



HENRY MILLER

NEW PERSPECTIVES

Edited by James M. Decker and Indrek Männiste

B L O O M S B U R Y

Henry Miller

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Henry Miller

New Perspectives

In memory of Edward Abplanalp and Thomas Nesbit

Notes on Contributors

Edward Abplanalp was Professor of Philosophy and Comparative Religion at Illinois Central College. His work focused on social justice, particularly with respect to the environment and appeared in journals such as *International Dialogue*. In addition to his academic pursuits, Ed loved to play guitar and travel. He passed away in June 2014.

Jeff Bursey is a Canadian literary critic whose works have appeared in a variety of publications, including *Nexus: The International Henry Miller Journal*. He is also the author of *Verbatim: A Novel* (2010).

James M. Decker is Professor of English, Humanities, and Language Studies at Illinois Central College. He is the author of *Henry Miller: Constructing the Self, Rejecting Modernity* (2005) and *Ideology* (2003), and he edits *Nexus: The International Henry Miller Journal*.

Sarah Garland is a lecturer in American literature and culture at the University of East Anglia. She is an interdisciplinary scholar of literature, film, and art history. Her research interests include transatlantic modernism; the American avant-garde; taste, consumption, the body and the everyday aesthetic; canonical and noncanonical American literature of the 1920s and 1930s (particularly expatriate writing); collaboration across the arts, and image-text intersections, juxtapositions, and configurations. She has had a longtime interest in Miller's work.

James Gifford is Associate Professor of English and director of the University Core at Fairleigh Dickinson University, Vancouver. His book *Personal Modernisms* appeared in 2014, and he has published broadly on modernism, postcolonial literatures, popular culture, and cultural theory.

Rob Herian is a lecturer in law at the Open University in the United Kingdom. Aside from a long-held interest in the work of Henry Miller, on which he has published in *Nexus: The International Henry Miller Journal*, Rob is also writing a PhD on the law of equity and works as a musician.

Hamish Dale Mercer Jackson received his B.A. in American and English literature from the University of East Anglia, where he was awarded first-class honors. His dissertation on Henry Miller and Jacques Lacan received distinction. He has also

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Paul Jahshan is Professor of American Studies at Notre Dame University, Lebanon. Author of *Henry Miller and the Surrealist Discourse of Excess: A Post-Structuralist Reading* (2001), his research interests include twentieth-century American fiction, the postmodern detective, cyber-theory, and Arab-American studies.

Finn Jensen graduated from the University of Copenhagen with an M.A. and PhD in literature. He has written a number of articles and two books about Miller: *The Angel from Brooklyn* (1993) and *The Age of Liberation* (2006). He is now retired from his teaching posts and is working on a major book about Miller's writing in Paris from 1930 to 1939.

Eric D. Lehman teaches literature and creative writing at the University of Bridgeport, and has published essays, reviews, and stories in dozens of journals and magazines, including *Nexus: The International Henry Miller Journal*. He is also the author of ten history and travel books, including *Becoming Tom Thumb: Charles Stratton, P.T. Barnum, and the Dawn of American Celebrity*, and *Homegrown Terror: Benedict Arnold and the Burning of New London*.

Anna Lillios is a professor of English at the University of Central Florida. Her research interests center on literature of place, particularly Mediterranean studies (focusing on the work of Lawrence Durrell) and Florida studies (focusing on the work of Zora Neale Hurston and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings). She is the author of *Crossing the Creek: The Literary Friendship of Zora Neale Hurston and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings* (2010). *Crossing the Creek* received a 2011 Florida Book Award for nonfiction and was the subject of a commentary on the editorial page of *The Wall Street Journal*. She edited the collection of essays, *Lawrence Durrell and the Greek World* (2004). She directs the Zora Neale Hurston Electronic Archive at <http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~zoraneal> and is the editor of *Deus Loci: The Lawrence Durrell Journal* and *The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature*. She is an ex-president of the International Lawrence Durrell Society and is currently a member of its executive board. She is an ex-president of the Florida College English Association and has received its 2008 Distinguished Colleague Award. She's currently the executive director and a trustee of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society.

Indrek Männiste works as a lecturer at Estonian Academy of Arts. He received his PhD in philosophy from the University of Auckland, New Zealand. In the past, he has worked as a Visiting Fellow in the Department of English and Comparative Literature in The University of Warwick, United Kingdom. He is the author of *Henry*

Miller: The Inhuman Artist (2013) and a contributor to *Nexus: The International Henry Miller Journal*. His main research interests besides Henry Miller are D.H. Lawrence, modernism, and modern technology.

Katy Masuga holds a PhD in comparative literature and a joint PhD in literary theory and criticism. Her first book, *Henry Miller and How He Got That Way* (2011), sets Miller in relation to his major sources of influence: Walt Whitman, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Arthur Rimbaud, Lewis Carroll, Marcel Proust, and D.H. Lawrence. Her second work, *The Secret Violence of Henry Miller* (2011), is a treatment of Miller's experimental and ekphrastic language in relation to the work of Maurice Blanchot, with comparisons drawn between James Joyce, Franz Kafka, and Marcel Proust via Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze's theory of a minor literature. Masuga has also published numerous articles and chapters on Miller and on topics including Ludwig Wittgenstein, Maurice Blanchot, Samuel Beckett, D.H. Lawrence, Shakespeare and Company in Paris, contemporary art, image and text relations, Frankenstein's Creature, and half a dozen short stories. She teaches comparative literature at Skidmore College in Paris.

Ondřej Skovajsa defended his doctoral dissertation *Written Voice: Leaves of Grass* (1855) and *Tropic of Cancer* in the Department of Comparative Literature at Charles University, Prague, in 2014. The dissertation re-conceptualizes oral composition theory to discuss modernist works. He translated and prepared a Czech edition Henry Miller's *Essays* (Dauphin 2011) and is currently working on a Czech translation of Whitman's first *Leaves* (1855). He spent a year 2011/2012 as Fulbright Scholar at University of California, Santa Cruz, and works as an assistant professor of English at Purkyně University, Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republic.

Guy Stevenson is an associate lecturer of English and American literature at Goldsmiths College, University of London. His principal areas of research are Henry Miller, early twentieth-century modernism and countercultural American literature of the 1950s and 1960s. He has contributed reviews and essays to a range of publications, including London's *Times Literary Supplement* and Toronto's *National Post*.

Foreword

You would be hard pressed to find any serious representation—most often you would find none—of Henry Miller's works in the present U.S. academic world. For instance, he remains conspicuously absent from the most notable anthologies of American literature. Beyond that, refereed academic articles on his works come few and far between in today's well-known U.S. critical journals, which in effect both reflect and help constitute the zeitgeist of American literary studies. Perhaps, most telling of all is Miller's notable absence from pedagogical arenas. I seriously doubt if any of his works (not just *Tropic of Cancer*, *Tropic of Capricorn*, and *Sexus*, but relatively noncontroversial ones like *Black Spring*, or even the topically innocuous "travel" work, *The Colossus of Maroussi*) makes its way into regular syllabi of college and university courses in American literature and/or American studies. Indeed, I am fairly certain I was the first and possibly the last instructor to assign *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn* in a course I taught at Dartmouth College for close to forty years.¹

Why this *miss*-representation? As with Mark Twain's major novel but without his canonical credentials, Miller's major self-referential works recurrently get censored for different reasons in different periods. George Orwell, for example, defended Miller early on but questioned his anarchic (i.e., nonreformist) politics. In former times, U.S. censorship of Miller's *Tropic* narratives mainly stemmed from how their "obscene" language and representational materials violated middle-class American moral standards. Miller himself anticipated this contemporary reception while writing *Tropic of Cancer*: "Sometimes I would lie abed till noon. There was nothing pressing, except to finish the book, and that didn't worry me much because I was already convinced that nobody would accept it anyway" (CAN, 223).

Today, his texts run into a different kind of moral censor. The "cultural studies" paradigm that dominates the current American academy openly judges written works mostly according to their propagation of liberal social values. In this politically charged context, Miller's writings get cited if at all as pejorative demos of politically incorrect views: sexism, racism, ethnic stereotypes, and even anti-Semitism.² This devalued view of Miller more or less gets summarized by Salman Rushdie's elitist dismissal of Miller's work on the grounds of his apoliticism: "Miller's reputation has more or less completely evaporated, and he now looks to be very little more than the happy pornographer beneath whose scatological surface Orwell saw such improbable depths." Indeed, few so-called "creative" writers before the Beats have felt beholden in some way to Miller's literary precedent.³

One can complicate if not entirely rebut the aforementioned charges,⁴ but to what end given academic reliance on a categorical imperative defined by one or another version of identity politics? Yet, why even take a defensive posture with Miller's

works at all? He himself (again) anticipated such a future reception and, eschewing programmatic political alternatives of every kind, in effect set down the terms for interrogating beforehand his present academic censorship: "...to be human seems like a poor, sorry, miserable affair, limited by the senses, restricted by moralities and codes, defined by platitudes and isms" (CAN, 259). Put another way, Miller's works put in question the unquestioned axioms behind such academic mala-judgments. At the very least, literary-critical studies would do well to follow the principle that Fang Lizhi remarked as a *sine qua non* of scientific investigation: to begin its own formulation about any subject with a good measure of methodological self-doubt. In fact, why not try suspending the hermeneutics of suspicion with works like Miller's and adopt a "second naïveté" so as to find a new, positive relation to them?⁵

The following collection attempts to do just that and from an impressive variety of disciplinary angles. The chapters in this book allow for a critically aware double reflection on these works, including how they concern at least one favorite subject of recent American studies: a transnational tableaux. Nonetheless, Miller's *bête noire* was and remains "identity politics" itself, whatever its avatar. A spiritual pragmatist, as it were, his writing instead constitutes a project precisely to deracinate his civilized self—its succumbing to one or another identitarian category—in order to engage a cosmic anonymity of self, as much as he could realize it in and through his writing: "What is war, disease, cruelty, terror, when night presents the ecstasy of myriad blazing suns? What is this chaff we chew in our sleep if it is not the remembrance of fang-whorl and star cluster" (CAN, 254). This book defines Miller's relation to writing from beginning to end. His works therefore request dialectical critical responses, the better to register his *post-hedonist* relation to sex (*pace* Rushdie) and other basic appetites, particularly as recorded in the two *Tropic* narratives and *The Rosy Crucifixion*.

Among other things, viewing Miller's writing as enacting symbolic strategies, to adopt a Kenneth Burkean term, would also allow us to re-view his loud deployments of ethnic stereotypes as purposeful signifiers of social-cultural formations into which one—he too—tends to fall, and which therefore require the deconstructions afforded by rhetorical modes of "obscenity." Such critical formulations show Miller's writing to be a kind of spiritual experiment. In that sense, another Henry, one whom he considered an authorial precursor, might very well have situated Miller's works within the paradoxically marginal mainstream of U.S. antinomian writing and living: "Books, not which afford us a cowering enjoyment, but in which each thought is of unusual daring; such as an idle man cannot read, and a timid one would not be entertained by, which even make us dangerous to existing institutions—such call I good books."⁶

Louis A. Renza
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Notes

- 1 Herbert West, a Dartmouth professor of Comparative Literature at Dartmouth College, was one of the first to write a “serious” academic review of *Tropic of Cancer* in the *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine* (1937). See Robert Ferguson, *Henry Miller: A Life* (New York: Norton, 1991), 270, 291.
- 2 See, for example, the by now familiar charges again deployed by Jeanette Winterson in a review of Frederick Turner’s book on Miller’s writing of *Tropic of Cancer*: “The Male Mystique of Henry Miller,” *The New York Times Sunday Book Review* (January 26, 2012).
- 3 Rushdie’s remark occurs in his essay taking Orwell to task for not maintaining the “political” standard entailed in literary work; hence the latter’s wrong-minded defense of Miller in his 1940 essay “Inside the Whale.” Rushdie, “Outside the Whale,” *Granta* 11 (1984), <http://www.granta.com/Archive/11/Outside-the-Whale/Page-4>. To a query in 1958 about his opinion of Miller, William Faulkner—one of the very few modernist American writers whom Miller had ever praised—responded: “Sorry, I don’t know him. Should I?” *Faulkner in the University*, ed. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph Blotner (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959), 282. Even hyperbolic hawkers of Miller’s “genius” by early and late peers like Karl Shapiro and Norman Mailer failed to inspire any academic-critical reopening *chez* Miller.
- 4 For example, the Miller narrator arguably exposes (and so tries to separate himself from) a nihilistic, reductive male sexism in his *self-evidently* burlesque caricature of Van Norden in *Tropic of Cancer*. As for Miller’s use of ethnic stereotypes, if nothing else, he was an equal-opportunity stereotyper, and not least of his own German-immigrant relatives about whom he remained caustically critical throughout his autobiographical works.
- 5 Paul Ricoeur makes this proposal in *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986). Cf. Wendy Doniger’s heuristic suggestion in a 2008 Convocation talk at the University of Chicago where she applies Ricoeur’s notion of a “second naïveté” specifically to contemporary academic subjects: “We need to balance what literary critics call a hermeneutics of suspicion—a method of reading that ferrets out submerged agendas—with a hermeneutics of retrieval, or even of reconciliation. ... [W]here in our first naïveté, we did not notice the racism, and in our subsequent hypercritical reading we couldn’t see anything else, in our second naïveté we can see how good some writers are despite the inhumanity of their underlying world views.” http://divinity.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/imce/pdfs/publications/criterion/winter_09.pdf. My thanks to Jed Dobson for pointing me to these references.
- 6 Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, A Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication, ed. Jim Manis (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 73.

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Chronology

- 1891 Henry Valentine Miller was born on 26 December in New York to Heinrich and Louise Miller (née Nieting)
- 1906 Miller attends Eastern District High School in Williamsburg
- 1908 Miller and his friends found the Xerxes Society
- 1909 Miller graduates from Eastern District; Miller wins a scholarship to study German at Cornell University but even with the scholarship, his family could not afford it; in September Miller enrolls in to the tuition-free City College of New York but leaves the college after six weeks and later takes a job as a clerk at the Atlas Portland Cement Company; begins an affair with Pauline Chouteau (née Laura May), a thirty-seven-year-old divorcée
- 1912 Pauline becomes pregnant but loses her baby in the fall; in March, Miller goes to New Mexico to work as a cattle herder but due to the lack of need is forced to work as a picker on a lemon ranch in Chula Vista; attends a talk by the notorious anarchist Emma Goldman in California and becomes fascinated by anarchist ideas; Miller grudgingly agrees to take an apprenticeship at his father's tailor shop in Manhattan
- 1915 Miller has vague ideas about becoming a writer; in October, Miller meets and falls in love with Beatrice Sylvas Wickens
- 1917 Miller leaves the tailor shop and marries Beatrice, partly to avoid the draft
- 1919 Henry and Beatrice's daughter, Barbara Sylvas, is born on 30 September
- 1920 Miller is hired as an employment manager at Western Union Telegraph Company
- 1922 Miller writes his first book *Clipped Wings* on a three-week vacation from Western Union
- 1923 Miller meets and falls in love with June Mansfield (born, according to Ellis Island records, Julia Smerth); on 21 December, Beatrice divorces Miller
- 1924 on 1 June, Miller and June get married; in September, Miller quits his job at Western Union to live the life of a writer
- 1927 Miller writes his second book *Moloch*; June abandons him for Europe but returns a few months later
- 1928 Henry and June visit Europe for the first time

- 1929 Miller and June return to New York
- 1930 on June's insistence, Miller returns to Paris alone to continue his literary career; Miller reacquaints with Alfred Perlès (whom he had first met in 1928)
- 1931 Miller meets Walter Lowenfels and Michael Fraenkel; Miller works as a proofreader for Paris's *Chicago Tribune*; starts working on his "Paris book" that would eventually become *Tropic of Cancer*; meets Anaïs Nin, with whom he starts both a literary and love affair
- 1932 Miller's first Paris-based short story "Mademoiselle Claude" was accepted for publication in the anthology *Americans Abroad*
- 1934 *Tropic of Cancer* is published by Obelisk Press and immediately banned in the United States and Great Britain; divorces June by proxy in Mexico
- 1935 Miller briefly visits New York
- 1936 *Black Spring* is published in June by Obelisk Press
- 1937 Lawrence Durrell visits Miller in Paris
- 1938 *Max and the White Phagocytes* is published by Obelisk Press after having been turned down by Alfred A. Knopf in the United States and Faber and Faber in Britain
- 1939 *Tropic of Capricorn* is published by Obelisk Press. James Laughlin's new firm New Directions brings out *The Cosmological Eye* in the United States; travels in South of France and, with the war impending, goes to Corfu to stay with Lawrence Durrell and his wife
- 1940 Miller returns to New York in mid-January. In late October he begins a road-trip around the United States with Abe Rattner in order to write *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*; publishes *The World of Sex*
- 1941 Colt Press publishes Miller's Greek book, *The Colossus of Maroussi*
- 1942 in June, Miller settles in Beverly Glen in California; starts to work on volume one of the *Rosy Crucifixion* trilogy, *Sexus*
- 1944 Miller moves to Big Sur. Marries Janina Martha Lepska
- 1945 *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* is finally published. In October, Miller and Lepska's daughter, Valentine Lepska, is born
- 1948 in August, Lepska gives birth to their son, Henry Tony
- 1949 *Sexus* is published in Paris
- 1952 Miller and Lepska divorce; *Books in My Life* is published
- 1953 in December, Miller marries Eve McClure; *Plexus* is published in Paris

- 1954 Miller and Eve visit Europe for the first time after the war
- 1955 *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch* is published
- 1959 Miller and Eve travel around Europe; *Nexus* is published in Denmark
- 1960 Miller and Eve divorce
- 1961 on 24 June, Grove Press publishes *Tropic of Cancer* for the first time in the United States. (68, 000 copies were sold in the first week); In July the book is banned in Massachusetts; a series of court cases begins; *Tropic of Capricorn* is published to circumvent piracy
- 1964 The United States Supreme Court (case *Grove Press Inc. v. Gerstein*) overrules the state court charges of obscenity in *Tropic of Cancer*
- 1965 Grove publishes the *Rosy Crucifixion* trilogy
- 1967 Miller marries Hiroko Tokuda
- 1969 Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* attacks Miller's works as chauvinistic and misogynous
- 1977 Miller and Hoki divorce
- 1980 *The World of Lawrence* is published; Miller dies of cardiovascular failure on 7 June

Abbreviations

- ACN** *Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (New York: New Directions, 1945).
- BIML** *The Books in My Life* (New York: New Directions, 1952).
- BS** *Black Spring* (New York: Grove Press, 1963).
- BSOHB** *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*. (New York: New Directions, 1957).
- C** *Capricorne—Ebauche de Tropic du Capricorne* (Paris: Blanche, 2013).
- CAN** *Tropic of Cancer* (New York: Grove Press, 1961).
- CAP** *Tropic of Capricorn* (New York: Grove Press, 1961).
- CBF** *Complete Book of Friends* (London: Allison and Busby, 1987).
- CC** *Crazy Cock* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991).
- CE** *The Cosmological Eye* (Norfolk: New Directions, 1939).
- CHM** *Conversations with Henry Miller*, ed. Frank L. Kersnowski and Alice Hughes (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994).
- COM** *The Colossus of Maroussi* (New York: New Directions, 1941).
- DB** *A Dream of a Book* (Big Sur: H Miller, 1958).
- HAM** *Hamlet* (with Michael Fraenkel) (London: Carrefour, 1962).
- HMC** *Henry Miller in Conversation* (with Georges Belmont) (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1972).
- HMJL** *Henry Miller and James Laughlin: Selected Letters* (with James Laughlin) (New York: Norton, 1996).
- HMW** *Henry Miller on Writing* (New York: New Directions, 1964).
- INL** *Into the Night Life* (with Bezalel Schatz) (Berkeley: H. Miller, 1947).
- LAN** Henry Miller (with Anaïs Nin) *Henry Miller: Letters to Anaïs Nin* (edited by Gunther Stuhlmann) (New York: Putnam, 1965).
- LE** *Letters to Emil* (New York: New Directions, 1989).

- LKM** "Letter to Kate Millet, May 27, 1969" *Nexus: The International Henry Miller Journal* 8 (2011): 3–4.
- LP** *A Literate Passion: Letters of Anaïs Nin and Henry Miller 1932–1953* (New York: Harcourt Brace Company, 1987).
- MOL** *Moloch or, This Gentile World* (New York: Grove Press, 1992).
- NEX** *Nexus: Book Three of "The Rosy Crucifixion" Trilogy* (New York: Grove Press, 1965).
- NI** The New Instinctivism (A Creative Duet) (With Alfred Perlès) *Nexus: The International Henry Miller Journal* 4 (2007): 3–56.
- PLEX** *Plexus: Book Two of "The Rosy Crucifixion" Trilogy* (New York: Grove Press, 1965).
- R** *Reflections* (edited by Twinka Thiebaud) (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1981).
- RTR** *Remember to Remember* (New York: New Directions, 1947).
- SAW** *Sunday After the War* (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1944).
- SEX** *Sexus: Book One of the "The Rosy Crucifixion" Trilogy* (New York: Grove Press, 1965).
- SMF** *The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1948).
- SSLH** *Stand Still Like the Hummingbird* (New York: New Directions, 1962).
- TNR** Letter to the Editor (re: Dreiser's Style) (*The New Republic*, 28 April 1926: 308).
- TOA** *The Time of the Assassins: A Study of Rimbaud* (New York: New Directions, 1956).
- WOH** *The Wisdom of the Heart* (New York: New Directions, 1941).
- WOL** *The World of Lawrence: A Passionate Appreciation* (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1980).
- WOS** *The World of Sex* (Chicago: J.H.N. [Ben Abramson], 1941).
- WR** *The Waters Reglitterized: The Subject of Water Color in Some of Its More Liquid Phases* (London: Village Press, 1973).