"). The end product of the books, his auto-novels, are only important insomuch as they are the tangible, undeniable evidence of a *process* realized, a transformation and re-writing accomplished, or at the very least undertaken. Sure, it would be nice if he helped a few people out along the way, showed them a few things about themselves as he struggled to re-write his own narratives, but the truly important

thing was that his own whale became more comfortable, more tenable as a result of this autobiographical catharsis.

So let's examine his process and see exactly how this self was written. In *Black Spring*, Miller's surrealist auto-novel written between the *Tropics* (begun as "Self-Portrait"), Miller revels in his powers as a writer, "And now, ladies and gentlemen, with this little universal can opener which I hold in my hands I am about to open a can of sardines."[103] He is speaking of the power to write and create of course, but he links a crucial concept to this act of writing in the last sentence of this same paragraph, "All this began in the Metro (first-class) with the phrase—*l'homme qui j'étais, je ne le suis plus*." You know it's important because he put it in French.

"The man that I was, I no longer am." We think back to the pivotal point in his life, the wound from June that "killed him in the eyes of the world." He is speaking also of the "one man in me that had died" of *Tropic of Capricorn*, the hard but hollow shell of his American life that was to become the subject of most of his writing.[104] Indeed, one could argue that this old Henry Miller's "death" was precisely what made accurately describing him possible. Miller could look himself squarely in the eye because he was no longer that person—both the liberation and rewriting of his self had made it possible to display such honesty about his previous self. It gave him enough of the necessary distance to sufficiently extract his ego from the rendering, as he no longer had the usual vested interest in his former, fallen self. He was surely capable of giving us himself with all warts and farts included—even Kate Millett recognized his valuable contribution in giving an honest assessment of the sordid state of modern man in his depiction of himself (for her purposes, his hyper-sexuality and inability to sustain meaningful heterosexual relations showed what a hideous ideology we've descended from).[105] But this "dead man" was no longer the same Henry Miller that was now writing the books.

Michael Woolf has written thoughtfully about the process which brought about the demise of the old Henry Miller, the one who suffered "pressures to adopt roles that [we]re alien to an essential self" under his oppressive American narratives. Miller's new, released self, as said earlier, grew out of this antagonism between two contradictory selves—the outer and inner, or public and private. Describing Miller's writing, Woolf continues, "Thus the public stance is in direct conflict with private identity. The literary enterprise is both an expression of that conflict and an act of liberation in which the private self is asserted at the expense of the public self. The public self, be it politically or domestically 'responsible,' is progressively 'dismantled' in a process that finally reveals an essential self: naked, un-American, and liberated."[106] So the act of writing is seen as a privileging of the private self's interpretation of the world, as opposed to the former public self, which had mostly professed to endorse the master narratives, in accordance with the social contract. This move can be seen as "re-writing," or perhaps "over-writing," the public self, since, through recognition of the author's work, that private self then comes to be known to the public, indeed to be seen as that person's "true" self. In this sense, it is a very real act of liberation that writing offers, the chance to be known to the world as your private self, with your own distilled and privileged narratives taking a front seat to the hegemonic narratives that social obligation had required you to underwrite.

So more than just the process of writing *was* valuable to Miller—the public expression of the inner, private self's beliefs, through publishing his books, offered another tangible component of his self-liberation: self-recognition. Now he could have a public recognition of that private self, and a chance to encounter others based on that liberated self and the beliefs proclaimed by it. A reification of this newly-evolved self in print was a necessary step in acquiring its permanence. And as he began to get published,

and even before that, as he began to show his writing to his friends in Paris (and a few back home), the new Henry Miller emerged, was "creatively shaped," as Bergson would put it, by his steadfast faith in his own intuition to distill narratives of meaning, a faculty that only got sharper as he trusted himself to live out, and to live out in writing, the implications of the swirl of ideas that he had opened himself up to receive. And the artist must be especially open to receiving new narratives. According to Miller, the artist who is properly alive to the "eternal here and now, the expanding infinite moment" of "passionate experience" must be "obedient to every urge—without distinction of morality, ethics, law, custom, etc. He opens himself to *all* influences—everything nourishes him. Everything is gravy to him, including what he does not understand—*particularly* what he does not understand."[107]

He found possibilities for himself by exploring these new ideas in writing—detailing his friends, his experiences, and his own reactions to them, first in long letters to his friend Emil Schnellock back in New York. These long letters were eventually incorporated in large chunks right into *Tropic of Cancer*, which explains some of the book's verbal flow and intimacy. They were nothing more than Miller's reactions to Paris and to the process he was undergoing there, as he was re-born from his despair over June and abrupt severing of nearly all American ties. Miller was encountering a flurry of new ideas and ways of seeing the world, many of which came at the hands of the strange cast of expatriate characters he was meeting in Paris.

So what were these new, better sources of narrative that Miller ran across in his new, chosen homeland? Often, they were nothing more than the close friends who appeared in his auto-novels. George Wickes describes the significant role that Alfred Perles ("Carl" of *Tropic of Cancer*) played in the final drafting of *Cancer*. But more importantly, Wickes writes, "it was his character that provided Miller with a point of

view he could use in his writings, a mixture of cynicism, bravado, and buffoonery. Perles was born to be a Miller character, a rogue and clown who lived marginally by his wits."[108] Miller was clearly influenced by Perles's personality—Carl could almost be a double for Miller's narrator in *Cancer*, and is the only other major character in the novel that Miller doesn't ridicule into a grotesque caricature of misguided hedonism or foolishness.

Michael Fraenkel ("Boris" in the auto-novel) was another lasting influence on Miller, and Fraenkel claims that it was he who set Miller on his proper path: "I told him to sit down before the machine and white paper and write anything and everything that came to his mind, as it came, and to hell with the editors and the public. Write as you talk, I told him. Write as you live. Write as you feel and think [...] You've got all the material you want right in this, in what you are thinking and feeling and going through *now*."[109] However much influence Fraenkel had in providing Miller with his *modus operandi* (it is a matter of some debate), as one of Miller's early roommates in Paris, he was definitely at ground zero for *Cancer*. Furthermore, his obsession with the "death theme" and hours upon hours of discussing it with Miller (sometimes for an entire day) certainly found their way into Miller's writing—both the "death" of his previous self and the spiritual "death" of the vulgar bourgeois society are themes that were at least partially incubated in the mind of Fraenkel, if not largely so.

But larger than any of these personal influences was Miller's general conception of "the artist," as it came to him through his life and through the writings of others. His goal was always to be a writer, and narratives about the life and purpose of "the artist" were always of great interest to him. Certainly the works of his favorites—Whitman, Emerson, Dostoievsky, Hamsun, even Joyce—were a great source of this material, but his philosophical readings proved to be just as influential in determining this narrative of

"the artist" for Miller. Aside from the countless references to philosophers and their ideas in his auto-novels (the most memorable being Immanuel "Pussyfoot" Kant's constant appearances in the later installments of *The Rosy Crucifixion*), we know that Miller took great pains to keep the aesthetic principles of his philosophical influences in mind when planning his novels. For example, Miller devised a "Tree of Life" wall-chart as the surreal-cinematic scenario for a planned book, never written, called *The Palace of Entrails* in 1933, after *Cancer* was written, but before it had been published (he was also working on both *Black Spring* and *Tropic of Capricorn* at this time). On the large poster are two quotes from influential philosophers: from Nietzsche, "I am convinced that art is the highest task and the proper metaphysical activity of this life," (written along one side of the "Tree of Life"); and opposite it along the other side of the trunk, the only typed words on the chart, from Bergson, "art has no other object than to set aside the symbols of practical utility, the generalities that are conventionally and socially accepted, everything in fact which masks reality from us, in order to set us face to face with reality itself."[110] Miller drew his high calling as an artist from the aesthetics of great minds like these, and he took cues from them about the best means of achieving these high aims. We see all throughout Miller his attempts to "set aside the symbols of practical utility, the generalities that are conventionally and socially accepted," and he wisely used Bergson's description of the creative powers of the intuition as a tool to re-shape his own world through his artful auto-novelistic self-explorations.

In addition to those fundamental narratives of "freedom," "honesty," and the transcendental privileging of the self that I have described in his writings, Miller also gave ascendancy to his role as a "writer" and "artist," a direct result of the many narrative influences in his life that gave such high esteem to this calling. The first line of Miller's outline for *Tropic of Capricorn* has the words "desire to live imaginatively" twice

underlined as a source for his philosophy of life and fight against "the world."[111] Miller champions the idea that man can do this, can have an outlet for his innate creativity, and we see the aesthetic narratives that have influenced him at work in his advocacy of this cause, from Bergson to Breton, Spengler to Whitman, Nietzsche to Fraenkel. And this is discarding the thousand other narrative tides that played over Miller's shores, most notably Anais Nin, whose influence has never been adequately measured (in part because Miller was so reticent about discussing this deep and lasting love).

The influence of surrealism as a new discursive narrative is not to be forgotten, either. A new way of seeing "the marvelous," of re-ascribing meaning to challenged perceptions and conventional notions, surrealism aimed to express the contents of the psyche, unbounded by pre-determined notions, to get past the filters of intellect and master narratives. Perhaps Miller's affinity for surrealism can also be traced to his youthful infatuation with the ideas of the anarchist Emma Goldman, who believed in following the impulse of one's will. But Miller clearly shows his artistic debt to surrealism in this period of self-realization and self-liberation, as he writes of "penetrating essences and communicating these essences back to his readers" and bringing the Unconscious to the surface.[112] In fact, we can see a clear parallel between making the conscious self aware of the unconscious self and liberating a repressed "secret" self from the bonds of civilization's master narratives. In both instances, the proscribed and public versions of truth are made to give way to, or at least share the stage with, the less bounded and more personal expressions of the self. The role of these ideas in Miller's work should be more than clear by now. Additionally, surrealism was a part of his "writing of the self." Miller's free-writing, associational mode, what he called "automatic writing," was a way of allowing the Unconscious to become manifested to the Conscious, and this was achieved through the act of surrealist writing.

I'm not suggesting that the Henry Miller of 1934-1940 would have absolutely no traces of the Henry Miller of 1914, or 1924, before he became Henry Miller the writer (or Henry Miller the written?). Surely Miller retained much of his core American identity, as we all must. Even while he was lambasting the Puritan morality play of "original sin" for its belief that man was by nature fundamentally corrupt, he nonetheless retained the focus on the self and the interior life that the Puritans and other Protestants had introduced in response to Catholic demands of social obligation and salvation-through-works. Similarly, in the midst of an utterly dispassionate and amoral orgiastic sexual experience, Miller could display the most romantic conceptions of love imaginable, or invoke strikingly Puritanical attitudes towards women, regarding them as whores or goddesses, with little in between.

No one completely destroys the self, then just rebuilds from the ground up. Such a feat is not only unimaginable, but undesirable. Traces of the old narratives, even great stretches of them, survived intact, whether because Miller never received the specific impetus to challenge them, never got around to it and sank into complacency, or even just looked at them and found them to be true—we'll never know. But we need a better understanding of this role of "the artist" that Miller strove to fill if we want to understand the endpoint of his argument, how one liberates the self. The next chapter will explore how Miller was inscribed in this narrative of the (Romantic) "artist," and how he managed to retain its creative and liberating power, even as the forces of modernity were conspiring to strip the artist of all claims to truth.

## CHAPTER 6—A FAITHFUL ROMANTIC ARTIST

Henry Miller, you'll remember, was not a young man in the 1930s, when his books were first published. Born in 1891, his literary and intellectual models were often more nineteenth century than twentieth, more in the vein of Romanticism than Modernism. Thus we find in Miller's desire to assume the role of the "artist," his primary new narrative, strong traces of the Romantic conceptions of the artist and the artist's function—the completely autonomous, creative genius revealing philosophical and religious truths through his compelling artistic imagination. To the degree that we are "constructed" by narratives, Henry Miller was "constructed" in the role of the Romantic artist. But while Miller exhibited many of the characteristics of a Romantic artist, we shall see that he was able to avoid their more dangerous pitfalls.

Perhaps no one has described the Romantic artist better than G.W.F. Hegel, writing about his contemporaries, the German Romantics. In his book *Fleeing the Universal*, Carl Rapp describes Hegel's treatment of this figure and details how Hegel predicted many of the moves of our contemporary theorists with his understanding of the position of the Romantic artist.[113] Rapp describes how, for the Romantics, Kant's foregrounding of the mind as the "origin or seat of both percepts and concepts" gave it a "position of spiritual authority with regard to all conceptions whatsoever," and "as a result, the spiritual life seemed best defined by those who evidenced the deepest grasp, or made the freest exercise, of their own subjective powers. Such persons thought of themselves, or were thought of by others, as the absolute spiritual centers of worlds they themselves made through the agency of their own imaginations."[114] This seems an apt description of the artistic world and aesthetic of Henry Miller's auto-novels, where he

certainly made overly free use of his subjective powers. We can see in this figure of the Romantic artist a significant source of Miller's powers to "re-write" himself and his narratives, through the powers of his own pre-eminent subjectivity.

Portraits of Miller are everywhere in Hegel's description of the Romantic artist. As Hegel revealed in his posthumously published *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Romantic art

> strips away from itself all fixed restriction to a specific range of content and treatment, and makes *Humanus* its new holy of holies; i.e. the depth and heights of the human heart as such, mankind in its joys and sorrows, its strivings, deeds, and fates. Herewith the artist acquires his subject-matter in himself and is the human spirit actually self-determining and considering, meditating and expressing the infinity of its feelings and situations.[115]

This is in exhibited in Miller "writing as he thinks and feels and lives," and "diving into experience." And Miller himself was certainly aware of his own dedication to this approach, as he makes clear in "Reflections On Writing": "I felt compelled, in all honesty, to take the disparate and dispersed elements of our life—the *soul* life, not the cultural life—and manipulate them through my own personal mode, using my own shattered and dispersed ego as heartlessly and recklessly as I would the flotsam and jetsam of the surrounding world."[116] One can hardly imagine a better realization of the mode that Hegel is describing than Miller's examination and projection of the self and his own subjectivity in his auto-novels and essays.

Rapp describes how Hegel thus anticipates the artistic movements of realism and surrealism as products of a displaced emphasis on the artist's ego and subjectivity:

> Both realism and anti-realism are regarded by Hegel as expressions of the new "inwardness": "The aspect of external existence is consigned," says Hegel, "to contingency and abandoned to the adventures devised by an imagination whose caprice can mirror what is present to it, *exactly as it is*, just as readily as it can jumble the shapes of the external world and distort them grotesquely." Realism and anti-realism are both thought of by Hegel as deliberate disruptions, even complementary disruptions, of the classical decorum required by "an objective and absolutely valid subject matter."[117]

We know that Miller was very concerned with disrupting "an objective and absolutely valid subject matter," which he saw as manifestations of the oppressive master narratives of American society, with all their seeming natural-ness and self-assuredness. And the two styles mentioned here were two of Miller's main modes (other than his use of direct address)—a hyper-real description of detail and experience and a surreal juxtaposition of thoughts, ideas, and dreamlike associational fantasies.

Here is Miller describing his focus on hyper-realism from *Tropic of Capricorn*: "In this null and void, in this zero whiteness, I learned to enjoy a sandwich, or a collar button. I could study a cornice or a coping with the greatest curiosity while pretending to listen to a tale of human woe. I can remember the dates on certain buildings and the architects who designed them. I can remember the temperature and velocity of the wind, standing at a certain corner."[118] We recall his ability to "get inside" objects and expound on them, which often actually occurred in surrealists flights of associational prose. For Miller, the two modes of hyper-realism and surrealism could even occur in the same passages—this is how complementary he found them to be. The best example of this is his self-consciously surrealist chapter "Jabberwhorl Cronstadt" from *Black Spring*, a high Joycean parody of flux and minutiae. Leon Lewis spotted this ego-driven phenomenon in

Miller's writing in his comprehensive and enlightening study *Henry Miller: The Major Writings.* Trying to come to terms with Miller's "eccentric arrangements of chronology," Lewis describes how Miller's

> "conversational" narrative is often interrupted by a switch to a parallel (or closely related) track in the narrator's mind which is followed for some time before the original or basic narrative line is resumed. Sometimes these digressions consume dozens of pages and threaten to become the subject of the narrative. It is almost as if Miller considers the narrator's consciousness to be the subject of his books (and it is *one* of the essential subjects of all of Miller's writing) and seems only vaguely concerned with the traditional constraints of plot. When Miller quotes Emerson's famous dictum that novels will give way to autobiographies (as an epigraph to *Cancer*), he is not just emphasizing the primacy of the author's *self* but suggesting that the traditional structure of the novel will be altered by an evolution that puts as much importance in the reaction of the "I" narrator of the novel to various events as was once put in the events themselves.[119]

Note carefully how this description of Miller's work from 1986 so closely mirrors the words of Hegel from the early 1800's in the next paragraph. The literary model that Miller adopted to achieve self-liberation clearly has its roots in a much older aesthetic tradition than we might first suspect. Miller obviously displays these ego-centric styles of hyper-realism and surrealism as he focuses on writing his own consciousness, and this illustrates that he is deeply inscribed in the narrative of Romantic transcendentalism (in the Kantian sense).

The reason for the Romantic's artist turning to these modes is even more clearly formulated elsewhere in Hegel:

> If subjective inwardness of heart becomes the essential feature to be represented, the question of which specific material of external actuality and the spiritual world is to be an embodiment of the heart is [...] a matter of accident. For this reason the romantic inwardness can display itself in *all* circumstances, and move relentlessly from one thing to another in innumerable situations, states of affairs, relations, errors, and confusions, conflicts and satisfactions, for what is sought and is to count is only its own inner subjective formation, the spirit's expression and mode of receptivity, and not an objective and absolutely valid subject matter. In the presentations of romantic art, therefore, everything has a place, every sphere of life, all phenomena, the greatest and the least, the supreme and the trivial, the moral, immoral, and evil [...] and the artist does well when he portrays them as they are.[120]

Chapter 1 of this study established Miller's dedication to equal treatment of "the greatest and the least" and his dada-ist belief in the value of both; chapters 4 and 5 described how he fought against the imposition of the "objective and absolutely valid subject matter" of the American master narratives. That Hegel was able to describe these modes so clearly, based only on his own interaction with the German Romantics of his time, is only further evidence of Miller's inscription in the long-standing narrative of the Romantic artist.

While we can definitely respect the willingness of the Romantic artist to open up givens for questioning and include a more comprehensive view of life in his formulations (as those previous chapters have established that Miller did), we can't help but get uneasy (just as Hegel did) about the shifting foundation of truth that these romantic narratives would seem to be introducing, by way of the unrivalled supremacy of the self.

Romantic art has opened a dangerous Pandora's box here. In discovering the creative powers of man to shape his own environment and his perceptions of that environment against received dogma, Romantic artists were running dangerously close to the opposite extreme, to the point of completely doing away with objective truth and any absolute, external reality, even one based on nothing more than the reasoning and intuitive faculties of mankind to determine truth. The Romantics had come to this state of philosophical and metaphysical poverty as a result of their displacement of the Divine into man's own subjectivity, Rapp describes. Thus, "the artist himself becomes the truth of things, and he accordingly enters into a paradoxical relation with respect to both subject-matter and technique, which lose their essential character and acquire instead whatever character he chooses to give them."[121] This is a step too far, when the artist accords *complete* and untethered power to himself to inscribe or determine meaning, to assign "whatever character he chooses to give them."

Hegel foresaw this as a consequence of the "free development of the spirit" in Romantic art. Metaphysical and philosophical truth are threatened, as "all faith which remains restricted to determinate forms of vision and presentation is degraded into mere aspects and features. These the free spirit has mastered because he sees in them no absolutely sacrosanct conditions for his exposition and mode of configuration, but ascribes value to them only on the strength of the higher content which in the course of his re-creation he puts into them as adequate to them."[122] This is too wide a swing of the pendulum over to the world-fashioning powers of man, and is indeed much more than Henry Miller asks for. Miller manages to maintain the appearance and aesthetic modes of the Romantic artist without slipping into the mistake that forfeits the possibility of metaphysical truth.

He does not wish to become God, he merely wants to become *a* god. As I have maintained throughout, Miller still retains a faith in human values and virtue, and understands that these guiding lights cannot be subject to the untethered caprice of even the most earnest and dedicated artist's ego. Miller is in fact making a gesture against the dissolution of art that Hegel predicted would come about as the result of the free development of the Romantic spirit, in which "art dissolves in response to the requirement that it be a continual display of the artist's own infinity, to which all fixities of form and content must be sacrificed."[123] As we shall later see, Miller wanted art to dissolve in an entirely different way.

Carl Rapp writes compellingly about how Hegel's description of the Romantic artist extends beyond the German philosopher's time and locale to "all those other intellectuals who arrived at the conclusion that thinking is essentially a process of invention or fiction-making and that truth (or what passes for truth) is always to be understood as an arbitrary construction, grounded only in the imaginations of individuals or groups."[124] Indeed, the dissolute Romantic artist is alive and well today in the coffee lounges of collegiate humanities departments all over world. Rapp's striking move is to realize that "Hegel's description of the manner in which art was de-stabilized by the Romantics is also an account of the simultaneous destabilization of every other spiritual formation." And as such, Hegel's critique of the Romantic artists' loss of faith in any form of determinate reality or external truth is extended into the intellectual projects that succeed theirs.

Foremost among these, and most important for our treatment of how Miller sidesteps the Romantic error, is the work of the French post-structuralists Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. A comparison of their projects to Miller's reveals a crucial difference in their respective processes of "re-fashioning." Miller undeniably has

many things in common with Derrida and Foucault. With Derrida, Miller shared an understanding of the power to create meaning and one's self through the act of writing, even if he stopped short of believing that it was done *ex nihilo,* or to the degree of caprice that Derrida contended.[125]

But Miller's greater affinity can be seen with the work of Foucault, with whom he shared a desire to expose the fake objectivity of master narratives—American master narratives, for Miller. The determined scientific knowledge of "man" as an object was delegitimated, or at least rendered problematic, by Foucault[126]—his life's work was to show how these supposedly "objective" narratives of human nature are in fact historically contingent and arise with (or from) the biases and circumstances of the eras and places in which they were produced. Foucault fought, in his own way, the master narratives of his culture every bit as much as Henry Miller fought those of his own. In fact the quotes that Rapp uses in *Fleeing the Universal* to describe Foucault's project could have just as easily been said about Miller's: "Foucault wished to clear the way for new conceptions of human nature and human knowing that 'would permit the individual to modify himself according to his own will'"; "Freedom was always Foucault's goal, freedom from being pinned down or categorized," freedom to indulge in what Foucault called "the care of the self," defined as "'an exercise of the self on the self, by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and attain to a certain mode of being.'"[127] Miller is clearly an important link in the tradition that gave rise to these contemporary thinkers, and he prefigures several of their stated aims in writing.

But these post-structuralists took their important insights too far, and this is the point where Miller avoided the Romantic pitfall that they fell into. Rapp describes this error—"Irony, as practiced and thematized by Derrida and Foucault, became (as Hegel predicted) a perpetual undermining of anything that offered itself as an objective

determination of the spirit, including all cultural formations and all pretended "knowledge."[128] But Miller knew not to take the romantic position of the artist to this extreme. His interest was not in a constant self-*creation* so much as it was in self-*realization*. The distinction is critical, because Miller's formulation shows that he has retained a faith in an external reality, and even the Divine. We must understand the limits that Miller respected in revealing or liberating his "true" self—that is, in seeking after the truth of his self in order to liberate it. He was not interested in just creating whatever self he thought would best suit his pleasures and purposes, but wanted to *reveal* a more essential self, based in enlightened human virtues and a deeper understanding of lasting human values. He trusted the faculty of his own intuition to give him a righter apprehension of the Divine and Truth than the master narratives of his day, but he did not expect that creative force of intuition to *create* truth based on whim or chance. This would be a falsifying manipulation of the history of human virtue, a distorting projection of the mind, a "sick reality of the mind."

We've seen the devastating failure of identity that can arise with this kind of self-creation *ex nihilo* in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Miller's contemporary also understood the crisis of self and collapse of worldview that would accompany such a blatant disregard for the origins of one's self and one's experience. James Gatz makes a severe break with his former self, getting completely away from his unsatisfactory life, but gets everything wrong. He is rejected by the high society he tries to will himself upon, and in the process discovers the impossibility of such a fanatical self-revision. For experience is the tether beyond which we cannot go in our self-creation—this is why it is more properly referred to by Miller as self-*realization* or self-*liberation.* The truth of the self that is revealed must be grounded in one's experience and a refining understanding of it, not in willful distortions of reality based on whim and fanciful illusions.

We need look no further than Miller's ever-present interest in the occult and in astrology to see that he retained a faith in something greater than the ego as a determinant of reality. Truth was larger than any one man's creation or distortion of it—Miller was trying to recover the long-standing tradition of the more essential human virtues. We see a faith that there is some abiding spirit of truth in human history in his use of Biblical wisdom to express his ideas and those narratives he came to endorse. Truth and human values have been, and will continue to be revealed *creatively*, but not *created* per se, throughout history.

His central metaphor from *Tropic of Cancer*, the flow of human history and ideas that the river Seine represents at various points during the book, is further clear evidence of this faith. The Seine constantly reminds Miller of the great minds and ideas that have kept alive the spirit of humanity, of life, through the ages, and he feels connected to this flow as he ruminates and wanders on the river's banks. Miller sees himself as keeping alive this tradition of great spirits, and often noted his feeling that he was merely an instrument of this noble tradition, that truth, freedom, and a comprehension of human values were ideas that "flowed through him." This is what led Jonathon Cott to see in Miller "an awareness and celebration of the recovery of the divinity of man, as well as the way of truth."[129]

Miller is clear-eyed enough to realize that his problem lies with those in control of the shaping of thought and values in his time, not with the nature of knowledge or epistemology itself. He does not repeat the Nietzschean mistake of "On Truth and Lying in an Extra-moral Sense," where his beloved Nietzsche tried to assert that all ideas and systems of knowledge were inherently flawed. Rather, Miller takes his fellow countrymen and bourgeois society to task for corrupting our values and cultural practices. "Life is great and beautiful," he said, "—there's nothing *but* life—but we have made of

the world a horrible place. Man has never handled the gift of life properly." It is what we have *done* to life, and our understanding of it, that is to blame. Miller doesn't attack "the idea" or knowledge, as some post-structuralists have done, he just opposes their current and recurrent incarnations in the narratives of power and oppression that cause so much suffering and self-denial; he judges them to be incompatible with the higher human virtues. He retains faith in philosophical and metaphysical truth, just not in the oppressive use of ideas and narratives to rob people of ecstatic and creative life. Knowledge is not flawed, truth is not discardable—but their current official versions do need some drastic repair work.

Miller uses the devices of the Romantic artist to expose these flaws in the current system of knowledge, but is careful to retain his trust in the intuitive creative power of the self to determine which ideas and narratives belong to the "absolutes" of truth and a sacred conception of the good. It's crucial to understand that these privileged narratives lead to truth, and so go beyond just being "stories," and especially go beyond being falsifications of reality. Through this, Miller retains more consistency and permanency than is allowed by the uber-free play of ego that Hegel foresaw in the dissolution of art. Miller would never have been able to reconcile his phenomenal sense of life and joy with the detached ambivalence that the ironic romantic artist must necessarily feel about his own self-created world of contingent meaning. As Carl Rapp describes this state, "On the one hand, it is exhilarating for the artist to feel that the world around him is essentially the product of his own imagination, that it is always necessarily a reflection of his own conceptions and interests, and that it can be completely transformed or even annihilated by simply altering these same conceptions and interests, or by performing a new exercise of imagination" (This is not so simple a task, however, when one is beholden to a fundamental desire for truth and understanding.) Rapp continues, "on the

other hand, it is terrifying to realize that, for this very reason, the ego is essentially isolated in a world without substance or content, so that there is nothing essential to which the ego can relate itself or with which it can identify."[130] This, remember, was Joyce's failure, and Miller had no use for this type of disillusionment or isolation.

Miller was careful to maintain the existence of that essential reality, as he did not want to slip into the morass of uncertainty that comes from losing one's conviction. Even if he retained only his faith in his own inner understanding to shape his beliefs and his understanding of human values—there are strong intimations that Truth is somewhat equivalent to the Divine for Miller, as is Life—the key is that he kept that faith in *something*. He understood the need for certitude and the security and assuredness that an external reality or truth gives. In that letter to Durrell from the 1950's, Miller closes his correspondence with the wisdom his years have brought him, "The only purpose of knowledge must be certitude, and this certitude must be established through purity, through innocence." [131] He showed disdain for those who denied the validity of external truth, maintaining a fundamental distrust of the "'knowledge' of intellectuals" because "they're always doubting, they never *know*."[132] That is, unchecked intelligence or intellectual "theses" often lead one away from truth and certainty in pursuit of ideas for ideas' sake. Miller calls for a return to the purity of human virtue through a return to the lessons that human understanding has given us about our values and nature. Even if this does not always lead us to <u>the</u> absolute truth, it at least leads us to happiness, through certainty and a sense of self-liberation in one's own solid understanding.

Foucault and Derrida, descendants of the Romantic position, wanted to play endlessly in the indeterminacy of narratives and meaning, but Henry Miller wants to get only to the point of self-liberation from the harmful master narratives of power and greed, with their accompanying cultural deadness. We don't need to be *always* in transition to

effect a meaningful liberation of the self, but rather, just to the point where we can re-appreciate the essence of humanity and the human spirit as its noblest ideals have been revealed to us throughout the flow of time and the history of knowledge.

This is why it is necessary to demonstrate Miller's limited involvement with the narrative of the Romantic artist as it has come to exist (with post-structuralism and various other postmodern neo-pragmatisms)—to anticipate criticism that his "re-writing" of the self would result in an endless, foundering process with no respect for metaphysical truth, as such. That is not the liberation of self that Henry Miller describes. Rather, he maintains, we only need to engage in this "deconstruction" of our narratives insofar as those master narratives are incompatible with our intuitive, inner understanding of human virtue. We need only do this to the point where it becomes possible to apprehend the divine, the true, the right—the narratives of the good, which are for Miller the Divine. For we must also recognize that those "human values" and "virtues" that Miller seeks are exactly equivalent to the narratives that his intuitive, inner understanding has led him to endorse, and they are likewise indistinguishable from the good, or the Divine, as Miller feels it is revealed through his creative powers of self-realization. A holy trinity of equality, they are all one and the same, the basis of Miller's faith—the abiding spirit of humanity as it is revealed through the creative shapings of the artistic imagination.

For are these really concepts that any of the serious among us can laugh at or dismiss—the true, the right, the good? Are these not valuable and necessary narratives for human behavior and self-worth, fundamental to each person's conception of self and self-creation? These are the Divine in the twentieth century, the basis for right living and transformation toward enlightened human ideals, the means by which "one detaches

oneself from what are the received truths and seeks other rules of the game," in Foucault's words, when those rules do not accord with our understanding.[133]

We need not be ashamed for retaining a metaphysical faith in something greater than the individual—it does not keep us off the cutting edge of the avant-garde or cost us our "badge of cool" if we aspire to truth and certainty, instead of groundlessness and despair. It happens to the best of our "underminers" of master narratives—it happened to Bob Dylan; it happened to T.S. Eliot. This pre-eminence of probity is the fundamental narrative of historical humanity. Societies are not overtly and explicitly founded on malevolence and selfish interests; they are founded on stated ideals of the common good and a proper understanding of human virtue. And try as we might, we cannot forget the importance of the social. The American self tends to forget its origins in society and in the social contract, but we should heed the lessons of the past. Even Socrates, who in so many ways rose above the possibilities and values of his society, understood that he "owed" himself to his society, in a sense, and was willing to die to honor that social contract.

Henry Miller's faith in the society of men was just as strong, but it was not based on any traditional contemporary notion of the "brotherhood of man," which Miller felt was "a permanent delusion common to all idealists everywhere in all epochs: it is the reduction of the principle of individuation to the least common denominator of intelligibility. It is what leads the masses to identify with movie stars and megalomaniacs like Hitler and Mussolini. It is what prevents them from reading and appreciating and being influenced by and creating in turn such poetry as Paul Eluard gives us."[134] Rather, Miller's sense of social communion was based in the fact that each person has to go through the same personal struggle to be free from the demands imposed by falsifications of reality. It is a society of compassion—sympathy with each person's plight for self-

liberation. But Miller ultimately viewed life as a fundamentally *personal* experience, with the particulars and prejudices of each person's mind and experience making universalities and systems nearly always impossible. Near the beginning of "An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere," he gives a clear indication of what life and the proper reaction to it should be, from his individualist's perspective:

> In every age, just as in every life worthy of the name, there is the effort to re-establish that equilibrium which is disturbed by the power and tyranny which a few great individuals exercise over us. The struggle is fundamentally personal and religious. It has nothing to do with liberty and justice, which are idle words signifying nobody knows precisely what. It has to do with making poetry, or, if you will, with making life a poem. It has to do with the adoption of a creative attitude towards life. One of the most effective ways in which it expresses itself is in killing off the tyrannical influences wielded over us by those who are already dead. It consists not in denying these exemplars, but in absorbing them, assimilating them, and eventually surpassing them. Each man has to do this for himself. There is no feasible scheme for universal liberation.[135]

In acknowledging his experience as *his* and his alone, Miller is not denying that he has relationships with other people, even with dead people and the ideas that they represent. What he *is* denying is that we experience life collectively, or can come to understanding through the intellectual masonry of others. Each of us must find her own way. As much as we may be dependent on others and the ideas and narratives they bring us, at the end of the day, the decisions and responsibility for your life and freedom and understanding of truth are personal and particular and lie with *you*.

So we're not any closer to resolving Miller's paradox, it would seem? How does a man use the American notion of liberal bourgeois subjectivity to defeat the very society that largely gave rise to it, the society to which he "owes" himself? Can you alone be responsible for your self-liberation—what kind of debt do you owe to the narrative of self-liberation which you assume? Are you not also beholden to the society that provided you with that narrative?

No. Perhaps if society was one, monolithic entity that dispersed ideas and ideological frameworks pre-packaged like Oscar gift-baskets, we could accept this. But our society is made up of many discourses, many fragments—a culture is a mosaic, not a uniform mold that we are poured into. Miller's American society was made up of just as many discourses—antagonistic and participatory, "true" and "false," "old" and "new." Why should geographic or social proximity be sufficient for causation here; we have no evidence that the American notions of self and self-liberation that Miller employs gave rise to the "spiritual deadness" that he conversely decries. These Romantic conceptions of liberal autonomy might just as easily have arisen, or become strengthened, in opposition to the bourgeois values that were killing the American spirit, in Miller's view. We must recognize that "bourgeois subjectivity" and "bourgeois values" are not synonymous—bourgeois subjectivity leaves room for a liberating opposition to narrow-minded cultural values, and bourgeois values almost universally proceed from just such cultural provincialism, a mind-boggling devotion to stultifying conformity. To deny this opposition is to deny the very existence of Henry Miller.

What narratives could Miller use other than those of his own culture? Granted, he ransacked European and Eastern cultures in his refining search for understanding, and grew enormously in the process, benefiting from the expansion of ideological possibilities. But he was still very American—a *counter*, transcendental American, who

found many of the narratives of his multi-faceted culture to be *true*, that is, in accordance with his own intuitive understanding of human values. Henry Miller did indeed "owe" himself to American society, but it was the American society of Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau—and a world society of artists and thinkers—that received his allegiance, not the American society of J.P. Morgan, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and Henry Ford. He wanted to take us back to the vision of these understanding artists, and he found that he needed the artistic tools that the narrative of the Romantic artist provided in order to effect this return to purity and innocence.

## CHAPTER 7—LIFE AS ART

We've hopefully been able to remove some of the tarnish from Henry Miller's reputation through these last six chapters. He is not the Godless, amoral sex fiend that some would like us to believe. We have seen his honesty, compassion, and utter dedication to the liberation of man from our state of indentured servitude to the corrupt master narratives of late capitalism, consumerism, and materialism. We've seen his poignant despair in the loss of romantic love and his steadfast determination to champion utterly free expression in literary works. Which of these ideals do you find personally offensive—freedom, honesty, creativity, belief in the Good, or a faith in the absolute and enduring power of human values to restore an expressive and fulfilling way of life to humanity? Hardly.

In his auto-novels, Henry Miller shows us the power of an individual to rewrite his own narratives. We see this in action, and the books are a lasting testament to this possibility. He claimed that he wasn't trying to open doors for people, or "alter the world," elaborating, "Perhaps I can put it best by saying that I hope to alter my own vision of the world. I want to be more and more myself, as ridiculous as that may sound."[136] But in presenting us with that boldly altered vision of the world, he gave us a lasting example of our own artistic and creative powers of self-imagining. We watch him go from a repressed volcano of burning desire to a free, expressive "happy rock," joying in his powers of creative self-realization. Though Miller may not believe in advice, feeling that each one of us must go and see for ourselves, must learn and inhabit new narratives through our own intuitive understanding, he certainly helped us along by confirming our ability to achieve this self-transformation and by providing us with a

model of one man's method of accomplishing this self-realization. In modeling his approach for us, he lets us inside the mind of a man undergoing this process.

We must recognize that his auto-novels are significant in this achievement—Henry Miller got closer than any other artist before him to realizing his consciousness in print. Even more than Joyce's still-mythic and still-artistically-molded streams of consciousness, Henry Miller was able to render the life of the mind in writing (though we cannot diminish the obvious footprint of Leopold Bloom on this technique). He mixes dreams, confession, literary references, the classics, speech, musings, direct address—basically the experience of the mind in its chaotic structure and associations; he is asserting the primary importance of this experience of the mind, how fundamental this flow of logic and emotion and this organic structure are to our daily experience, as opposed to the rigid, logical order of a machine or a mathematical proof. *This* is what it is like to be a human being, Miller is saying—Life, as experienced by consciousness, is a more flowing, organic, and creative phenomenon than the mechanistic theories of modernity—psychology, medicine, science, even politics and literary narrative—would have us believe. As Welch Everman puts it, Miller "rejects the well-crafted novel of coherent characters and logical cause-and-effect plot in favor of association, digression, and contradiction."[137] These are truer to the nature of consciousness, Miller insists, and his goal has been to make his writing as true-to-life as possible.

Paradoxically, in showing us what a life-like experience his art can be, Miller has also allowed us to see what an artistic experience inner life can be. "Strange as it may seem today to say, the aim of life is to live, and to live means to be aware, joyously, drunkenly, serenely, divinely aware. In this state of god-like awareness one sings; in this realm the world exists as a poem."[138] His depiction of consciousness serves as a model for a fresh way of looking at the experience of life, and it is a model that is more attuned

to what the life of the mind is really like. We get to see a life, not in terms of an external narrative, "plot," or progression (which are artificial impositions whose effect is to induce conformity and reduce the actual richness of experience), but rather an associational life of the mind that is aware of contingency, the chaos of experience, and the randomness of circumstance. Miller incorporates all of these factors in a more realistic depiction of what it is to be alive in the modern world—the era of world wars and global forces, with the world spinning violently and apocalyptically out of each individual's control. Miller's life of the mind, as it is depicted in the auto-novels, cannot be reduced to formulae and predictable behavior; it recognizes the artistic and creative aspects of experience—that we shape our meaning and interactions with the world, that we have a constant swirl of mental associations running in our minds that help this process along, and that logic does not always win out: just as often, emotion and intuition will affect our decision-making and understanding.

Time and again, Miller gives us a flow of thoughts, memories, and allusions instigated by random occurrences in his environment—looking at a building, a button, or the cut of a lapel. In thus becoming impressionistic of consciousness, Miller is (1) highlighting the creative play of our own imaginations, and (2) showing us how sheerly *enjoyable* this imaginative play that we all perform can be. He illustrates how this creative process plays an important part in our intuitive inner understanding of experience. The associations of our minds—memories and discursive narratives blending with present experience—shape our intuitive, inner understanding. This is what the "whale-devouring" process looks like to us, as we perceive it inside our minds.

The creative possibilities of our mental associations and flow of thoughts were always important to Miller. We recall the solace and relief that he found in confabulating his inner dialogue as he walked to and from work back in New York, revealing his "true

self" in imaginative mental play. This inner free-play is later echoed in *Tropic of Capricorn* and *Tropic of Cancer* as Miller enters the mental "Land of Fuck" during dispassionate sexual encounters. These sexual trances "led absolutely nowhere and w[ere] hence enjoyable."[139] The artistic powers of the imagination were not confined to artistic endeavors, Miller realized; he was fully capable of artistic, creative mental play in his daily life, for the sheer enjoyment of it. And these inner flights of fancy served much the same purpose as Miller's written ones—the revealed the self to him, in a creative and intuitive process. This mental play clearly parallels the artistic play of Miller's writing—indeed, one of Miller's major aims seems to have been transposing this mental play *into* writing.

We have already described how Miller effected a re-visioning of the world through artistic creation—"By the force and power of the artist's vision the static, synthetic whole which is called the world is destroyed. The artist gives back to us a vital, singing universe, alive in all its parts," Miller writes in "Reflections on Writing."[140] Ultimately, Miller wanted to extend this ability beyond the artist, to each one of us who was capable of realizing it. "When the individual is wholly creative," Miller describes this state in *The Wisdom of the Heart,* "the personality itself becomes a creation. From symbolizing himself in his works man symbolizes himself in his being."[141] As described in Chapter 5, Miller took the creative powers of the artist and applied them to his own self-fashioning, and suggests that we do the same (" My life itself became a work of art."). Of course, doing this would mean the end of the artist as we know him. Hegel would get his dissolution of art, but not in the exact way had thought he would. Foucault would get his "life as art," but not in the way he predicted.

"All art," writes Miller, "I firmly believe, will one day disappear. But the artist will remain, and life itself will become not 'an art,' but art; i.e. will definitely and for all

time usurp the field."[142] Miller wants to expand the incipient creative and artistic play that he has become aware of in his life, to the point where it becomes fully capable of fulfilling all the functions of the artist for the self, a personal artistic vision for each one of us who is capable of realizing it. Does he realize the implications of this for art? "Do we want every man to become an artist and thus eliminate art? Unconsciously, I think that every great artist is trying with might and main to destroy art. By that I mean that he is desperately trying to break down this wall between himself and the rest of humanity [...] in the hope of debouching into some more quick and vivid realm of human experience."[143] The "wall" that Miller speaks of stems from the artist's ability to see into the future by imagining and conveying higher possibilities for mankind. This separates him from mankind because his fellow men lack the creative vision to understand and realize these imaginative possibilities in the present. Thus, the desire to extend art into all of life, and thereby abolish it, is almost a selfish desire on Miller's part, in the sense that he merely wants all of mankind to be capable of more quickly realizing and incorporating the truths possible from creative and artistic vision. Artists, he reasons, would suffer less if the world could right itself within their lifetime, and this can only be possible when each one of us can realize and transform ourselves in accordance with artistic vision, can become artistic. True artists are, as Jay Martin said of Miller regarding *Black Spring*, "bent on restoring creativity to man."[144] If the telos of art is truly liberation, each one of us must realize our artistic possibility and become self-actualized creatively, opening ourselves up to the artistic possibilities in the life around us.

The drive to fulfill artistic vision, Miller continues, is only a part of a larger creative drive within each of us (related to our need for self-liberation and self-realization) that Miller wants us to get in touch with. He relates this with a clever anecdote about Picasso:

> I know this sounds crazy, but I believe that we're all born creative. We all have the same creative instincts. Most of us are killed off as artists by our schooling [...] What is it Picasso said not long ago? It made my heart jump, it was so wonderful! He was looking at an exhibition of children's works somewhere and he said, pointing at the work "Think of it…it's taken me all these years to get back to where they are." To be able to do as they do, spontaneously, fearlessly, colorfully, with utmost liberty. Do you see? When you go through "discipline," you get cramped, inhibited, thwarted, and frustrated.[145]

This Bergsonian creative drive makes it possible for each one of us to achieve self-liberation from false narratives. According to Miller, the artist "struggles to emancipate himself from false relations with his fellow-men, from false relations with nature and with all the objects which surround him. Art is only one of the manifestations of the creative spirit. What every great artist is manifesting in his work is a desire to lead a richer life; his work itself is only a description, an intimation, as it were, of those possibilities."[146] It would be more accurate to say that the artists of today are simply those among us who have awakened to their inherent creative abilities and the possibilities of self-transformation that these abilities offer. They are not a breed apart, Miller argues, they are simply the first to "dream while wide awake."[147] And Miller was remarkably consistent about this position from his very first auto-novel on.

Miller foresaw from the get-go that "books," as we knew them in 1934, must cease to exist in this scheme—on only the second page of his first published auto-novel, *Tropic of Cancer*, he loudly proclaims, "There are no more books to be written, thank God. This then? This is not a book. This is libel, slander, defamation of character. This is not a book, in the ordinary sense of the word. No, this is a prolonged insult, a gob of

spit in the face of Art [...] "[148] A book "in the ordinary sense of the word" contains only more falsifications and un-self-conscious manipulations of the reader with the debilitating master narratives. Instead, each of us will become a personal artist with creative (and self-creative) outlets of our own. For Miller, the greatest sin was stifling man's creative urge, his universal need for artistic self-expression (a Hegelian idea),[149] which the former Artistic hierarchy of "artist" and "audience" made possible.

To break down this dichotomy of artistic oppression will obviously require a completely new paradigm for creative expression. Seeing as how Miller was notorious for wanting all of civilization to "go to smash," this does not exactly pose a very big problem for him. Welch Everman has described Miller's "anti-aesthetic" very succinctly: "What Miller seems to have in mind—and he makes this point with remarkable consistency throughout his writings—is an art that would break down the barriers between art and not-art, between art and life. The artist would be one whose art could escape the limits of its own conventions and open out into the world, where art and life would be identical."[150] Henry Miller certainly did his part to mix life and art by recording his personality in over 3000 pages of autobiographical romance. And he went well beyond just incorporating letters to Emil Schnellock into *Tropic of Cancer.* In June of 1933, Miller made a grand gesture that showed his dedication to the confluence of his art and his life—he attempted to bring both *Cancer* and his marriage to a close with a letter to June titled "Dernières pages," also intended as a draft for the conclusion of his novel.[151] Though he ultimately rejected this ending to *Cancer*, the gesture demonstrates his firm belief that the two realms, art and life, hold important creative possibilities and implications for each other.

In this desired confluence of art and life we see the strong imprint of a dada aesthetic. Jeffrey Bartlett clarifies this influence on Miller, realizing how this coming

together carried implications of a more personal aesthetic: "Dadaists themselves realized after the war years that their impulse was ultimately personal and sustainable only individually, as Tristan Tzara emphasized in 1924: 'Dada knows the correct measure that should be given to art: with subtle, perfidious methods, Dada introduces it into daily life. And vice versa."[152] So the desire to incorporate artistic processes into life and self-formulation did not originate in the mind of Henry Miller. But his life-art is surely the most famous and extensive example in history. Even more than this merging of the sublime-in-art with the mundane-in-life (and deconstructing both concepts in the process), however, the dada-ists were interested, like the Romantics, in "the intensity of a personality transposed directly," or a full-blown invasion of art by life and the ego. They were, indeed, one of the more direct routes by which the narrative of the Romantic artist reached Henry Miller. So these two projects, mixing art with life and asserting the primacy of the ego, were related for the dada-ists as well.

So what in the world would this art-as-life life-art look like? we might ask. Well, look around you. What are Campbell Soup cans on museum walls, if not life as art, art as life? Or the Grateful Dead touring around for thirty years, making music a way of life and of their life a musical performance? Or the "happenings" of the sixties? I think we can safely say that the young man who, in the mid-1990s, had a friend shoot him in the shoulder with a .38-caliber pistol as part of a "performance art" piece in Manhattan was effecting a successful union of art and life and doing his part to destabilize our notions of each.

My point is not that we have Henry Miller to thank for all of this—he was just describing the future of art as he saw it, and as others before him had envisioned it, too, where each one of us awakens to the creative possibility inherent in our lives. But he was a key link in this tradition that has given rise to post-modern music like noise bands, jazz

improvisation based on "moods," and the challenging *4'33"* of John Cage, in which a pianist comes to his instrument and sits for four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence, letting the sounds of the audience be the composition. How is an art which can admit these destabilizing statements *not* in a state of dissolution? This tradition exploded with the "do your own thing" mentality of the 1960's youth culture and continues to the present, and artistic living is more widespread today than seventy years ago, from our ridiculous bumper stickers to our ridiculously postmodern Halloween costumes (I'm not even going to bring up Californians or the world of high fashion). Compared to many other world cultures, today's America has less blind "respect" for convention and for the observation of rigid social codes, with their monotonous, stale, unimaginative, and inartistic modes of living.

We can see a curious effect in these "anarchic" art movements, like performance art or punk rock. They move the locus of the artistic experience into the observer's mind, and focus on the effect or change that the artistic "experience" has on you, the observer. The significant move in these gestures is to provoke some kind of disruption in our artistic sensibilities (maybe just to even make some of us aware that we *have* artistic sensibilities), or to make us aware of our own emotional or even physical reactions to the experience. This is doubly interesting when we recall that Henry Miller wrote mostly because of the effect it had on him, not caring as much what the final product was. In their own ways, these are both moves toward placing the focus of art in life, if the primary benefits of art are during the creation (to the artist's psyche) and during the reception (how it alters/challenges your perceptions). These foci are in direct opposition to the formerly held aim of art, to show us the "beautiful" or the "sublime" as it was revealed *in the artistic object*. This is further evidence that the dissolution of art as described by Henry Miller is proceeding apace.

Hegel thought that art would end in an ecstasy of self-involvement, and this is true to some degree if we find that the effects of contemporary artistry can be viewed in these selfish terms, with the primary benefits of art being its effects on the individual's inner understanding, whether that of the producer or the observer. But we don't see the slippery uncertainty or randomness that he assumed were inevitable in art's devolution. Rather, as we see the creative faculties of art (the ability to manifest philosophical or metaphysical truth, for Hegel) brought into life, and as we see the conscious application of artistic possibility into daily decisions and understanding, we get what Henry Miller desired. The individual's creative drive is given a freer, more public expression, and this helps her in refining her apprehension of metaphysical truth (for those who allow themselves this necessary and fundamental narrative), as her perceptions are challenged by artistic others and her self is revealed through her creative artistic expression.

So the self would seem to be more liberated today, or at least we have a much greater opportunity to encounter this kind of liberation, than when Henry Miller began writing at the start of the Great Depression. According to Miller, that's all he ever wanted (besides civilization going to smash). And he certainly played a pivotal role in this creative evolution. The Swedish writer Olle Lansberg and Miller were talking in 1966 about Miller's legacy—his real love for writing, and how his basic love for humanity always shines through. I'll leave you with an exchange from this fascinating conversation:

> **Lansberg:** What is so exciting to me in *your* writing is that you've had the courage to open up and just let it all flow. Perhaps a passage here and there has overflowed all rules and boundaries—but how beautiful that is! Somebody was needed who had the guts to open up *all the way* so that others

after him could at least try…Sometimes I think you have an impossible dream—to write a book that won't stay beneath the covers.

**Miller:** That's my life. It sometimes runs over. [153]

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## NOTES

[1] Jay Martin, *Always Merry and Bright* (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1978), p. 321. Miller's letters to Cairns over the years provided much of the valuable biographical data of Miller's Paris years for Jay Martin's excellent biography and critical study of Miller, *Always Merry and Bright*, and Cairns helped his friend out financially many times over the next decade, even making possible his escape from France just before WWII and Hitler invaded . (Ibid., p. 337).

[2] Ronald Gottesman, "Introduction," *Critical Essays on Henry Miller,* ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: C.K. Hall & Co., 1992), p. 12.

[3] Robert Creeley, "Testimonial and Reflection," *Critical Essays on Henry Miller,* ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: C.K. Hall & Co., 1992), p. 385.

[4] Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 169.

[5] Henry Miller, *My Life and Times* (New York: Gemini Smith/Playboy Press, 1971), p. 10.

[6] Letter to the *New Republic*, May 18, 1938 issue. From Edmund Wilson's "Twilight of the Expatriates," *Critical Essays on Henry Miller,* ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: C.K. Hall & Co., 1992), p. 93.

[7] Mary Kellie Munsil, "The Body in the Prison-house of Language: Henry Miller, Pornography, and Feminism," *Critical Essays on Henry Miller,* ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: C.K. Hall & Co., 1992), pp. 288-289.

[8] It is on Rupert Murdoch's FOX network, after all.

[9] Kenneth Rexroth, "The Reality of Henry Miller," *Critical Essays on Henry Miller,* ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: C.K. Hall & Co., 1992), p. 98.

[10] George Wickes, *Henry Miller and James Laughlin: Selected Letters*, ed. George Wickes (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996), pp. x-xi.

[11] Rexroth, "The Reality of Henry Miller," p. 96.

[12] Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* (First Evergreen Edition 1980)(New York: Grove Press, 1961) (Originally published: Paris: Obelisk Press, 1934), p. 90.

[13] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man.* Reprint. (New York: Dover Publications, 1994.) (Originally published: New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1916), p.185.

[14] Gottesman, "Introduction," p. 5.

[15] Georges Orwell, "Inside the Whale," *Henry Miller: Three Decades of Criticism* (New York: NYU Press, 1971), pp. 8, 11.

[16] Henry Miller, *My Life and Times,* p. 34.

[17] Henry Miller, *Books in My Life* (Norfolk, Conn: New Directions, 1952), p. 317.

[18] Martin, *Always Merry and Bright*, p. 331.

[19] Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, pp. 257-258.

[20] Ibid., p. 288.

[21] Henry Miller, "Reflections on Writing," *The Wisdom of the Heart* (Norfolk, Conn: New Directions, 1941), p. 25.

[22] Henry Miller, *My Life and Times*, p. 74.

[23] Jonathan Cott, " Reflections of a Cosmic Tourist: An Afternoon with Henry Miller," *Critical Essays on Henry Miller,* ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: C.K. Hall & Co., 1992), p. 360.

[24] Henry Miller, "Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere," *The Cosmological Eye* (Norfolk, Conn: New Directions, 1939), p. 193.

[25] Not that the occupation of writer is inherently a "filthy" one, but that Miller, as a writer, is one of the "filthy" variety. At least that's where his more reasonable critics would hopefully draw the line. ☺

[26] Richard Kostelanetz, "Henry Miller: On the Centenary of His Birth," *Critical Essays on Henry Miller,* ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: C.K. Hall & Co., 1992), p. 340.

[27] Henry Miller, *Black Spring* (New York: Grove Press, 1963) (Originally published: Paris: Obelisk Press, 1936), p. 57.

[28] Erica Jong, "Goodbye to Henry-san," *Critical Essays on Henry Miller,* ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: C.K. Hall & Co., 1992), p. 387.

[29] Henry Miller, as quoted by Cott, " Reflections of a Cosmic Tourist: An Afternoon with Henry Miller," p. 362.

[30] Henry Miller, *My Life and Times*, p. 74.

[31] John Williams, "Henry Miller: The Success of Failure," *Critical Essays on Henry Miller,* ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: C.K. Hall & Co., 1992), p. 263.

[32] Henry Miller, Alfred Perles, and Lawrence Durrell, *Art and Outrage: A Correspondence about Henry Miller* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1961), p. 30.

[33] Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, p. 249.

[34] Ibid, p. 249.

[35] Henry Miller, Letter to Durrell, *Art and Outrage: A Correspondence about Henry Miller*, pp. 30-31.

[36] See Gottesman, "Introduction," pp. 1, 8, 9, 21, and Kate Millett's chapter "Henry Miller" from her book *Sexual Politics* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 294, 309, 312, for critical testimonies (from both "friend" and "foe") of Miller's unerring commitment to honesty.

[37] Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, p. 11.

[38] George Wickes, "Henry Miller: Down and Out in Paris," *Critical Essays on Henry Miller,* ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: C.K. Hall & Co., 1992) (Originally printed 1969), p. 111.

[39] Henry Miller, Letter to Durrell, *Art and Outrage: A Correspondence about Henry Miller*, p. 30.

[40] Lawrence Durrell, "[Letter, August 1935]," *Critical Essays on Henry Miller,* ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: C.K. Hall & Co., 1992), p. 85.

[41] See Kate Millett's chapter from *Sexual Politics* and Michael Woolf's treatment of her analysis in "Beyond Ideology: Kate Millett and the Case for Henry Miller,"*Critical Essays on Henry Miller,* ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: C.K. Hall & Co., 1992), pp. 165-178. Woolf asserts that Millett missed Miller's position of ironic detachment from his hyper-sexual and dispassionately hyper-masculine characters, especially Van Norden from *Tropic of Cancer*, who Millett saw as a character whose degrading treatment of women and failed communication with women were endorsed by Miller. This character was the basis for much of her famous condemnation of Miller. She also committed this error on a more minor scale with Miller's early persona, the one from before his "liberation" or awakening. These honestly depicted characters, Woolf understands, were not meant to be taken as an endorsement of their beliefs and attitudes—in fact, they are pitiable and somewhat despicable.

[42] George Wickes, "Henry Miller: Down and Out in Paris," p. 111.

[43] Henry Miller, *My Life and Times,* p. 38

[44] Henry Miller, "Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere," pp. 181-184.

[45] Martin, *Always Merry and Bright,* p. 286.

[46] Henry Miller, "Universe of Death," *The Cosmological Eye* (Norfolk, Conn: New Directions, 1939), p. 109.

[47] Ibid., p. 118.

[48] Ibid., p. 129.

[49] Ibid., p. 113.

[50] Ibid., p. 128

[51] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Random House, 1986) (Originally published 1922), p. 589.

[52] Julian Kaye, "A Portrait of the Artist as Blephen-Stoom," *A James Joyce Miscellany,* ed. Marvin Magalaner (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois UP), 1959, p. 76.

[53] Henry Miller, "Universe of Death," p. 133.

[54] Julian Kaye, "A Portrait of the Artist as Blephen-Stoom," p. 45.

[55] Gottesman, "Introduction," p. 5.

[56] Ezra Pound, [Review of *Tropic of Cancer*]*, Critical Essays on Henry Miller,* ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: C.K. Hall & Co., 1992), pp. 87-88.

[57] Michael Woolf, "Beyond Ideology: Kate Millett and the Case for Henry Miller," p. 175.

[58] Ibid., p. 175.

[59] Ibid., p. 166.

[60] James Goodwin, "Henry Miller, American Autobiographer," *Critical Essays on Henry Miller,* ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: C.K. Hall & Co., 1992), p. 303.

[61] Henry Miller, *My Life and Times*, p. 156

[62] Kostelanetz, "Henry Miller: On the Centenary of His Birth," p. 345.

[63] Jeffrey Bartlett, "The Late Modernist," *Critical Essays on Henry Miller,* ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: C.K. Hall & Co., 1992), p. 323; Cott, " Reflections of a Cosmic Tourist: An Afternoon with Henry Miller," p. 56.

[64] John Williams, "Henry Miller: The Success of Failure," p. 263.

[65] Henry Miller, *My Life and Times*, p. 34.

[66] Gagnier, *Subjectivities:A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920,* p. 6.

[67] Ibid., p. 40-41.

[68] Henry Miller, *The Wisdom of the Heart,* p. 45.

[69] Henry Miller "Une Etre Etoilique," *The Cosmological Eye* (Norfolk, Conn: New Directions, 1939), p. 285-286.

[70] Cott, " Reflections of a Cosmic Tourist: An Afternoon with Henry Miller," p. 367.

[71] Henry Miller, *My Life and Times*, p. 42.

[72] Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, p. 244.

[73] Henry Miller, *My Life and Times,* p. 199.

[74] Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn,* 13th edition (New York: Grove Press, 1961) (Originally published: Paris: Obelisk Press, 1939), p. 261.

[75] Henry Miller, *My Life and Times,* p. 62.

[76] Ibid., p. 36-37.

[77] Ibid., p. 34.

[78] Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn*, p. 64.

[79] Henry Miller, *Sexus* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 485.

[80] Ibid., p. 484-485.

[81] Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn*, p. 53.

[82] Ibid., p. 488.

[83] Ibid., p. 489.

[84] Ibid., p. 497.

[85] Frank Kermode, "Henry Miller and John Betjeman: Puzzles and Epiphanies," *Henry Miller: Three Decades of Criticism* (New York: NYU Press, 1971), p. 93.

[86] Henry Miller, Letter to Durrell, *Art and Outrage: A Correspondence about Henry Miller*, p. 29.

[87] Henry Miller, Interview with David Dury. "Henry Miller's Real Woman" *Conversations with Henry Miller* (Jackson, Miss: University Press of Mississippi, 1994) (Originally published in *Mademoiselle*, 64 (December 1966), 90-91, 150-151), p. 129.

[88] Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn*, p. 69.

[89] Ibid., p. 274.

[90] Henry Miller, Interview with David Dury. "Henry Miller's Real Woman," p. 128.

[91] Emil Schnellock, "Just a Brooklyn Boy," *Critical Essays on Henry Miller,* ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: C.K. Hall & Co., 1992), p. 37.

[92] Henry Miller, Letter to Perles, *Art and Outrage: A Correspondence about Henry Miller*, p. 58.

[93] Ibid., p. 33.

[94] Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn*, p. 219.

[95] Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, p. 2.

[96] Petri Liukkonen, "Henri Bergson," http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/bergson.htm.

[97]. Swami Krishnananda, "Studies in Comparative Philosophy—Henri Bergson," http://www.swami-krishnananda.org/com/com_berg.html.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Henry Miller, *The Wisdom of the Heart*, p. 4.

[100] Henry Miller, "Reflections on Writing," *The Wisdom of the Heart*, p. 21.

[101] Goodwin, "Henry Miller, American Autobiographer," p. 302.

[102] Henry Miller, *My Life and Times,* p. 52.

[103] Henry Miller, *Black Spring*, p. 31.

[104] Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn*, p. 68.

[105] Millett, *Sexual Politics,* p. 309.

[106] Woolf, "Beyond Ideology: Kate Millett and the Case for Henry Miller," p. 169.

[107] Henry Miller, *The Wisdom of the Heart*, p. 3.

[108] George Wickes, "Henry Miller: Down and Out in Paris," p. 120.

[109] Michael Fraenkel, "The Genesis of *The Tropic of Cancer*," *Critical Essays on Henry Miller,* ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: C.K. Hall & Co., 1992), p. 58.

[110] Henry Miller, *My Life and Times*, p. 75.

[111] Ibid, p. 62.

[112] Kostelanetz, "Henry Miller: On the Centenary of His Birth," p. 346.

[113] My understanding of Hegel's conception of the Romantic artist and the dissolution of art relies heavily on Carl Rapp's chapter "Hegel's Concept of the Dissolution of Art" in his book *Fleeing the Universal* (pp. 67-92), as does my subsequent understanding of the Romantic artist in relation to the modern post-structuralists Foucault and Derrida.

[114] Carl Rapp, *Fleeing the Universal* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998), p. 71.

[115] G.W.F. Hegel, as quoted by Rapp, *Fleeing the Universal*, p. 72. From *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art,* p. 607.

[116] Henry Miller, "Reflections on Writing," *The Wisdom of the Heart*, p. 28.

[117] Rapp, *Fleeing the Universal*, p. 75. Hegel quote from *Aesthetics*, p. 81.

[118] Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn*, p. 68.

[119] Leon Lewis, *Henry Miller: The Major Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), p. 43.

[120] Hegel, as quoted by Rapp, *Fleeing the Universal*, p. 74. From *Aesthetics*, p. 594.

[121] Rapp, *Fleeing the Universal,* p. 74.

[122] Hegel, as quoted by Rapp, *Fleeing the Universal,* p. 73. From *Aesthetics*, p. 606.

[123] Rapp, *Fleeing the Universal,* p. 72.

[124] Ibid., p. 73.

[125] Derrida, See *Writing and Difference*, *Of Grammatology*.

[126] Rapp, *Fleeing the Universal,* p. 89.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid., p. 90.

[129] Cott, " Reflections of a Cosmic Tourist: An Afternoon with Henry Miller," p. 355.

[130] Rapp, *Fleeing the Universal,* p. 79.

[131] Henry Miller, Letter to Durrell, *Art and Outrage: A Correspondence about Henry Miller*, p. 33.

[132] Henery Miller, 1971 Interview with Georges Belmont, "Henry Miller in Conversation," *Conversations with Henry Miller* (Jackson, Miss: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), p. 165.

[133] Foucault, as quoted by Rapp, *Fleeing the Universal,* p. 90. From *Foucault Live* pp. 306-307.

[134] Henry Miller, "Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere," p. 152.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Henry Miller, Letter to Durrell, *Art and Outrage: A Correspondence about Henry Miller*, p. 32.

[137] Welch D. Everman, "The Anti-Aesthetic of Henry Miller," *Critical Essays on Henry Miller,* ed. Ronald Gottesman (New York: C.K. Hall & Co., 1992), p. 332.

[138] Henry Miller, *The Wisdom of the Heart*, p. 2.

[139] Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn*, p. 182.

[140] Henry Miller, *Wisdom of the Heart*, p. 3.

[141] Ibid., p. 191.

[142] Ibid., p. 24.

[143] Henry Miller, "Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere," pp. 167-168.

[144] Martin, *Always Merry and Bright*, p. 295.

[145] Henry Miller, 1970 Interview with Julie Burns. "Henry Miller: I Wonder Who the Hell I'm Writing For," *Conversations with Henry Miller* (Jackson, Miss: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), p. 148.

[146] Henry Miller, "Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere," p. 168.

[147] Henry Miller, 1970 Interview with Julie Burns. "Henry Miller: I Wonder Who the Hell I'm Writing For," p. 152.

[148] Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, p. 2.

[149] See G.W.F. Hegel's *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, ed Michael Inwood (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 35-36 and 123. Hegel describes this impulse in Miller (and all people) amazingly well. From p. 35: "The universal and absolute need out of which art, on its formal side, arises has its source in the fact that man is a *thinking* consciousness, i.e. that he draws out of himself, and makes explicit *for himself*, that which he is, and generally, whatever is." And from p. 36: "The universal need for expression in art lies, therefore, in man's rational impulse to exalt the inner and outer world into a spiritual consciousness for himself, as an object in which he recognizes his own self. He satisfies the need of this spiritual freedom when he makes all that exists explicit for himself *within*, and in a corresponding way realizes this his explicit self *without*, evoking thereby, in this reduplication of himself, what is in him into vision and into knowledge for his own mind and for that of others."

[150] Everman, "The Anti-Aesthetic of Henry Miller," p. 330.

[151] Martin, *Always Merry and Bright*, p. 292.

[152] Bartlett, "The Late Modernist," p. 319

[153] Henry Miller, Interview with Olle Lansberg. "Olle Lansberg at Home with Henry Miller," *Conversations with Henry Miller* (Jackson, Miss: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), p. 102.