

**Soliloquies of Lust:
Henry Miller and the Transmutation of Desire**

by

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Abstract

Soliloquies of Lust: Henry Miller and the Transmutation of Desire

The fictional legacy of Henry Miller (1891-1980) is one libidinally open question to humankind: how can an 'American Expatriate' whose autobiographical novels still earn him a 'pornographic renegade' fame pretend to alter the World of Sex?

By first examining a few of the cultural conditions behind Miller's devising of his self-seeking *Men*, the following pages will present the premises that have led to the emergence of his estranged sensualist's cynical voice.

Then, by interrogating the instances of narratological transformation endured by his (often anti-) *Heroes*, the next section will challenge some of the socially disruptive views conveyed by the storyteller's first-person revelations.

Finally, by looking for the *Goddesses* to whom all of Miller's pangs of Life have been dedicated, this thesis will try to illustrate the extent of one man's dependence upon his female lovers' projections of the Self.

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Soliloquies of Lust: Henry Miller and the Transmutation of Desire

Introduction

It is possible to transmute the bad into the good, the wrong into the right. There is always this possibility. It would be an utterly uninteresting world if everything remained what it seems to be. I do believe in transmutation. (Henry Miller, *My Life and Times* 190)

Buried amidst *Tropic of Cancer's* opening diatribe against "Art, [...] God, Man, Destiny, Time, Love, Beauty... what you will"¹ lies a framework of self-defeating irony that often goes unnoticed. Behind the 'expatriate-narrator's' marked contempt towards secular inadequacy, beyond the fury and the violence of his initial assaults, lurks a dormant fear of isolation: "No one to whom I can communicate even a fraction of my feelings..." (*Cancer* 6). And while Henry Valentine Miller the fictitious and facetious storyteller insists on disavowing all Institutions and applauds the death of Literature, the would-be writer who shares his name has to cull his own public personae out of the same aesthetic forum his spokesman has defiled. Still, it is easy to understand why most commentators do not even dare dispute the very reliability of 'Val's' double-barrelled voice: regardless of the genre with which he chooses to experiment, Miller always seems to be recopying the same notes he frantically typed on the evening of May 21, 1927, some three weeks after June, his second wife, had eloped to Paris with her lesbian lover. The preacher of

¹ *Tropic of Cancer* 2. All subsequent textual references will be given parenthetically, using this format: title (often abridged) and page number(s) for Henry Miller's own works; author's or editor's last name and page number(s) for secondary sources. Complete citations appear in the bibliography.

Remember to Remember does not want his readers to forget that all his prosaic endeavours are but revisions of one lifelong tale: the stopgap spiel of a thirty-five-year-old 'failure' who, in a single sitting, has spontaneously sketched the substructure of his whole *Rosy Crucifixion*, designed the pseudofactual sfumato out of which a modern Narcissus's literary karma will one day emerge, captured the sole subject that has not yet eluded him: himself.

Notwithstanding, Henry Miller's compulsive longing for uniqueness often verges on discursive schizophrenia. Hence his urge to alleviate the stylistic seclusion inherent to his so-called 'gangster-author' stance, to validate his own work through his prating about the composite nature of his self-professed spiritual kinship with the likes of Whitman and Thoreau (in *Stand Still Like the Hummingbird*), Rimbaud (in *Time of the Assassins*), Balzac (in *The Wisdom of the Heart*), and D. H. Lawrence (in the never completed and posthumously published *World of Lawrence*, which also contains shorter pieces on Joyce and Proust, the early Paris years role models turned harbingers of the West's decline). If his hankering for a private formal niche has been plaguing him from the start, Miller must however wait until the near culmination of his 'magnum opus'—until *Nexus's* sappy versifier has found himself altogether unable to wade into the 'book of his life'—before he can blurt it all out: “[...] Christ! Do you know what's the matter with me? I'm a chameleon. Every author I fall in love with I want to imitate. If only I could imitate myself!” (190).

In *The Mind and Art of Henry Miller*, William Gordon argues that the empirical cornerstone of Miller's commonplace sagas might be grounded in his fundamentally optimistic survey of the world's periodical spasms: “He accepted a cyclical view of history as did Nietzsche, but modified by a sense of Destiny or purpose. Rejecting eternal recurrence, Miller, like Vico and Spengler, accepted some kind of evolutionary progress as a future possibility if not as an historical fact. He looks forward to a new man who will live on a higher level than man has achieved before” (47). His *Hamlet* correspondence

with Michael Fraenkel, originally about the Death theme in literature, would appear to confirm Gordon's observation; as Miller puts it, "History covers only a short span of human endeavour, human evolution. I am not at all sure that the cyclical aspect of our historical life will not give way to another, to a seemingly anarchic one in which we move not within definite cultural limits but within unlimited *human* ones based on the realization of our own potentialities" (*Henry Miller's Hamlet Letters* 123).

Thus, by celebrating the hegemony of phoenix-like (re-)creation over his personal Sisyphian tenets, this unbound wanderer has taught himself how to weave some evocatively nihilistic clamours of awakening into his *Black Spring's* "Walking Up and Down in China" episode: "Born and reborn over and over. Born while walking the streets, born while sitting in a café, born while lying over a whore. Born and reborn again and again. A fast pace and the penalty for it is not death simply, but repeated deaths" (185-86). The rich, though mostly borrowed from Dada, kaleidoscopic imagery Miller uses in order to convey the Megalopolis's madness cannot, however, help him set his philosophical canvas in gyral motion. It depends upon that fixed, pivotal segment of his past—that split second of lucidity before Val's supine assent to Love's demise—around which gravitate all of his doomsday dreamscapes and undertones of salvation.

No wonder the dissonant echoes and wavering pitches that make up most of his autonovels² generate dissent. Whereas one faction of the critics—among whom stand Bertrand Mathieu, Kathryn Winslow, and Ihab Hassan—thinks that Miller is at his best when, as in such tomes as *The Colossus of Maroussi*, he sublimates his appetite for symposiac filth, another, boisterously led by Norman Mailer, regards his travelogue on Greece—as well as the various 'collections' (such as *The Cosmological Eye*, *The Wisdom*

² Even though the term almost seems an innuendo, its reappearance throughout this text substantiates the void that still exists after more than half a century of coined phrases about Miller's self-seeking legacy, one which invariably resists the student's urge for narratological categories. Despite its cloudy import, it will nevertheless be preferred here since the author's own dictum—Miller has always labelled his book-length ventures *autonovels* or *autobiographical romances* (Lewis 57)—truly remains as unequivocal and legitimate as anyone else's.

of the Heart, and *Stand Still Like the Hummingbird*) issued in the United States by New Directions before Grove Press's printing of the banned books during the sixties—as a closet misfit's too zealous attempt to please an apprehensive audience with less frankly audacious material.³ But this separation is perhaps a false one: although his sexually exuberant production is generally considered his most important, there is much that would suggest that Miller's entire literary output should be read as a single corpus.

His autarchic 'I narrator' daubs his earthly ventures on the various screens of Being that surround him like skin-graft placards on a whitewashed wall. In the half-sermon, half-chronicle *Colossus of Maroussi*, for example, the Hellenic icons of rebirth that stir his imagination are instantly fused to the very structure of his antinomian diary. Lost amidst a series of topographically fleeting and metaphysically enticing inner spaces, Miller's already expansive persona thus develops into a metamorphic entity whose fluid sway follows the course of his spiritual journey. Furthermore, this runaway's fragmented self-portrait mirrors the literal *katábasis*, the 'little death' depicted by Bertrand Mathieu in *Orpheus in Brooklyn* (50), that ratifies the 'emergence'—Mathieu's *palingénesis*—of one's conscience of lust: "People seldom mean what they say. Any one who says he is burning to do something other than he is doing or to be somewhere else than he is is lying to himself. To desire is not merely to wish. To desire is to become that which one essentially is. Some men, reading this, will inevitably realize that there is nothing to do but act out their desires" (*Maroussi* 237). Through his Grecian palimpsest's sublimation of bodily greed, Miller has managed to extol Eros's triumph without having to revert to his customary 'downward spiral' of sensual estrangement and its concomitant aroma of decay.

³ Miller's agreeing to release *Quiet Days in Clichy*'s profitable 'smut' (for his first day followers) and *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*'s zany theosophy (for the fresher cultic converts) almost simultaneously does however tend to prove that he has never really cared whether he was becoming one of America's 'dominant literary figures' for the 'wrong' reasons or not.

As the hyperrealistic and tormented carnality of such works as *Tropic of Cancer* and *Sexus* testifies, Miller's celebration of human potential often finds its expression in a naive enthusiasm for excessive phallicism. In his "Obscenity and the Law of Reflection" essay, however, he draws a sharp distinction between the passionate and repressive forms of sentimental alienation:

In the realm of sex there is a similar kind of sleepwalking and self-delusion at work; here the bifurcation of pure desire into fear and wish has resulted in the creation of a phantasmagorical world in which love plays the role of a chameleon-like scapegoat. Passion is conspicuous by its absence or by monstrous deformations which render it practically unrecognizable. (In *Remember to Remember* 284)

Through its psychoanthropological analysis of the autonovels' mechanics of fictional intentionality, Gilles Mayné's *Eroticism in Georges Bataille and Henry Miller* addresses the problematic inclusion of collective desires within the private sphere. It also reiterates the importance of the sexual prohibition's 'transgression' as a cultural *rite de passage*:

What characterizes eroticism, in sharp contrast to pornography and obscenity, is the fact that in an erotic experience, the prohibition arrests us and suspends our consciousness: we keep telling ourselves that we cannot transgress a prohibition until the very moment when we realize that we must transgress it, that we are indeed already transgressing it and, what is more, that we are enjoying such a transgression to the utmost. In other words, we are enjoying the transgression of the impossibility to transgress the social prohibition. Clearly, between awareness of the impossibility to transgress this taboo and the actual experienced transgression of such a taboo, we have entered a phase in which we do not know what is happening to us (this passive mode is here unavoidable); a phase of supreme(ly enjoyable) hesitation which, as the transgression goes on, forces us to distort our own social, religious, and, above all, linguistic preconceptions. (3)

If it underlines which issues are at stake in terms of both Bataille's and Miller's amatory experiences, Mayné's comparative stance, unfortunately, neither elucidates the conditions of their representation nor assesses the aesthetic motives behind the authors' respective 'air-conditioned nightmares.' Neither does it explain why, in *Histoire de l'oeil* and *Tropic of Capricorn*, the narrators—whose rages for truthful wantonness have already prevented their falling into Love's benumbed dementia—suddenly feel the urge to plunge towards a subterranean locus where the profane merges with the divine.

So, when Val sanctifies his phraseology of the flesh on an altar of self-demeaning artificiality and then seeks solace in profanity, it is because he realises that his ecstatic ideals do not stand a chance against the mass-market culture's neurotic sales pitches and truly pernicious indecencies to which Norman Mailer alludes in the *Genius and Lust* anthology:

Lust has all the attributes of junk. It dominates the mind, appropriates loyalties, generalizes character, leaches character out, rides on the fuel of any emotional gas—hatred, affection, curiosity, even boredom—yet lust can alter on the instant to love. Indeed, the more intense lust becomes, the more it is out of focus—the line of the ridge between lust and love is exactly where the light is blinding, and the ground remains unknown. (92)

But whereas Mailer isolates *lust* from *love* and plays one notion against the other in a (con)sequential relation, Miller chooses to insist upon the way in which the human will, through its passionate engagement with both worlds, can regulate the conditions of its existence.

In *My Life and Times*, the would-be alchemist who has not quite given up his dream of finding his own philosopher's stone offers some indications on how to decipher the chimeras of siring that hold his 'dirty books' together:

The one great power we have is our ability to transmute things. When a thing goes wrong you have to turn the wrong into the right. This is the one thing God gave us, I feel, and this is the greatest thing about the universe—that it can be altered. It's capable of any transmutations whatever. Man has a bit of this power in him: to take what is lost and failed and convert it into a new and wonderful thing. (122)

Foremost among these 'things' are the swiftly shifting surroundings that confer on Miller's 'autobiographical romance' its dash of pseudonaturalism. For example, the coming of the merry dancers who set the night aflame onto *Tropic of Capricorn's* stage would seem rather pointless without those painted curtains which, when they cascade one in front of another in shutter-priority mode, animate their virtual rambles. Adding surreal layers, thus allowing him to materialise his artistic ambitions, to his otherwise only too figurative

likenesses, Miller's formalistic leitmotifs and calculated transfigurations pervade his entire corpus, from *Cancer's* well-known river imagery to the more obscure *enantiodromos*, "the process whereby a thing turns into its opposite" (100), of *Joey*.

Whether amidst the Coupole's callous crowd or on the crest of the Pacific coast, this American caroller of fulfilment consistently elects to settle in emotionally remote territories. His connection with the failings of his contemporaries, on the other hand, enables him to find Glory at the core of Nothingness—and to appropriate it. Empowered by his mimetic, if oneiric, grasp on creation, the guru-narrator of *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymous Bosch* devises a millennial iconography that evokes the shared solitude from which run-of-the-mill revolutions arise:

Every creature, every object, every place has its own ambiance. Our world itself possesses an ambiance which is unique. But worlds, objects, creatures, places, all have this in common: they are ever in a state of transmutation. The supreme delight of dream lies in this transformative power. When the personality liquefies, so to speak, as it does so deliciously in a dream, and the very nature of one's being is alchemized, when form and substance, time and space, become yielding and elastic, responsive and obedient to one's slightest wish, he who awakens from his dream knows beyond all doubt that the imperishable soul which he calls his own is but a vehicle of this eternal element of change. (29)

Notwithstanding, Miller's belief in spiritual transformation only exists in opposition to the naturalistic mode featured throughout his guerrilla prose. His Val is but a mere activist of abatement who fantasises about some long-forsaken protectorates of lust. Who, like a bald eagle whose feathers have been dressed in plaster of Paris, dives into the deep with his limbs all stretched out. And who, since he will always favour a dynamic failure over a comfortable stasis, does not resent stumbling upon the occasional reality check.

In "An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere," Miller nails the sporadic advent of one's 'rosy crucifixions' down when he writes that "The condition of ecstasy is, as we know, not a permanent state of being. It is an experience which permits us to undergo a radical transformation, a fruitful metamorphosis, a renewal" (in *The Cosmological Eye*

191). And since most of them bathe in an underlying light of palliative euphoria, Val's sensual epiphanies bring forth an array of liberating inceptions that bid the reader to self-consciously partake of Art's ascendancy on social longing: "J'aime le désir. En désirant les choses, personne n'est blessé, ni dérangé, ni exploité. La création est le désir pur. On ne possède rien. On crée, on lâche. On est hors de ce qu'on fait. On n'est plus esclave" (*Order and Chaos chez Hans Reichel* 78). Val's refusal to avoid 'emotional failure' and bohemian poverty—by selling his creative sovereignty to the pleasingly disseminative machinery of Capital—has turned him into an epicurean admirer of Freedom, whose libidinal integrity does indeed radiate 'out' of the conceptual domain. But this societal posture, at least for the present of Miller's narratives, is famously resistant to the utopian impulse.

Jotting his identity down along the lines of an ambiguous interaction—one that runs on alternate fits of fascination and disgust—between a self-made character and his community (of letters), this twentieth-century bard never ceases to recite, though half-heartedly at times, his antique, worm-eaten psalmody of loneliness. Thus, by first examining a few of the cultural conditions behind Miller's devising of his self-seeking *Men*, the following pages will present the premises that have led to the emergence of his estranged sensualist's cynical voice. Then, by interrogating the instances of narratological transformation endured by his (often anti-) *Heroes*, the next section will challenge some of the socially disruptive views conveyed by the storyteller's first-person revelations. Finally, by looking for the *Goddesses* to whom all of Miller's pangs of Life have been dedicated, this thesis will try to illustrate the extent of one man's dependence upon his female lovers' projections of the Self.

Men

Real life begins when we are alone, face to face with our unknown self. What happens when we come together is determined by our inner soliloquies. The crucial and truly pivotal events which mark our way are the fruits of silence and of solitude. (*The World of Sex* 96)

Often accused of nurturing an antisocial view of this 'World of Sex,' Henry Miller has always reverted to the very amoral nature of his 'subject' in order to justify his 'bohemian disaffection' from modernity. By looking at, successively, some of Val's acknowledged models, ideological stances, and sociopathic associates, this chapter will search for the conditions of his self-professed loneliness.

At once coveted and feared, the secular isolation of his Lycée Carnot's *répétiteur* evolves, by the end of *Tropic of Cancer*, into a form of methodical reclusion. Trapped in a no-man's-land paralysed by frost, Miller thus agrees to let go on the incapacitating surges from which his rancid dissertation on the stench of nostalgia is springing. *Cancer's* disabused pose—as one of its earliest appraisals, drafted in 1940 by a writer whose own contest with Ideology has moulded twentieth-century literature, testifies—stuns. George Orwell's "Inside the Whale," dissecting the didactic weight of the book's projected irreverence, begins with a forthright invective aimed at the apolitical modernist:

When *Tropic of Cancer* was published the Italians were marching into Abyssinia and Hitler's concentration camps were already bulging. The intellectual foci of the world were Rome, Moscow, and Berlin. It did not seem to be a moment at which a novel of outstanding value was likely to be written about American dead-beats cadging drinks in the Latin Quarter. Of course a novelist is not obliged to write directly about contemporary

history, but a novelist who simply disregards the major public events of the moment is generally either a footler or a plain idiot. (In Wickes, *Henry Miller and the Critics* 33)

While Orwell's essay does point to the cadence of logographic histories around which Miller's Paris revolves to a standstill, it however fails to assess the fractal discontinuity that regulates the narration's internal conflicts. Val cannot picture himself as playing a part in an actual rebellion's revolutionary skits because, for him, his autobiographical labyrinth of organised chaos *is* the Revolution. Secluded from the Age's social terrain, this gossamer of casual allegories—whose unfettered shifts of personality suffer no archival referents—repels emotional bankruptcy via his hearty grip on Immediacy. He thus impregnates his textual body of illusions, through which all separate identities are funnelled and connected, with some enumerative syntheses:

I know that I spring from the mythological founders of the race. The man who raises the holy bottle to his lips, the criminal who kneels in the marketplace, the innocent one who discovers that *all* corpses stink, the madman who dances with lightning in his hands, the friar who lifts his skirts to pee over the world, the fanatic who ransacks libraries in order to find the Word—all these are fused in me, all these make my confusion, my ecstasy. (*Tropic of Cancer* 259)

The legends of his 'race' have given birth to an uncommitted drifter whose tales only serve to mock his own hidebound feelings of belonging. The Val who wants to be on friendly terms with his spiritual fathers cannot however refrain from laughing at their shortcomings.

One of them, Arthur Rimbaud has, some sixty years before the release of *Cancer*, gone through an organic *Saison en Enfer* very similar to Val's own. If Miller's self-proclaimed kinship with the screamer of *Illuminations* seems a tad farfetched, it has nevertheless inspired him to write a revealing, if ornate, tribute to the *poète maudit's* craft. While celebrating Rimbaud's treatment of symbolic transfigurations, Miller also exposes, in *Time of the Assassins*, his personal targets: "He realized that the poison of culture had transformed beauty and truth into artifice and deception. He takes Beauty on his knee and

he finds her bitter. He abandons her. It is the only way he can still honor her" (134). Before he can drink in the Seine's serenity and commune with the life therein, Miller, too, must to a certain extent forsake the Truth about himself. As shown by James Dale Brown, Rimbaud's insurrection against the stale diktats of his world has galvanised Miller's own hatred of behavioural formulae and convinced him to challenge every word that refuses to sanction sexual impunity:

When Miller emphasizes the demonic basis of Modern Romanticism in relation to Rimbaud—its infantile and destructive, as well as Dionysian, urges—he speaks of his own art, too. Enlarging upon that definition, he underscores the transcendental and pagan aspects. Art is a means to destroy the old barrier between civilization and individual desire, between discontent and ecstasy, between Thanatos and Eros. Insofar as art becomes a means to discover and express individual autonomy and personal joy, however, it is antithetical to modern institutions. The art of Rimbaud, like the art of Henry Miller, is an expression of revolt. What Miller sees in Rimbaud is an ability to move beyond that revolt, to return and accept life joyously, without rebelling but also without confirming. (*Henry Miller* 72)

For these two autobiographers, then, Power and Love cannot but commingle into one self-consuming carnival of lust. But, whereas his mentor has only fed on versified desolation with disgust, Miller welcomes the same nauseating spasms with delight. Only through them can he make sail for the *Tropic of Cancer*.

In "Studies in Genius: Henry Miller," Villa Seurat accomplice Lawrence Durrell tries to adapt Val's offensive upon epic conventions to the pigeonholes of modern narratology: "Miller's work has no 'characters,' there are only savage charcoal cartoons of human beings: it has no time-springing—it is written in a perpetual historic present: it has no sequence, location, process..." (In Wickes, *Henry Miller and the Critics* 106). *Cancer's* burlesque troupers have renounced to evade this visceral era's chronological vacuum and thus proudly luxuriate in a barbed-wired sanctuary where all is forgotten. Yet, like Joyce, "the great blind Milton of our times" (*Cancer* 260), Miller is unable to blot his native soil out of his life-sentence account: the crude Paris through which Val is roaming definitely dons some of Brooklyn's lights. Furthermore, its Latin Quarter gushes

forth the *Künstlerroman* of a colonial fugitive who, as hard as he tries, cannot be severed from his cultural heritage. *Tropic of Cancer's* is a cathartic megalopolis that electrifies its literary desperado and then leaves him alone with his longing for a collective past.

Val's ultimate bond with the lost continent's ongoing myths therefore portends his admittance into the patriarchal nexus of American traditional literature. In "Twisting American Comedy: Henry Miller and Nathanael West, among Others," Kingsley Widmer does not hesitate to name the protagonist of Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as one of Val's forefathers:

After all, *Tropic of Cancer*, too, centers on the journeying of a genial and folkish American adolescent, however baldingly fortyish. He, too, partners with outcasts, compulsive American studs and Parisian whores. He, too, wryly sees through the usual American con games—not least the pretensions to high culture. And he also learns of life as a flowing river (the dominant metaphor of the book), especially the flow of sperm and excrement. (221)

While Val's drifting towards his 'heart of darkness' between two World Wars bears a resemblance to Huck Finn's own floating unawares across the Mississippi Delta of his expanding conscience, it is in Miller's denial of cowardly conformities and, even more so, his downright impudence that, as noted by Brown, one can discern a few traces of Samuel Clemens's idiosyncratic fondness for derision:

For this twentieth-century Huck Finn, the whorehouses and sewers of Paris are the exile's raft and river. The whole North American continent is the shoreline of corruption and enslavement. Miller is writing obscene letters to earth, celebrating an adolescent sexual freedom, thumbing his nose at an inhuman culture. He has inherited from Twain that vernacular tradition, based on regional humor (the lower-class Brooklyn of Miller's birth), that as literary art converts serious issues into double-edged comedy [...]. (47)

Both Twain and Miller have recorded perverted homages to Innocence, lost and regained. Both of them have told the story of a 'Huck' who, exalted by the placid cruelty of passing 'Tom Sawyers,' cannot come to rest until every scarred and desecrated 'Jim' is shipped back to his masters.

The 'American in Paris' who, one day, decides to scrawl his revolutionary chapters in reaction to the Age's puritanical masquerades spontaneously adopts a 'naturalistic' posture that recalls William Dean Howells's 1891 plea for literary realism in *Criticism and Fiction*:

Let fiction cease to lie about life; let it portray men and women as they are, actuated by the motives and the passions in the measure we all know; let it leave off painting dolls and working them by springs and wires; let it show the different interests in their true proportions; let it forbear to preach pride and revenge, folly and insanity, egotism and prejudice, but frankly own these for what they are, in whatever figures and occasions they appear; let it not put on fine literary airs; let it speak the dialect, the language, that most Americans know—the language of unaffected people everywhere—and there can be no doubt of an unlimited future, not only of delightfulness but of usefulness, for it. (In Michael Davitt Bell, *The Problem of American Realism* 40)

By responding to the avant-garde's polished eloquence with a litany of four-letter words, Miller, like the one poet of the American Renaissance who has taken upon him to wipe out the Puritans' fear of the flesh and to spiritualise his corporeality in a lover's arms, knows that he has ventured on a lonely road. His deference for the exhilarating frankness of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, grossly conspicuous in the *Mezzotints* 'juvenilia' ("The Bowery Phoenix," reprinted in the *Henry Miller Miscellanea*), comes to revolve, in his more mature pieces, around his speaker's search for an auctorial genealogy.

Thus, tracking mystical influences, Robert Ferguson declares that "If the novel can usefully be said to have a recipe then *Tropic of Cancer* owed much to Hamsun's *Hunger*, much to Rabelais, much to the shamanistic Whitman who celebrated and sang himself, and announced to his readers that what they held in their hands was not so much a book as the result of an act of transubstantiation" (*Henry Miller: A Life* 230). At times comically absurd, as when the partygoer of *Sexus* suddenly insists on visiting the dearly missed Walter's birthplace while on a drinking spree to Long Island (122-23), Val's quest for an artistic ancestry constrains him to reckon with his country's cultural landmarks and, under the working title of *I Sing the Equator*, to deliver a stirring Giant's eulogy: "In Whitman

the whole American scene comes to life, her past and her future, her birth and her death. Whatever there is of value in America Whitman has expressed, and there is nothing more to be said. The future belongs to the machine, to the robots. He was the Poet of the Body and the Soul, Whitman. The first and the last poet" (*Cancer* 243-44).

He who swears that through him nations and then warbles blustering obituaries can appreciate the pain Grace inflicts upon her suitors and is not reluctant to relinquish the welfare of others for Her sake. However, carrying on Annette Kar Baxter's stylistic assessment (*Henry Miller, Expatriate* 47), Brown remarks that Miller's 'cover' never reaches the original version's sustained pitch of symbiosis between collective and personal decrees:

As befits the period, Miller's song of the self is darker than Whitman's. The individual's experience in America has changed and the self is virtually powerless now; but by embracing his alienated status and placing himself in opposition to his culture, Miller reinstates the individual symbolically at the center of his society. Miller's song is more violent and pessimistic precisely because it is set in a world more hideous and inhuman than the one Walt Whitman imagined. *Tropic of Cancer* recasts, rather than repeats, Whitman's "Song of Myself," but the underlying pattern of sensuous rebirth remains intact. (*Henry Miller* 113)

It is through the stereotypical memories of his bookish youth that *Cancer's* die-hard renegade with a penchant for easy preys rummages for male role models. In *Beneath the American Renaissance*, David Reynolds delineates the genus of Whitman's early *b'hoy* guise—a self-reliant, resourceful American beau not so different from the fortysomething derelict who peddles his loquacity for drinks in Montparnasse's cafés:

On the one hand, the *b'hoy* is intelligent and inclined to copy the taste and manners of gentility. On the other hand, he is a loafer, a street-wise person who has dropped out of the social mainstream. It would not be long before Whitman would assume a notably broad persona in *Leaves of Grass*, one intelligent enough to cite Oriental scriptures but lowly enough to pronounce himself one of the roughs, one who could loaf and invite his soul but also plunge wholeheartedly into the activities of city life. (509)

Faithfully striding, Miller's own 'street-wise loafer' tries to find a middle ground between some upper-class compromises and the harshness of Scumtown. These two sedative poles

of his Devastation both speak, to him at least, of his past struggles, of the tormenting sense of failure which he is not ready to let go. Hence Val's telling the world that Comfort feeds on Calamity: he will not let anyone forget that his collection of distress calls still bears its stench of Paradise.

At once formalised and dehumanised, the 'world of sex' in which Miller's 'dolls' ramble expediently detaches itself from the previous century's transcendentalist ideologies of libertarianism. No wonder the man whose dreams have been blown to bits deserts deference and pushes for the mob's survivalist instincts: since all are partaking in the same consolidated loneliness, there is nobody left to care whether Love grows out of its pile of dirt or not. For the prodigal son of *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* and *Remember to Remember*—the two-volume, pre-*On the Road* chronicle of an American hedonist—there remains nothing else to do, then, but to confess his faith in his fatherland's propensity for sociopolitical redemption. Like Twain's Mississippi and Joyce's Liffey, the Seine will one evening escort Miller's 'Yank' on his self-revealing odyssey and, perhaps, make him come to terms with the domestic mirages of superficial bliss that have commanded his escape to Paris. Like Rimbaud and Whitman, his utopian counterpart will, lest he should surrender to the dejection of his *Cancer's* anaesthetised masses, sing of the loves that have given him Life.



Whether they are stocked with underpaid secretaries and helpless refugees or French madams and hopeless exiles, the *Tropics'* are communal cities that, as Alan Trachtenberg points out in "‘History on the Side’: Henry Miller's American Dream," forcibly incorporate the crowd within their private spectacles of desire:

Miller's idea of freedom, of the natural and the wild, intensifies as his *persona* moves further away from society, from any relations in which history is an interference. Miller's Paris, for example, is portrayed as the perfect medium of his hero's release. It is the Paris

of declassed expatriates, émigrés, failed artists. *Tropic of Cancer* conveys virtually no sense of Paris as a complex fact in the shared consciousness of people who live and work there. The book does not portray the way of life of Paris, but an idea of Paris where the raffish bohemian life seems the rule. In Miller's version, rootlessness *is* the way of life. (In Gottesman 248-49)

Since Val is fleeing from an inner malaise not so innocently associated with the clockwork twinges of his Brooklyn days, the stage upon which he acts his way out of puerile affairs merely illustrates the lineaments of his secular cells. And, despite his affiliation with some of France's most disillusioned libertines, Val's apocalyptic diction, with its ever thumping rhythms, continues to duplicate the jerky choreographies of the New World's technocrats: "Even as the world falls apart the Paris that belongs to Matisse shudders with bright, gasping orgasms, the air itself is steady with a stagnant sperm, the trees tangled like hair. On its wobbly axle the wheel rolls steadily downhill; there are no brakes, no ball bearings, no balloon tires. The wheel is falling apart, but the revolution is intact..." (*Cancer* 170). This metonymically glowing city which Val has besieged is a living organism in itself. It is full of lust: Val's own and the one of those automated lovers whom he had hoped to leave behind.

In *Bodies and Machines*, Mark Seltzer thus establishes a trinomial alliance among civil intercourse, collective imperatives, and individual longing—luscious commodities supplied by a 'culture of consumption' which perpetuates itself "through a coordination of the desires of the market and the disciplines of the machine process: through a coupling of bodies and machines" (58). For a supplier of sexual goods like *Tropic of Cancer's* speaker, however, such a liberal commercialisation of desire nullifies its self-gratifying potential. Val, therefore, cannot advocate his narration's ready-made decentralisation of yearning without first agreeing to give himself over to its merry-go-round pleasures. In *Stand Still Like the Hummingbird's* title piece, then, Miller begs the atomic generation to read between the lines of the prewar prophecies that have signalled the advent of a standardised universe in which the "machine was theirs and would come home to roost. It

would engender more machines, more intricate machines, more amazing machines, more machine-like machines, until the world and all its man-made parts became one vast interlocking machine of a machine” (194). This communal witness of a novelist wants his audience to realise that the Industrial Age’s celestial music of pinions and cogwheels has not ceased to play yet.

In “An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere,” the legendary ‘depth’ of Miller’s political views incidentally crops out: “I don’t need an explanation of our capitalistic society. Fuck your capitalistic society! Fuck your Communistic society and your Fascist society and all your other societies! Society is made up of individuals. It is the individual who interests me—not the society” (in *The Cosmological Eye* 162). Miller seems to think that his *laissez-faire* attitude—a form of ideological listlessness that has nothing to do with ‘noncommittal objection’—and his refusal to contextualise his autonovels’ sexual ethos both serve to assert his reliance on the canons of dissidence. No wonder his narratives foster a legion of confessional scorners whose thirsts for subversive brutality can never be quenched. Yet, in the preface to his *Writer and Critic* correspondence with Miller, William Gordon seeks to minimise the seditious effects of such condescending sketches:

In freeing sexuality and violence at the same time, Miller often gets considerable violence into his sexuality; but he avoids, as the Victorian world did not, sexualizing his violence. Some parts of the New Left have no doubt given up on this society; others hope to change it. Yet in spite of much talk about the individual’s well-being, these ends are being sought through group action. Miller, on the other hand, has always placed the responsibility for change on the individual himself. (xix-xx)

By continuing to validate the pre-established and perennial rules of Patriarchy, the *Tropics*’ carnal hunters, alone and proud in the horror of their Night, are blindly rewriting, in sperm and saliva, some outrageous tracts they can no longer decipher.

For Brown, though, the man who strives to circumvent the Machine Age’s short-lived pangs of irrationality is trying to subvert its covenant of frailty: “The rampant sexual promiscuity of *Sexus* is ultimately an expression of the individual’s desire to transcend the

severely limited possibilities of urban industrialized life on all fronts. Sexual repression—and Miller's wild inversions of accepted sexual behavior—becomes merely symptomatic of larger, thoroughly inhuman forces at work in modern culture" (77). In the same breath, literally, *Tropic of Cancer's* saviour of confusion can either camouflage himself as an idle insurrectionist who rebels by proxy—"What has all this to do with you, Moldorf? The word in your mouth is anarchy. Say it, Moldorf, I am waiting for it. [...] You are the sieve through which my anarchy strains, resolves itself into words" (10-11)—or become a quixotic idyllist who hurls 'mind bombs' at a lethargic human race: "The age demands violence, but we are getting only abortive explosions. Revolutions are nipped in the bud, or else succeed too quickly. Passion is quickly exhausted. Men fall back on ideas, *comme d'habitude*" (11). Jumping to and fro between metaphorical locales on the periphery of chaos, Val makes of intercourse a sentimental shelter where, once it has been exposed and disarmed, originality is proscribed and where, consequently, absent-minded customers spend most of their time trying on their uniforms of nakedness.

Walker Winslow, in "Henry Miller: Bigotry's Whipping Boy," compares the *Cancer* rascal's almost filial devotion to his corrupt environment to the pointless ardour of a dumbfounded automaton:

In the scenes that have been condemned you see the robot type of compulsive sexuality that arises out of lost individuality. Here sex is a desperate respite from poverty, regimentation, and competitive insanity—an impotent rage. Over all of this you sense that the writer is a partially resurrected figure who has begun to live like a man. He has a toe hold on freedom. He is free to mock the city and the creature he once was. Even when this man, this writer, seems to cling to the maggotty hive of the city because of the woman he loves, who is its captive, you sense that the seeds of emancipation are germinal. An odd specimen, this Henry Miller. (In Wickes, *Henry Miller and the Critics* 74)

While the emotional junk of *Cancer* protects its programmed destroyer from his own perfunctory fervour, it cannot prevent the cultural erosion which Norman Mailer associates with the narration's outbursts of phallic energy and semiotic fuel:

History proved to be on Miller's side. Twentieth-century life was leaving the world of individual effort, liquor, and tragic wounds, for the big city garbage cans of bruises, migraines, static, mood chemicals, amnesia, absurd relations and cancer. Down in the sewers of existence where the cancer was being cooked, Miller was cavorting. Look, he was forever saying, you do not have to die of this crud. You can breathe it, eat it, suck it, fuck it, and still bounce up for the next day. There is something inestimable in us if we can stand the smell. (16-17)

The phantasmagorical wasteland where all of *Tropic of Cancer's* emblems of cogency are systematically distorted and reduced to spring-lock pieces simply reflects the inner struggle of a man whose grasp on sedition is firmer than ever. Like Bosch's, Miller's adulterated 'garden of earthly delights' possesses an alluringly nightmarish quality: it features no faked atrocities, no euphemistic versions of the Womb's *danse macabre*. Only genuinely monstrous Men joined in one last embrace before the suspension of Time.

While Mailer's reading corroborates *Cancer's* aesthetics of sexual satisfaction, it only partially applies to the paragons of degradation devised by the following *Tropic's* appalled expressionist:

You could see the whole American life—economically, politically, morally, spiritually, artistically, statistically, pathologically. It looked like a grand chancre on a worn-out cock. It looked worse than that, really, because you couldn't even see anything resembling a cock any more. Maybe in the past this thing had life, did produce something, did at least give a moment's pleasure, a moment's thrill. But looking at it from where I sat it looked rottener than the wormiest cheese. (*Capricorn* 12-13)

As Mailer also remarks, the fright of societal estrangement that turns its narrator's carnal engines on is the empty premise of a forsaken syllogism of lust:

Sex was a function of filth; filth was a function of sex—no surprise that sex was getting ready for the automobile, and the smell of gasoline would prove the new aphrodisiac. Henry Miller's milieu was incapable of experiencing sex without the power relation to sex. [...] In sex, in dirty sex, the tastes are ground into the other's mouth and cowardice is expiated by going down. Beyond dirt is karma. (175-76)

The words which *Tropic of Capricorn's* storyteller aligns almost automatically in his madman's log—the 'Land of Fuck Interlude' (170-203)—remain, as cold and vile as they are, the only tools he can use in order to delay the apparition of his book's central figure of

desire: "This is Broadway, this is New York, this is America. She's America on foot, winged and sexed. She is the lubet, the abominate and the sublimate—with a dash of hydrochloric acid, nitroglycerin, laudanum and powdered onyx" (*Capricorn* 339). Enamoured of 'Her' (June, his second wife, the Mona or Mara of *Tropic of Cancer* and *The Rosy Crucifixion*) aroma, Miller has combined the multifaceted love provider and the pitiless libidinal machine into a female aggregate of destruction—a self-propelled castrator who fashions her own network of desire and around whom all wayward satellites of lust gravitate.



In "Max," a 1935 fable originally included in *Max and the White Phagocytes* and reprinted in *The Cosmological Eye*, Miller plainly acknowledges his resentment towards the mob's untainted egotism. Moreover, the mockeries that accompany the doleful rise of its emotionally washed-out protagonist enable its soliloquising storyteller to weave into the semantic flux of his desire a transgenic typology which operates on three simultaneous levels: identification, projection, and sublimation. In *Form and Image in the Fiction of Henry Miller*, Jane Nelson thus 'psychoanalyses' this playful agitator of a narrator whose obscene bouts with his heedless 'cronies' exemplify how "The acceptance of evil on which Miller insists is not a simple acceptance of the social horror he sees about him. It demands recognition and assimilation of the negative aspects of the self. Miller's male figures serve this end, for the male companions in the narrator's erotic adventures are projections of negative aspects of the I" (142). Like variations on a theme, then, Miller's antisocial sidekicks—Van Norden and Kronski, Curley and Osmanli—are all 'cunt-struck' monsters (*Cancer* 4) whose fancies of repossessing the Womb impel them, throughout the *Tropics* and *The Rosy Crucifixion*, to take part in the same tragedy of errors.

Since Val is laughing *with*—instead of *at*—his lewd associates so as to protect his (a)moral standing, he cannot utterly condemn their disruptive envies without first having to define the nature of his own disarray. His, therefore, are acquiescent testimonies which, in spite of their transilient properties, often end with one's civil destitution. For instance, the necrophilic frenzy of *Tropic of Capricorn's* Kronski reaches its climax when, while reminiscing over a cemetery venture with a former mistress's sister, he realises that his confidant's spiteful pranks conceal a fantasy of mental infiltration:

“[...] I thought to myself that I really was mad and to prove it to myself I decided to do something mad and so I said to her it isn't *her* I love, it's *you*, and I pulled her over me and we lay there kissing each other and finally I screwed her, right beside the grave. And I think that cured me because I never went back there again and I never thought about her any more—until yesterday when I was standing at the door. If I could have gotten hold of you yesterday I would have strangled you. I don't know why I felt that way but it seemed to me that you had opened up a tomb, that you were violating the dead body of the girl I loved. That's crazy, isn't it? [...]” (78)

Curiously enough, the twisted sense of betrayal experienced by Kronski leads him to blame the narrator for letting him cheat on himself. If this nihilistic doctor made pathological deceiver frequently succeeds in corrupting the narrative continuum, it is perhaps because Miller ironically sets him up as a model for persevering ugliness and sentimental ineptitude. In Kronski are sprouting all the germs of dissension which *Capricorn's* chronicler is feverishly nurturing in preparation for his final showdown. Thus, wearing nothing but a funeral mask decked with scars, the same Kronski resurfaces at Val's *Rosy Crucifixion* in search of a dignity he has never owned. Left alone in times of need, he winds up a mutilated and dispossessed beast hunting for affection on *Sexus's* red-light avenues:

The accident had not essentially changed him. It had merely altered his appearance, exaggerated what was already there latent in his being. The monster which he had always been potentially was now a flesh-and-blood fact. He could look at himself every day in the mirror and see with his own eyes what he had made of himself. He could see in his wife's eyes the revulsion he created in others. (333)

Yet, all in all, Kronski simply consummates Val's most apprehended fantasies. For example, by wedding one of his persecutors Kronski is merely surrendering his already alienated self to the hateful crowd whose petty torments and railleries he has agreed to suffer. By growing a shell of hideousness around him so as to divert the attention away from his inner frailties, he is turning their rejection into a loathsome decoy that will eventually enable him to defy his despisers. And, by entrusting his lust to a woman who hates him and starting on a doctrinal rampage, Kronski—like all of Miller's neurotic scapegoats—manages, through his sardonic 'manipulation' of direct speech, to 'take over' the narration for a while. In terms of diegetic interference, however, John Stymer, the majestic Idiot of *Nexus* who stumbles upon intercourse as upon a fit of elaborately passive onanism, definitely prevails:

“[...] Because the more I fuck the more I concentrate on myself. Now and then—*with her*, that is—I sort of come to and ask myself who's on the other end. Must be a hangover from the masturbating business. You follow me, don't you? Instead of doing it to myself someone does it for me. It's better than masturbating, because you become even more detached. The girl, of course, has a grand time. She can do anything she likes with me. That's what tickles her... excites her. [...]” (24)

Still, Stymer is only verbalising the deviationist distress shared by so many of Miller's Men—self-defined 'studs' whose own 'grand times' are often limited to visions of phallic grandeur. Some of them enrol in the 'fucking' infantry in search of an affective missing link and thus desperately await sanctity at the turn of an erection. Others, like Sylvester, to whose wife Tania *Tropic of Cancer's* preacher has dedicated his sermon on the mount of Venus, withstand a few blows for their believing in monogamy:

You think, you poor, withered bastard, that I'm no good for her, that I might pollute her, desecrate her. You don't know how palatable is a polluted woman, how a change of semen can make a woman bloom! You think a heart full of love is enough, and perhaps it is, for the right woman, but you haven't got a heart any more... you are nothing but a big, empty bladder. (62)

Val knows only too well that his idea of an orgasmic revolution cannot coexist with the indiscriminate assent and pitiable benevolence of his partners in jest: he therefore tries to prove himself right by stabbing them in the back.

Outreaching the sheer bravado of "Max," *Cancer's* apologia of the transgressive soul solemnises its inner contentions by featuring the specular clash between Val and Van Norden—the autonovels' epitome of self-absorption—and promoting their mutual fondness for ruinous tournaments of flesh. Infatuated with his own ideal of control, then, Miller's narrator spurns his peer's autocratic schemes: "In a sense Van Norden is mad, of that I'm convinced. His one fear is to be left alone, and this fear is so deep and so persistent that even when he is on top of a woman, even when he has welded himself to her, he cannot escape the prison which he has created for himself" (134). If he, too, is caught in the same pubic web, Val is nevertheless able to see that lust itself has become his and Van Norden's common dungeon of rapture, and that the more they fight for their coital rights, the deeper they fall. While Val is drowning his anxieties towards an active female desirer in his libidinal compulsions, Van Norden hopes that his dependence on casual encounters of the eager kind can dissimulate his romantic apprehensions: "[...] The married ones! Christ, if you saw all the married cunts I bring up here you'd never have any more illusions. They're worse than the virgins, the married ones. They don't wait for you to start things—they fish it out for you themselves. And then they talk about love afterwards. It's disgusting. I tell you, I'm actually beginning to hate cunt!" (107).

Such ironically overblown caricatures are normally expected to execute their discursive stunts and get off the narrative stage without asking questions about the moral purport of their deeds. Van Norden, however, is coping with an incapacitating form of autosuggestion which is progressively estranging him from the only human being he has ever respected—himself. He decks his virility out in a conscious attempt at counterbalancing the narrator's paranoid pleasures but the salacious boldness that plagues his prattle only makes of his disdain another emasculating choke chain. Besides, if Val's

quantitative performances are usually synonymous with ecstatic salvation, Van Norden's advertised sexual captivity only reveals a dread of interpersonal impersonality:

"One gets tired of chasing after new cunts all the time. It gets mechanical. the trouble is, you see, I can't fall in love. I'm too much of an egoist. Women only help me to dream, that's all. It's a vice, like drink or opium. I've got to have a new one every day; if I don't I get morbid. I think too much. Sometimes I'm amazed at myself, how quick I pull it off—and how little it really means. I do it automatically like. Sometimes I'm not thinking about a woman at all, but suddenly I notice a woman looking at me and then, bango! it starts all over again. Before I know what I'm doing I've got her up to the room. I don't even remember what I say to them. I bring them up to the room, give them a pat on the ass, and before I know what it's all about it's over. It's like a dream.... Do you know what I mean?" (108)

For Kate Millett, the narration's lingering in postcoital limbo signifies that the discursive mode itself has been adulterated by Van Norden's professed obsession for denaturalised genitals: "In so stipulating on a contingent and momentary union, Miller has succeeded in isolating sexuality from the rest of life to an appalling degree. Its participants take on the idiot kinetics of machinery—piston and valve" (*Sexual Politics* 300).

Val, however, does not discriminate in favour of emotional voyeurism for the sake of narratological transience: he is trying to fulfil his ideals of unmitigated consumption by learning to enjoy—and to make others enjoy as well—the sight of his flustered effigies of lust. That is why *Tropic of Cancer's* readers are therefore requested to observe, as through a cybernated peephole, the blind motions of Miller's pre-programmed 'servofuckers:'

As I watch Van Norden tackle her, it seems to me that I'm looking at a machine whose cogs have slipped. Left to themselves, they could go on this way forever, grinding and slipping, without ever anything happening. Until a hand shuts the motor off. The sight of them coupled like a pair of goats without the least spark of passion, grinding and grinding away for no reason except the fifteen francs, washes away every bit of feeling I have except the inhuman one of satisfying my curiosity. (147)

Almost by accident, then, Val blatantly confesses his lack of interest for these oblivious movements of the body—these mere projections of a mutual solitude—about which his narration goes on and on. He, too, is surrendering to this sensual world's passive ecstasy.

And, like all the resigned thieves of Love with whom he shares 'this mortal coil,' is secretly awaiting the helping 'hand' that will, one day, 'shut the motor off.' By reverting to the precise moments of Van Norden's periodical coming into his own, by going over the genesis of his physical lust again and again, Val attempts to inscribe his little clique's fear of libidinal entropy on the blank canvas of his sensual History. Like a few generic messiahs before him, he is seeking to convince himself that, by relying exclusively on the powers of his Will, he can harness an entire generation's quickening spasms of Fervour.

No wonder Val stumbles upon the same moralistic orthodoxies that have compelled many of his literary predecessors to fall back on mere adaptations of Passion's naked contract. His most outrageous charades thus feature the same polarisation of desire that has obliged Seltzer to annotate the culturally disruptive threat posed by the debilitating rhetoric of such a 'pretty hate machine' as Miller's:

In sum, the materialist *reduction* of the life process to matter and mechanics is also the systematic *abstraction* of the life process. The reduction of persons to bodies and bodies to sheer matter is the abstraction of persons, bodies, and matter to systems of representation, inscription, calculation and measurement. This is the double discourse of transcendental materialism and the naturalist machine. (225n37)

Van Norden's innumerable attempts at becoming the perfect automaton of sex are but doomed-to-fail 'shots' at secular actualisation. Moreover, they actually precipitate his withdrawal from the extant realm of palliative empathy outside of which such addicted 'buggers' like him do not even dare hope to survive.

In spite of the chronic Idealism that plagues them both from time to time, Val and Van Norden remain (almost pathologically) faithful to their transcendent belief in the self-deceptive nature of (sexual) Freedom. For Val, it revolves around his anxious anticipation of the Moment of Betrayal, the instant of utter lucidity when all the veils of Lust will come off. Van Norden's incompetence as a societal agent, on the other hand, prevents his induction to such higher spheres of Self-Advocacy. So, in one of Val's Dadaistic collages

of inverted paroxysm, this libidinous ruffian's dominion over his *rive gauche* 'land of fuck' vanishes as soon as the emblem of his superpotency collapses to the ground:

I can see him going at her in that quick, animal way of his, reckless of what's going on about him, determined only to have his way. And a look in his eyes as though to say—"you can kill me afterwards, but just let me get it in... I've got to get it in!" And there he is, bent over her, their heads knocking against the wall, he has such a tremendous erection that it's simply impossible to get it in her. Suddenly, with that disgusted air which he knows so well how to summon, he picks himself up and adjusts his clothes. He is about to walk away when suddenly he notices that his penis is lying on the sidewalk. It is about the size of a sawed-off broomstick. He picks it up nonchalantly and slings it under his arm. As he walks off I notice two huge bulbs, like tulips bulbs, dangling from the end of the broomstick, and I can hear him muttering to himself "flowerpots... flowerpots." (131)

Thus, because Val insists on pretending that nothing can impede his carnal Fantasia, all of Van Norden's hysterical excesses are forgiven and forgotten at once—dismissed as mere hypersexed slips of the tongue. Yet, by forcing its way through *Tropic of Cancer's* text like the nebulous 'it' Van Norden so fiercely attempts to lodge into what he apparently regards as Europe's vaginal Elysium, his phallic 'broomstick' consequently partakes in the rampant triteness associated with the narration's sexual warfare. Furthermore, by feigning to relinquish—perhaps so as to intercept some of the scorn aimed at his anathematised characters—his ascendancy over the telling of his life story, Miller encourages them to hold his narrative's dialogic areas to ransom. Such adamant lunatics as Van Norden and Kronski, for example, are always free to grab the plot with both hands and confine it to their own little psychodramatic daydreams. Even during episodes which are drenched in irony, a subdued and mildly disabused Van Norden is therefore allowed to steer the raconteur's diction:

The whole point about Bessie was that she couldn't, or just wouldn't, regard herself as a lay. She talked about passion, as if it were a brand new word. She was passionate about things, even a little thing as a lay. She had to put her soul into it.

"I get passionate too sometimes," Van Norden would say.

"Oh, *you*," says Bessie. "You're just a worn-out satyr. You don't know the meaning of passion. When you get an erection you think you're passionate."

"All right, maybe it's not passion... but you can't get passionate without having an erection, that's true isn't it?" (139)

Between the development of the sexual pariah's revivalistic typology and his silent contamination of the narrative mode, then, there is a proximity whose remnants Miller uses as the backbone of his prose. By throwing all societal notions of decency overboard, Val wants to establish his double standard of desire in accordance with the polarised version of the cultural system that has been imposed upon him. So when Van Norden, helped by the narration's tongue in cheek tone, demotes himself to the rank of a petty narcissist who indulges in slander, his earnest attempt at self-examination suddenly turns into a pathetic guffaw of derision:

The maid commences to take down the pictures and the photographs, mostly of himself, which line the walls. "You," he says, jerking his thumb, "come here! Here's something to remember me by"—ripping a photograph off the wall—"when I go you can wipe your ass with it. [...] Hey, you! Yes, you! Like this...!" and he takes the photograph, his own photograph, and wipes his ass with it. "*Comme ça!* Savvy? You've got to draw pictures for her," he says, thrusting his lower lip forward in absolute disgust. (126)

Thus, if such a seemingly flawless machine of perfunctory fallacy like Van Norden cannot hold on to his dying universe's autoerotic promises, the pallid pantomime which the rest of Miller's company of lascivious strangers cares to act out can only end in a standardised nightmare of self-defeating admonition.

In the closing pages of *Tropic of Cancer*, then, deserted lovers are being born as from a male parthenogenesis: the narrator's marriage withers away, Van Norden devotes his discursive energy to exclusive copulation with 'cold creamed' apples, and Fillmore abandons his 'knocked-up' girlfriend and leaves for the land of oblivion—America. Woman, whose vital fire initially inspired Miller to jot down his essay on Liberty, has been utterly obliterated from his man-made world. Even his ultimate glance at the Seine, often read as an optimistic pronouncement, takes on a sarcastic twist when collated with the *flow* metaphor he has previously borrowed from Joyce: "I am a writing machine. The last screw has been added. The thing flows. Between me and the machine there is no estrangement. I am the machine..." (28). A robotised alien to himself and to the sluggish

crowd, this solitary “Megalopolitan Maniac” nevertheless finds the courage, at the twilight of his *Black Spring*, to shout his refusal to conform to the wishes of others and, for a while, to forsake his transmutative Dream:

Tomorrow you may bring about the destruction of your world. Tomorrow you may sing in Paradise above the smoking ruins of your world-cities. But tonight I would like to think of one man, a lone individual, a man without name or country, a man whom I respect because he has absolutely nothing in common with you—MYSELF. Tonight I shall meditate upon that which I am. (242-43)

Heroes

For a long while I thought I had escaped, but as time goes on I see that I am no better, that I am even a little worse, because I saw more clearly than they ever did and yet remained powerless to alter my life. (*Tropic of Capricorn* 3)

Black Spring's conclusive call for a transmogrified singer of the self meets an unexpected resistance at the outset of *Tropic of Capricorn*: the 'major work' in which Miller addresses his life with June—the endless tale that will eventually be expanded into the tripartite *Rosy Crucifixion*—compels him to regress to pre-*Cancer* themes and styles, to adopt the retrospective stance that will thenceforth characterise his writing. Hence his 'one-book-man' fame: only the first *Tropic* has truly been composed in the present, has managed to capture his Parisian life's spurts of immediacy. All his other narratives, especially his travelogues on Greece (*The Colossus of Maroussi*) and America (*The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* and *Remember to Remember*), depend upon a flood of interwoven dialectical tenses, thus revealing a definite and irreversible longing for an all-encompassing past away from contemporary affairs. This chapter, then, will seek to shed some light on the methods used by Miller in order to transpose his mutational envies in a dialogic key that can be called his own.

As demonstrated by Nelson, the more Miller tries to understand his Histories in the First, the more his fictional persona verges on nostalgia: "The *I* of the *Tropics* is 'pervious and maculate,' ready for the experience of transformation. In *The Rosy Crucifixion*, the *I*

recalls the experiences which surround the transformation in *Capricorn*, and the sense of analysis and recall is pervasive” (150). In the later ‘autobiographical romances,’ then, the ‘I narrator’s’ spiritual abdication gradually comes to embody the author’s own shifts of perspective: the contempt Val has once manifested towards the terrorists of Love—Van Norden, Kronski, and Curley, among others—is, thereupon, remodelled into an idle acceptance of his all too human environment. At the end of *Nexus*, in a raving soliloquy, Miller thus surrenders his vanquished ego to the same crowd he used to despise: “‘So you have no answer! You’re pretending to be something which you’re not. You’re afraid of falling back into your old ways. You flatter yourself that you’re different, but the fact is you’re only too much like the others whom you glibly condemn [...]’” (295-96). Val’s self-critical revelations, however, are but apologies in retrospect. Only in utter misery does this astute reactionary leave all the underworld’s delusions behind and sees Paris burning with his *Cancer* desire. Only when abandoned by his petty clique of supporters does Miller allow himself to laugh at his personal inadequacies and to recognise that his grandiloquent ‘visionary’ writing has been nothing but a fraud.

Moloch, his account of an American megalopolis oxidised by its own madness, is an ill-mannered—and overtly hateful—cry for defiance which can neither bring comfort to the book’s “progeny of thugs and werewolves” (7) nor prevent its sycophantic pallbearer’s falling into deeper states of emotional lethargy. In spite of Dion Moloch’s pseudoaesthetic disengagement and the presence of the Rabelaisian word list, Miller’s primeval hunt for the genesis of passion turns *This Gentile World* into a barbaric realm that merely exults over “The world of the machine in a tempo of glorified planetary abandon. An orgasm of inorganic lust rising to a crescendo of atomic disintegration” (7). Similarly, the rancour *Crazy Cock*’s Tony Bring holds against his merciless environment possesses none of the emancipatory qualities displayed in Val’s forthcoming confessions. With its crudely sketched characters and its verbal brutality that serves no editorial purpose other than the one of shocking the bourgeois for the sake of it, this early draft of the *Rosy Crucifixion*

quickly falls short of its moralistic, though hackneyed, goals. Small wonder both of these attempts at literary fault-finding have failed to reach their prospective audiences: by relying on an omniscient narrator who must seek solace in the past in order to tell his 'Brooklyn boy' stories, Miller has only managed to silence the madman who has been shouting from the inside.

When even the Void's soothing despair is gone and there remains nothing else to do but to spit in the Seine, Val can finally let his inner conscience speak for itself. Prefacing the posthumously published *Crazy Cock*, Erica Jong depicts the emergence of a solipsistic champion in a nutshell: "Paris plus first person bravado equals the voice we have come to know as Henry Miller" (ix). This voice is Miller's inasmuch as it is one that squeals and shrieks for its own pleasure, that thrusts its truthful wavelengths into the guts and works its way to the cerebrum where it ticks until going off again. So, the exorcism of Reality¹ that leaves Val with the heavily loaded *Tropic of Cancer* in his hands paradoxically helps him to see through the code-free rules of his newly found gospel. Altogether spellbound by his fierce denial of all restrictive fallacies, he has become a survivalist who no longer fears to substantiate an anaemic confidence in self-actualisation: "Nothing that had happened to me thus far had been sufficient to destroy me; nothing had been destroyed except my illusions. I myself was intact. The world was intact" (102).

Miller's Hymn to the Free is dedicated to those Grand Desirers who, like Walt Whitman and himself, do not hesitate to travel further down the pits of their ecstasies. Unlike the bohemian poet of *Leaves of Grass*, however, *Tropic of Cancer's* wishful thinker, perhaps because he senses that his libidinal omnipotence is being put on the line, stops before reaching rock bottom. Nevertheless, his firebomb of a book consecrates the

¹ In *Always Merry and Bright*, Jay Martin explains how Miller acquires his "Je t'écoute! Vas-y!" attitude (324) while on the verge of an emotional meltdown: "By late summer, 1931, he achieved the gift of numbness and indifference which made both hope and despair seem irrelevant. Now, very simply and very quietly he knew that he had reached zero as a value. The past and the future seemed alike: he had achieved nothing in the past, he hoped for nothing in the future. He had only wanted to write, he felt now, in order to avoid life" (231).

ascendancy of yearning over thinking right from the start: "To sing you must first open your mouth. You must have a pair of lungs, and a little knowledge of music. It is not necessary to have an accordion, or a guitar. The essential thing is to *want* to sing. This then is a song. I am singing" (2). Miller's instinctive use of such a normative link between will and fulfilment accounts for this untamed romanticist's steadfast reliance on the ethos of magical realism. By acting first—and then standing tall—Val simply presumes that Liberty's promises of old cannot elude him much longer. He does not seem to realise that he only succeeds in living by longing because he once agreed to repudiate all of vanity's fancies, not because he has frivolously engaged himself on the path of 'sensual enlightenment.' America's forsaken man of straw has become a newly converted, middle-aged rebel who does not respond to contempt anymore but receives his contemporaries' abusive signals as mere artefacts of the hatred he has sown—morning-after souvenirs from the 'passing strangers' to whom, one day, he will address his incendiary epistles.

Despite its synaesthetic outbursts, Val's sociocultural deliverance therefore heralds an inevitable detumescence in loneliness, aeons away from the blunt actuality of his initial statement: "I had moments of ecstasy and I sang with burning sparks. I sang of the Equator, her red-feathered legs and the islands dropping out of sight. But nobody heard" (254). An outsider to Montmartre's Salons, Miller feels the need to found a virtual *brotherhood* of literati anyone who has ever written about Impunity is constrained to enter. Triggered by Nin's *Unprofessional Study*, the inclusion of D. H. Lawrence as first member of this purely conceptual club obliges Miller to rationalise his own creative ambitions. In "Euphoria in Paris: Henry Miller Meets D. H. Lawrence," David Stephen Calonne likens the *Cancer* expatriate's and the *Rainbow*-chaser's pursuits of arcane renewals:

The artist becomes the savior of culture, his faith flames Phoenix-like, for he stands in the most vital relation to the spiritual problems of his age. He carries within himself profound anxieties (as mirror of his "civilization"), yet has the power to transform, to transmute them into symbols of spiritual strength, integrity, and plenitude. Like Orpheus he descends

into death to save love and life, but he must have greater stamina and faith than Orpheus and not look back. (95-96)

As far as Val's figurative liturgy of transmutation goes, it is but the manifestation of a profane fear of oblivion—one that he shares with the other 'modern mystics,' Lawrence included—which foreshadows no truly promising signs of redemption. Besides, Miller knows all too well that the recurrent imagery of decay which satiates his narrator's violent hungers cannot give way to the 'semblance of a devoted future' unless he first agrees to make a one-act farce out of his little melodrama of survival. Only by putting the finishing touches to his book of broken hours during his 'winter of artifice' in Dijon can he relate to the pallid motifs of renascence depicted in Lawrence's works. Only by seeing his own battered individuality dangling over the Great Western Divide can Val understand that, for him at least, the Lotos of yesteryear will have to be grown out of spite.

Applying a 'medium is the message' rationale to Miller's confessional tales, John Parkin maintains that unspecified identities are embedded in the heaps of words his narrator assembles:

In religious terms Miller imposes on the clown figure an epic mask which makes of him the martyred saint of anarchic individualism whilst he still tosses off varied anecdotes, meta-texts etc., and whilst Henry may have looked forward to acquiring an authentic voice, Miller's authorial mode is one of ever more complex self-interrogation, "one of the primary distinguishing features of the novel" as Bakhtin describes it [note: in *Dialogic Imagination*] and as such an ever more prominent feature of modern fictional study. (*Henry Miller, The Modern Rabelais* 246)

Right from the moment of his novelistic birth, then, Val defines himself as the focal point of Henry's tales. Fostered by the desensitised crowd while lost to its suicidal conventions, the *b'hoy* whose cardinal sense of being has gone awry must decide whether he will follow or lead, whether he will altogether give up or make good use of the mutational powers that are bestowed upon him. If he, waiting at the crossroads of his lives, takes advantage of his privileged status as Chief Editor of Fabricated Immediacy, Miller's factional promoter of the self never ceases to remind his esteemed hack that, no matter which ways

his stories go, he will always remain a man wilfully stranded on his personal island of 'I narration.'

The generic evolution of the *Tropics*' transformational ethos dictates intratextual patterns whose legitimacy rests on an arbitrary, extratextual structure. While the 'rosy crucifixions' (*Capricorn* 322) Val inflicts upon himself help to punctuate his reveries with dashes of godlike ambition, they also induce the contemplative altered states that keep him away from his sentimental Reality:

Up to the present, my idea in collaborating with myself has been to get off the gold standard of literature. My idea briefly has been to present a resurrection of the emotions, to depict the conduct of a human being in the stratosphere of ideas, that is, in the grip of delirium. To paint a pre-Socratic being, a creature part goat, part Titan. In short, to erect a world on the basis of the *omphalos*, not on an abstract idea nailed to a cross. (*Cancer* 247)

As Edward B. Mitchell suggests in "Artists and Artists: The 'Aesthetics' of Henry Miller," the *Sexus-Plexus-Nexus* suite "is a trilogy which in one sense begins with the question of how and why to write, which in the course of the novel becomes transmuted into the larger question of why and how to become an artist on another level" (In Mitchell 165). Still, the conditions of Miller's emergence as a fixed-income *littérateur* do not tell much about Val's frantic attempts at turning himself into the perfect subject of his desire.

One must therefore look beyond the 'autobiographical romance's' half-cocked hype of portentous foolishness and pre-emptive slaying of Art's 'grand façades' in order to understand why Henry Miller deems it so important to tell everybody about his taking his former self by the hand, stripping him of his honour, beating him up, and abandoning him in a dark alley. In a 1961 letter to Barney Rosset, almost two years after the completion of his *Rosy Crucifixion*, the prodigal expatriate confesses that "In the process of delivering myself, of submitting to the discipline of writing, I have come to realize that it is I myself who was awakened, that my hidden purpose in writing the story of my life was to free myself of the devils that possessed me. [...] The game—of writing, living, being—has

come to be for me the end in itself' (In Martin, *Always Merry and Bright* 463). Immured in a looking glass cage where all metamorphic pleasures have given way to the typeset volutes of his revulsion, the reaper of lucidity assuages his appetite for loneliness with lullabies from the dead.



Miller's purgatorial pageant must be as hard on himself as it is hard on those to whom his injurious litanies are addressed—hence his narrator's taking refuge in his monotonous babbling of the same misogynous mantra, one that praises the acute profanity, selling of hysteria, and breezy kicking in the groin which he has once seen performed during Love's gory masquerade. Val, after all, is merely trying to get even with the petty rogues of envy like Van Norden who, after having deprived him of his taste for the gist of dawn, have shoved him in a semiotic dead end where no light shines. And even though it only partially explains his periodic going off his discursive path, the casual obscenity at which *Tropic of Cancer's* infantryman lunges also yields its share of sordid indolence:

When a hungry, desperate spirit appears and makes the guinea pigs squeal it is because he knows where to put the live wire of sex, because he knows that beneath the hard carapace of indifference there is concealed the ugly gash, the wound that never heals. And he puts the live wire right between the legs; he hits below the belt, scorches the very gizzards. It is no use putting on rubber gloves; all that can be coolly and intellectually handled belongs to the carapace and a man who is intent on creation always dives beneath, to the open wound, to the festering obscene horror. He hitches his dynamo to the tenderest parts; if only blood and pus gush forth, it is something. The dry, fucked-out crater is obscene. More obscene than anything is inertia. More blasphemous than the bloodiest oath is paralysis. If there is only a gaping wound left then it must gush forth though it produce nothing but toads and bats and homunculi. (253)

With its corrupt female genitalia and its aggregates of degradation, this monograph on decay often wears the stench of Brueghel's apocalyptic scenes. More so when, at the turn of a phrase, Miller deliberately stops the course of his p(r)ose and launches himself into

some static dissections of his cultural milieu which unabashedly evoke the nineteenth century *tableaux vivants* mentioned by Reynolds (215). In view of Seltzer's comments on 'relations of vision and supervision' it seems clear that Miller's almost obsessive use of an iconography of sociosexual stigmata throughout *Tropic of Cancer* exemplifies how "one discovers in the realist fascination with seeing, and not least in the spectacles of violence, and thrilled identification with representations, in the realist text, an eroticizing of power and of the power of making-visible" (*Bodies and Machines* 96). But, because he compels his audience to partake in his conjectural voyeurism, Val simultaneously neutralises his sententious ruling over what is being shown: one cannot conduct the sacrifice of lust while being laid on the altar.

Hence the writer's 'asking' the reader to accompany him, via the (not so) linear reconstruction of his narratives, along the process of his figurative creation. Yet, the first-hand fury that forces Miller to exchange semantic blows whenever he faces the Unknown often sets his so-called 'autobiographical' account spinning in another direction. His is a 'no censorship' covenant with himself which neither Henry nor Val can easily break. Miller's literary persona, however, cannot benefit from his sheltering indigence unless he paradoxically plays by the rules of his copulative complex, unless he finally ceases to believe that narcissism is the most efficient shield against tenderheartedness and oblivion the next best thing to insanity. For Leon Lewis, then, the fear of commitment initially experienced by *Sexus*'s hot-blooded partner accounts for a lack of temperamental integrity:

One of the reasons that the author was reluctant to marry Mona was his instinctive awareness that his freewheeling sexual aggressiveness was a method for blotting out the emptiness of his life. Without a real sense of self, he had to depend on sexual passion as a means for expressing himself and even rationalizing his existence. He needed the fix of sex every day to dull the psychic pain. (*Henry Miller: The Major Writings* 209)

So, by talking dirty to the World, Val, at least for a while, manages to save himself from the grip of passionate perplexity.

Thus, together with *Cancer's* ritual aggressions and the bitterly ribald 'pogrom of love' postures (84) that fill *Crazy Cock* to the brim, the self-destructive emptiness of *Capricorn* and *Sexus's* cataleptic brutalities all lead back to the communal strains observed by Millett:

Furthermore, as Miller reminds us again and again, obscenity is a form of violence, a manner of conveying male hostility, both toward the female (who is sex) and toward sexuality itself (which is her fault). Yet, for all his disgust, indeed because of it, Miller must return over and over to the ordure; steel himself again and again by confronting what his own imagination (powerfully assisted by his cultural heritage and experience) has made horrible. The egotism called manhood requires such proof of courage. This is reality, Miller would persuade us: cunt stinks, as Curley says, and cunt is sex. (307)

In order to become that madman on the edge of twilight which he has always wished to be, Val must therefore convince himself that his semisatirical attitude towards the 'Cunt' perfectly emulates the despondent radiance of his playtime buddies. On his journey to the heart of vaginal sorrow, this self-confessed pilgrim of deceit has to prove his allegiance to the dominion of men by brutishly taking his turn in their race for incessant, though indiscriminate, intercourse. By assuming such a 'ludicrous guise as Curley's, for example, Val expects to get acquainted with the festive terror of orgasmic incarnation that will hit him like a bolt and galvanise his drugged body until he will be 'blue in the face.' Too bad none of his cherished friends cares to warn him about the hurtful features of his newly found attire: at least he will not be naked and alone when laid to rest.

As seen earlier, Miller knows all too well how thin the line between the liberating and destructive sides of sexual representation is. No wonder he has always denied being the ghostwriter—the thesis advocated by Lawrence J. Shifreen and Roger Jackson in their *Bibliography of Primary Sources*—behind the hard-core sketches of *Opus Pistorum*. Unlike Val's most wilfully offensive trials of grace, the *Opus's* coprophilic fits of corporeal exploration do not make use of 'indecent' as a form of sensual enlightenment. They are but sordidly graphic exposés that merely corroborate, in the negative, Miller's "Obscenity and the Law of Reflection" breakdown:

The obscene has all the qualities of the hidden interval. It is as vast as the Unconscious itself and as amorphous and fluid as the very stuff of the Unconscious. It is what comes to the surface as strange, intoxicating and forbidden, and which therefore arrests and paralyzes, when in the form of Narcissus we bend over our own image in the mirror of our own iniquity. Acknowledged by all, it is nevertheless despised and rejected, wherefore it is constantly emerging in Protean guise at the most unexpected moments. When it is recognized and accepted, whether as a figment of the imagination or as an integral part of human reality, it inspires no more dread or revulsion than could be ascribed to the flowering lotus which sends its roots down into the mud of the stream on which it is borne. (In *Remember to Remember* 290)

Like the splendour of the lotus that, catching the eye, renders the dirt in which the flower blossoms less noticeable, the ethically and stylistically sound coarseness of language and shocking images that Miller promotes in his autonovels bear no resemblance whatsoever to the dialectic world they are supposed to transcend. If the obscene appears in 'Protean guise,' it is only because its detractors have paradoxically come to depend upon the State of Filth's prohibited pleasures for their carnal sustenance. That is why Miller, in need of a vernacular of his own, one with ramifications that extend beyond the reach of tradition, finds, in bawdiness, a bottomless well. Why, wanting to stun the easily affected mind with some high-risk lexical acrobatics, he must annihilate Beauty so as to fill the void left by the passing away of Literature.

Yet, unless he shall suddenly welcome the Machine Age's mellow turpitude, *Tropic of Cancer's* vociferous mourner of lenity has no other choice but to pretend, even though he has already given up on this sectarian sphere of resentment in which dotting mercenaries like him are automatically ostracised when they come forward, that Honesty's salvation resides in the suggestive prevarications he so faithfully continues to turn out. Paying heed to the braggart's centripetal gestures of subjection, Mayné deems his limitless musing in discharge a perfidy of the senses:

In such passages, the narrator, always in control, appears, instead of making love *with*, to "perform" sex *on* the girls he seduces. But of the seduction itself, nothing transpires in the narration. It is as though Miller does not have time to "waste" with seduction (and sensuality), as if he is only interested in the capture, in the possession (the "appropriation," Bataille would say) of these women, a possession which the narration accentuates by strongly implying an unfailing virility. And as the women he picks up invariably enjoy

having sex with him and ask for more, sex is a privileged way to gratify his narcissistic ego. But does he really meet these women? Does he like them as much as he likes himself? (81)

Because of Miller's peculiar use of first-person narration, such recurring bouts of sexual boldness frequently give the impression that the narrator's outbursts of ironical rage are actually aimed at his book's manifold sessions of fornication. More often than not, it is the very idea of 'seduction' conveyed by all its professionally promiscuous characters, Val included, that is under the prose's scrutiny. If *Cancer's* immodest storyteller does indeed fall for a glimpse of himself caught on a *maison close's* ceiling, he does not let such a dubious spasm of vanity—like the one that has already proven lethal for both Fillmore and Van Norden—go to his head. He knows that he must fight his craving for self-devotion with a sharpened sense of derision lest he, too, should be changed into a pathetic jester with no other ambition but to discover a gateway to the other side of the mirror.

Without a genuine encroaching upon civil prohibitions, then, Val's profligate fables remain as bare and delusive as the golemlike carcasses they portray:

One can thus conclude that Miller "obliquely" aims at getting rid of obscenity. That is why, ultimately, his fiction has so little of the erotic. As we suggested before, there is for Miller no one thing that is obscene per se; obscenity is a false problem. If this is so, it should be possible, as he does, to "accept" everything. The only problem is that, in accepting everything, he no longer takes into account what is violently and vitally obscene. If one pushes such logic to its extreme, one ends up in a world so inhuman that one would have to protect oneself at all costs from its latent dangers. (Mayné 106)

Once meaningful feasts of exchange, the copulative rituals perpetuated by the thumping idolater of *Capricorn* thus nurture a consequential solitude which his mute appeals to the Other cannot alleviate: "I know that we were conjugating the verb love like two maniacs trying to fuck through an iron grate. I said that in the frantic grappling in the dark I sometimes forgot her name, what she looked like, who she was. It's true. I overreached myself in the dark" (235). Once the malignant projection of an imaginary perfect self, the philanderer's virgin passion has matured into an organic screen on which some empirical

vainglories and autoerotic surges flicker: "Moving from house to house, window to window, my forlorn hope is to catch sight of a woman bidding herself goodnight in a cracked mirror. If only once I could catch that last look before the light is blown out!" (*The World of Sex* 146).

Now that Miller has decided to take part in Pride's tragicomic antimasque, nothing can prevent his losing his head over the creature of utter egotism, his own *Cancer* persona, which he has salvaged from his past. And since he has invested all of his rage, as well as his lunacy, in this survivor's cry for mercilessness, Henry wants Val's spiteful bellow to mean much more than a mere call to arms. Yet, as noted by Mayné, such a severing strategy seldom imparts more than a raving dismay:

If Miller does humiliate his lovers, never does he accept (never does he allow himself the chance) to be humiliated by them in return, and *a fortiori* never does he of his own free will humiliate himself. In his writings he seems to be doing precisely the opposite, to be using sex as a means of *avoiding* humiliation, of avoiding having to put his self resolutely into question. (83)

Seeing that his former caretakers have chosen to retaliate, Val has no choice but to crawl under the heap of sadistically reproachful sentences he has so carelessly piled up. By locking himself up in a cage of verbal abuse he hopes to dodge the loathing of others.

Thus, late on the eve of his 'rosy crucifixion,' Miller's devoted scorcher puts the blame on, alternately, the excess and/or lack of truth and/or consistency in his make-believe life by drawing the attention away from his own behavioural shortcomings. Hence his desire to have his sentimental seizures pass for courageous acts of Civil Disobedience: he wants the reader to forget that it is he who, in a frantic attempt at proving the world he had no need for safety nets, has systematically bombed all his potential retreats. And when the most sacred components of Val's fabricated persona have collapsed and the very substance of his character is suddenly at stake, this would-be sweetheart cannot but run

for cover like the coy wooers he has mocked.² Yet, in spite of Mara-Mona's rechristening routine and chameleonic fixations, there rises from *Sexus's* hunt for a volatile ego a bidirectional, though overflowing, rivulet of faked purity:

I was not aware, when I first knew Mona, how much she needed me. Nor did I realize how great a transformation she had made of her life, her habits, her background, her antecedents, in order to offer me that ideal image of herself which she all too quickly suspected that I had created. She had changed everything—her name, her birthplace, her mother, her upbringing, her friends, her tastes, even her desires. It was characteristic of her that she should want to change my name too, which she did. I was now Val, the diminutive of Valentine, which I had always been ashamed of—it seemed like a sissy's name—but now that it issued from her lips it sounded like the name which suited me. (165-66)

Such a forceful displacement—almost a dismemberment—of identity as the one ordered by Val's own Archangel of Destitution should have affected his life story's whole spectrum of dialogic connections. Yet, this ordinarily unmindful narrator, who is now stingingly endowed with a name that has forever been his, curiously continues to savour his chronic anguish of an ever changing milieu. It is easy to understand why *Capricorn's* narrator instantly weds this mandragora of a woman with whom, in a majestic spatter of consciousness, he has been cavorting to some Russian roulette fandangos. A most dedicated tutor, she will take him by the hand and, while strolling down the avenue in search of today's quarry or hovering over her casualties of lust, make him hear, for the first time, the sound of his inner voice.

² For biographical commentators like Martin, Miller's involvement in a 1932 'bizarre love triangle' with June and Nin forcibly elucidates his devising of a sublimated male hankering's onanistic tokens:

What were the two women for Henry except the image of *his* capacity to love and his need to be loved? What were the two others for June but an audience for whom she could play her parts, an arena for her continuous transformation—hermaphrodite and homunculus? What was deeper in the attraction of Henry and June for Anaïs than her desire to be perfect for both of them, as she was—secretly—perfect for herself? In the others each saw the androgynous shapes of his own desires; in order to strengthen himself, each invented the others' qualities as imitations of his own. (*Always Merry and Bright* 271)

Thus June toys with an affectedly ingenuous Anaïs who compels an amenable Henry to make of June a libertine freak feeding on desperation: the abstruse vendetta that befouls Passion's hold on Life has, between the blows, come full circle again.



Via its plea for 'self-reliance' on an Emersonian 'nature,' *Tropic of Capricorn* speaks of an embryonic conscience's progressive estrangement from the world in which fewer and fewer people believe in systems of moral escapism based on the desirer's mutational skills:

I wanted a metamorphosis, a change to fish, to leviathan, to destroyer. [...] I wanted that eye extinguished so that I might have a chance to know my own body, my own desires. I wanted to be alone for a thousand years in order to reflect on what I had seen and heard—and in order to forget. [...] I wanted to be that night which the remorseless eye illuminated, a night diapered with stars and trailing comets. To be of night so frighteningly silent, so utterly incomprehensible and eloquent at the same time. Never more to speak or to listen or to think. To be englobed and encompassed and to encompass and to englobe at the same time. No more pity, no more tenderness. To be human only terrestrially, like a plant or a worm or a brook. To be decomposed, divested of light and stone, variable as the molecule, durable as the atom, heartless as the earth itself. (69-70)

The seeker of delusion who is jotting these lines down has just begun to roam the alleys of his past. Despite his brutal coming around amidst the city's listless crowd, he does not yet fully realise the extent of his lover's betrayal. This man, seeing that his anger comes from within, will one day bark his bewilderment at the top of his lungs. Thus, in accordance with his grand scheme of ubiquitous confusion, the motives behind Miller's dwelling on the narratological implications of 'change' vary considerably from one novel to another. For example, the swift alterations of the sequential mode and unpredictable fits of lexical dementia observed in *Tropic of Cancer* do not share much with *Capricorn's* quieter but harsher renewals of the confessional genre, which, themselves, have little to do with the elusive rhetoric of such verbose pieces as *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* and *Plexus*. Nonetheless, there is a common denominator to all of Miller's books: each one is a monograph on one of Love's metamorphoses.

Whether to align himself with the American transcendentalist tradition or to initiate a whispering campaign against headlong amenability, Miller painstakingly strives to litter mottoes of aloofness as assertively esoteric as his "Obscenity in Literature" tirades:

There, in his own nature, is where transmutation may be practiced, where indeed it *should* be practiced, and nowhere else. And when man perceives the truth of this he becomes reconciled to all apparent evil, ugliness, falsehood and frustration; thenceforth he ceases to impose upon the world his private picture of grief and woe, of sin and corruption. [...] Looking at things in this light the word transmutation carries still greater significance: it implies that our welfare is dependent upon our spiritual understanding, on the use we make of the divine vision which we possess. (In Thomas H. Moore, *Henry Miller on Writing* 198-99)

As cogently heartening as it is, Miller's petition for the demise of priapic pretence actually contradicts the very paragon of psychosexual severance put forth in his 'dirty books.' Still, foreshadowing the narratological hook between *Sexus* (504-05) and *Nexus* (7) which will confer on *Plexus* its hiatal status, the canine metamorphosis undergone by *Tropic of Capricorn's* emotionally impaired narrator simply implements the theosophical prank devised by his muse: "It is Sunday, the first Sunday of my new life, and I am wearing the dog collar you fastened around my neck. A new life stretches before me. It begins with the day of rest" (344). Like Kafka's Gregor Samsa, this former petty boss at the 'Cosmococcic Telegraph Company' (25) is more intent on drawing a public apology out of his Maker of Errors than on seeking a cure for his transmigrative bathos:

It is so quiet in the room and so frightfully empty that I shriek and howl just to make a little noise, a little human sound. I try to lift myself from the table but my feet are too heavy and my hands have become like the shapeless feet of the rhinoceros. The heavier my body becomes the lighter the atmosphere of the room; I am going to spread and spread until I fill the room with one solid mass of stiff jelly. I shall fill up even the cracks in the wall; I shall grow through the wall like a parasitic plant, spreading and spreading until the whole house is an indescribable mass of flesh and hair and nails. I know that this is death, but I am powerless to kill the knowledge of it, or the knower. (*Capricorn* 242)

Miller's clerical antihero is an archetypal sensualist who, regardless of its death-dealing undertow, rushes into his regency of suffering like a madman. As a bestial incarnation,

then, he looms over the pale comfort of Beauty without even having to renege on his sentimental alibi.

Since *Capricorn's* fool for feigned promises is being cornered by his own self-deceptive tendencies, however, he can no longer yield to his so-called 'natural' instincts of lust without first assessing their innate validity. It is perhaps because, in *Tropic of Cancer*, Val's nondescript crises of homoerotic or transsexual projection have merely resulted in some emphatically tormenting blurs: "I find myself wondering what it feels like, during intercourse, to be a woman—whether the pleasure is keener, etc. Try to imagine something penetrating my groin, but have only a vague sensation of pain" (79). As reported by Dearborn, such a free association of anima and carnal restoration proceeds directly from the basic postulates of Otto Rank, one of Nin's psychoanalysts:

According to Rank, art grew out of primitive man's inability to make the connection between intercourse and birth; birth shook his belief that his soul could transcend bodily death. Thus man turned to the creation of art, which, during what Rank called the "era of sexuality"—the twentieth century—became eroticized. Thus too was born the cultural view of woman as a sexual being, a symbol of reproduction who disturbs man's conception of the world as a place where there is no real death but only rebirth and regeneration. (167)

These wide-open matrices that epitomise Man's dread of creative confinement invariably lose—at least for the likes of Fillmore and Van Norden, the grown-up infants of *Cancer* who have never recovered from the trauma of their own birth—all their powers of captivation as soon as they become full of a new Life. Moreover, enhancing Parkin's "*Sexus* is a love-story, *Plexus* virtually cuts out pornography, *Nexus* is arguably the Bildungsroman of a superannuated adolescent" compendium (214), Gordon alleges that "The character whom Miller presents as himself in *Capricorn* and *The Rosy Crucifixion*, where the most offensive passages occur, is not yet mature, and to an extent we are experiencing the transitional phase in which sexuality as a purely biological function passes into maturity and the emotion of love" (*The Mind and Art of Henry Miller* 27-28). His narrator's libidinal addiction exposes a craving for pellucid performances that cannot be

dissipated with a pelvic twist; he wants to revive the voluptuous imminence of his boyish infatuations in order to avoid the ambush of Vanity but ends up in a specular trance instead. By making of intercourse his escape plan, Val is marking the inner boundaries of his sensual cell; choosing to convulse rather than to concede, he therefore imposes upon his Dreamer's volition the obsolete irrationality of his lust.

The sinusoidal gyre of unrestricted aspirations that sustains Miller's alter(ed) ego consequently converts his regressive recollections into first-hand cases of wombed folly: by going over his life's earliest chapters, Val agrees to revert to the preconscious dusk in which he has once been lost. In his 'tropical literature' (*Big Sur* 161), particularly in the wilfully scabrous *Quiet days in Clichy*, this self-opinionated, Gargantuan gorgier of flesh eulogises his phallic and gastric gluttony. He even goes as far as to design in "Uterine Hunger" a parthenogenetic model whose female factor harbours the parasite of sex: "Women—they too seem like morsels of food. After I attach myself to them I devour them. I fuck my way through body, brain and soul, and then I split again" (in *Wisdom of the Heart* 188). Emulating the *ouroboros's* silent hiss (*World of Lawrence* 139), he can also turn himself into some synthetic beast of Tantric coition, one that is issued from a Siamese coupling of two androgynous entities and that digs its lair in the dirt: "What was life on the solid earth to us who were decapitated and forever joined at the genitals? We were the twin snakes of Paradise, lucid in heat and cool as chaos itself. Life was a perpetual black fuck about a fixed pole of insomnia" (*Capricorn* 229).

Even though Miller may think that he has become utterly indifferent to this kingdom of corruption in which he used to fit so well, there still subsists in his guts—if not in his head's—writing a certain fondness for the objects of his ecstatic paranoia. Thus *Tropic of Cancer's* metaphorical weight: with its endorsement of longing and collateral motifs of velocity, this book prevails as his narratological sequence's semantic nucleus. Transcending the limitations of Val's social history, its inaugural bodily stirs successively give way to some spiritual motions induced by the stasis of Dijon and, ultimately, to its

champion's wedlock with a Paris *apprivoisé*: "The sun is setting. I feel this river flowing through me—its past, its ancient soil, the changing climate. The hills gently girdle it about: its course is fixed" (321). At once slashed and drained of its opiate juices, the metonymically fluid city that George Leite revisits in "The Autochthon" has regurgitated an American Jonah onto dry land:

With one last draught inside him to carry him to another and deeper level he left the surface of this sea. And stood on a Bridge overlooking the Seine. He says he was thinking of his wife, but that was an evasion. For the truth was that for the first time he became aware of the Seine, of another level, a lower and deeper level than ever before reached. *Tropic of Cancer* was behind him. The last page was blank. And the creator, empty of desire; the whale cleansed of the last remnants of the Sargasso, was found by the world itself. A world he had dragged from the depths; still dripping, with its placenta hanging, but no longer wrapped in the bonds of sex. (In Porter, *The Happy Rock* 143)

There, by the river whose sullied waters will soon be turned into blood again, the self-serving victim of yore has refused to swallow the world's rank Eucharist. And if he knows that he has played his cherished ferryman's part for the last time, he is just not ready to admit it yet. He also knows that he will nevermore come up with such a fiercely uplifting and poignantly honest role for himself.

A newborn monarch to the barren province of consecration, this melancholy jester has seemingly forgotten how his story ends. Perhaps it does not.

Goddesses

I think how wonderful her face is, how it changes every minute. I never see her twice the same way. I see only an infinity of adoration. That's a good word for you—*adoration*. (*Sexus* 458)

This final chapter will examine these 'ways,' the ones in which Henry Miller's 'I narrator' idealises *Woman's Lust* and turns the sexual interests of his lovers into mere reflections of his own phallic preoccupations. The almost mythical Cora of his youth, for example, becomes the standard of ethereal perfection against whom all of his autonovels' female characters have to be measured. She also arises as the prototypical 'goddess' (*Moloch* 69) from whose ascendancy the self-sentenced 'Brooklyn boy' will one day try to run away: "She is completely mine, almost slavishly so, but I do not possess her. It is I who am possessed. I am possessed by a love such as was never offered me before—an engulfing love, a total love, a love of my very toenails and the dirt beneath them—and yet my hands are fluttering, forever grasping and clutching, seizing nothing" (*Sexus* 163).

Whether under the Night's spell or in thrilling lucidity, Miller's Val is seeking to avenge his crushed illusions by sanctioning the old and tarnished dichotomy between the Madonna and the Magdalene. In the retrospective *Book of Friends*, though, he eventually comes to realise the rather puerile nature of his insubstantial attraction: "That's where I spent most of my time—in Dreamland. Strange that I never thought of fucking her. Not that she was too sacred, too holy to be fucked. No, it was Love I felt for Cora, love with

a capital L that reached to the skies. And I never mixed the two—love and sex, which shows what an imbe[c]ile I must have been” (100). By ceaselessly insisting on the full-time Desirer's failure to alternate between sentimental and physical games, Miller makes it clear that there are but two possible courses of action for his ‘cunt-struck’ heroes: businesslike intercourse with prostitutes or lifelong devotion to the heart's elect.

And then there *are* his Junes: multifaceted enchantresses whose transcendental presences prevent Val's biographical chronicles from reading like dreadful parodies of commedia-dell'arte situations. The intradiegetic and extratextual ‘Her’ to whom *Tropic of Capricorn* is dedicated assumes a double office: she is, at once, the actively evanescent receiver and passively radiant giver of greed from whom Val filches his own vital hungers. But, as Gordon points out in *The Mind and Art of Henry Miller*, the narrator's compulsive urge to bring, as part of his sociosexual roadshow, the intimate and the secular together impels an imminent sacrifice of lust:

The loved one can become the audience for the work, the equivalent of the muse, to whom the work is addressed and for whom it exists. This relationship with the muse represents a natural contradiction to the extent that she is a real woman; for if she satisfies his artist's ego, she helps take him away from life, which awakens fear. If she draws him toward life, she creates obstacles in him for his work. And when his art ideology changes, the muse-mistress must be cast off. (54)

Navigating between Scylla and Charybdis, in Miller's case, has never been a problem. Besides, by doing so, he has repeatedly managed to dodge ‘authorial commitment’ in most of its forms and, through the spinning of his ‘confessional’ tales, to cast all of Val's imaginary conquests away from the tedious and calculated motions of everyday certainties.

Thus, as much as Miller's asocial narrator wants to institute a New Order of All Things Sexual, he still runs for cover every time his prized belief in the idea of an unadulterated passion based upon the ‘loved one's freedom’ faces threats of emotional routine. For *Tropic of Cancer's* professional hedonist, for example, to settle down would almost equate to give up on his dream of a self-satisfying community in which all bodily

implements will work together for the sake of this collective organism's pleasure. So, just before dispatching an emotionally enslaved Fillmore back to America, Val expounds on the Parisian carnal web in whose endemic license he used to luxuriate: "Going back in a flash over the women I've known. It's like a chain which I've forged out of my own misery. Each one bound to the other. A fear of living separate, of staying born. The door of the womb always on the latch. Dread and longing. Deep in the blood the pull of paradise. The beyond. Always the beyond" (290). In pursuit of what lies ahead, even though it is through glimpses of lovers from the past, Val—following in Van Norden's steps—often forgets to acknowledge today's offerings. Even actual symptoms of solitude do not seem to matter, anymore, to the predator who has smelled the gore of life: he will not feel lonely until the whole wild game has been laid to rest.

Since he has abandoned his long-term prospects of sentimental devotion, the neurotic valets whose oral fixations pack the autonovels feels the urge to be chastised in order to stay alive—hence his everlasting search for the one 'Venus in furs' who will be able to simultaneously praise and mock his feeble knocking at the door of glory. No wonder prostitutes play such a prominent role in Val's personal adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew*: even though they can freely enter and rule over all of Man's cells of desire, they remain symbolical prisoners of the retribution they have agreed to take in exchange for a shot at killing the agony of being. Lewis accordingly detects, in the pervasive misapprehension that encompasses such self-interested characters as Van Norden when in the presence of *Cancer's* hyperplastic dolls, a pseudofactual surrogate for their civil impotence:

The women seem to have magic powers locked in their bodies but the men lack the proper keys. The myth of the fertile, life-giving earth/mother female figure has been distorted so that woman is now an insatiable, self-absorbed, castrating whore. The myth of the male as a noble warrior and a pillar of dignity, integrity, justice and reasoned discourse has been distorted so that man is now a frightened, ego-inflated phallus without feeling or wisdom. (*Henry Miller: The Major Writings* 79)

One must however bear in mind that 'myths' appeal to Miller in so far as he can turn them into fawning allegories: by taking delighted souls along between the left and right banks of fervour, Val only seeks to confirm his status as the boisterous Charon of deadened copulation.

If *Tropic of Cancer's* seer of inanity, pretending to be closer to her 'realm of the senses' than anyone else, holds the prostitute's assertive sexuality on high, he nonetheless endorses her intellectual marginalisation through his mundane patronage: "And while it's very nice to know that a woman has a mind, literature coming from the cold corpse of a whore is the last thing to be served in bed. Germaine had the right idea: she was ignorant and lusty, she put her heart and soul into her work. She was a whore all the way through—and that was her virtue!¹" (49). Moreover, as Mark Seltzer stipulates in *Bodies and Machines*, the doxies at work in *Cancer* embrace more than a metaphorically ironic role:

The scandal of the prostitute or "painted woman" would seem to be her *unnaturalness* or *artificiality* (the artifice that turns biology to economy). But if the painted woman would thus seem to violate the recalcitrant association of the female and the natural, she would thus seem to exemplify the equally recalcitrant, if reverse, association—the normative link between the female and the cultural, the association of "aesthetics and the feminine." (65-66)

While Miller does not go as far as to present the 'harlot's trade' as an acquired taste for uterine plundering, the libidinal malaise that persistently brings such a codependent onanist like Van Norden back to the 'calculated calmness of the whore' consequently leads him to regard those ladies who tear the night apart as *nothing* else than commodities of candour. As Seltzer also remarks, the *fille de joie's* appeal resides in her specular transgression of the torpid crowd's projected proscriptions, and in the politics of delusion she has engraved in her flesh:

¹ Miller, normally, is cautious not to let such a semantically disruptive trace as a misplaced exclamation mark interfere with—or, rather, sabotage—the pseudoliterality of Val's verbal dissemination. This last one reveals a tongue-in-cheek pose which, incidentally, delivers a severe blow to the self-professed 'earnestness' of his narrative voice....

If the realist and naturalist novel frequently seems to require the figure of the prostitute, this is because the case of the fallen girl provides a way of a once embodying and bringing to book, in both senses, the desire to see and the project of making "the social" visible. For one thing, the compulsory visibility of the prostitute—the painted woman, who must catch one's eye—draws on (as Zola's *Nana* makes clear enough) an exciting theatricality or illusionism and a charismatic self-absorption and self-abstraction. (98-99)

Miller's 'autobiographical romances,' however, can hardly be compared to the humanistic odes to the common people to which Seltzer is alluding. If mention is made, in passing, of the syphilitic rabble that swarms through *Tropic of Cancer's* blackened pages, it is chiefly because it serves to typify its narration's carnal fatalism. Likewise, none of the book's innumerable paramours, not even the ones who wander about their own 'cities of the interior,' actually holds the hackneyed 'fallen girl' role. They all seem to have chosen to become requited providers of warmth in a world grown frigid with indifference. Similarly, one glimpse at *The Colossus of Maroussi's* 'woman at the well,' whose crude but unmitigated charms resurrect the aromas of precivilised rapture, suffices to take its beguiled narrator to the brink of idolatry: "All her powers of seduction had been driven back into the coffin of sex where, in the darkness of her loins, passion and desire burned to a thick smoke. Disclaiming all hope of seducing man her lust had turned towards forbidden objects of desire—towards the animals of the field, towards inanimate things, towards objects of veneration, towards mythological deities" (111-12).

Maroussi exposes a wild sensuality that reaches far beyond, while including it as well, the genital groping in the dark of Val's urbane nights. In Greece, Miller comes upon the essence of his own Ecstasy and, perhaps because it seems so naked and raw, is able to salute its restorative powers in and on his writing. His unexpected brush with this modest Mary Magdalene has left the solicitous pilgrim in a state of emotional bliss from which he will never fully recover—an unfortunate fate for a man who has just planned to dedicate the remainder of his life to Literature's grandest slaughter of Goodwill. Yet, if Miller's Grecian epiphanies brighten the cathartic nightmares of theosophical surrealism generated during Val's vivisectional banquets with the whores of Paris, the isolated and disassociated

female bodies that he—in the manner of Luis Buñuel's early cinema²—superimposes in his “Scenario (A Film With Sound)” rather take after the tortuous stances of Goya's martial agonies. Thus, adding the finishing touches to his frigid portrait of a stainless-steel dryad's miscarriage of Love, the omniscient onlooker of this loose tribute to Nin's *House of Incest* forever silences an actress whose lips have always been sealed:

Finally, as a dull, normal daylight breaks over it, we can distinguish the form of a foetus curled up in the womb.

The foetus fades out abruptly and we see Mandra climbing out of an enormous bed, her hands to her throat, as if she were choking. She runs to the oval mirror hanging on the wall and opening wide her mouth she coughs. She coughs again and again, as if something were stuck in her throat. Finally she feels it coming and she holds out her hands to catch it. She coughs again and there falls into her hands a tiny little heart, about the size of a pigeon's egg. (In *The Cosmological Eye* 106)

By imposing such vain apotheoses of simulated hurt upon himself, Miller's narrator chooses to remain seated on his ‘liar's chair’ and to celebrate his most painful delusions instead of attempting to outlive his prosthetic ideals and stargazing schemes. Hence his unconditional surrender to that (not so) remote area of the psyche where only the ‘insane's’ anamorphic bombast can convey a swearword's colour or the aroma of a missing heartbeat. He, too, wants to find out what it feels like to write without a safety net. Switching from the counterfeit pomposity of Literature to the genuine atrocity of Life, Miller realises that all text-book conventions must be drained from his prose. Still, in between the shapeless and derogative lingo of *Moloch* and *Tropic of Cancer's* lavishly lascivious manifestos, there is a rhetorical gap which *Crazy Cock's* point-blank lacerations of inflatable dolls can hardly fill:

Mute marble licked with eroticism, black ecstasy projected on screen-white fantasy. Hysteria. Hysteria of stone. Female stone shivering with music. Statue fornicating truth. Statue masturbating lies. Masturbation incessant, obscene... a rubber litany in a rubber dream. A hysterical woman with marble organs, a woman of marble with hysterical organs, a female stone spewing its guts is a fountain of fire breaking through ice. (201)

² Miller has recorded his enthusiasm for *L'Âge d'Or* in an essay initially published in *Max and the White Phagocytes* and reprinted in *The Cosmological Eye*.

Although they bring back remembrances of the Hermione-like succubus of Immunity with whom he had intercourse at daggers drawn, such self-inflicted pangs of glory cannot but taste of bitterness and defeat.

Notwithstanding, the shameless quadragenarian who suddenly grants upon himself the right to walk out on sense discovers that the decorative and tactful phrases which he has gathered over the years are no longer redeemable for a twinkling of prolix awe. He thus finds himself staring at the World with protoplasmic nightmares oozing out of his pupils and no words to describe what he sees. By teaching himself how to properly steal from his personal ordeals, Miller nevertheless manages to present his readers with a bite of universal ruin. By jotting down his lingering reveries, *Tropic of Cancer's* sleepwalker sets forth a mindful contemplation of his acetylene awakening:

Suddenly I see a dark, hairy crack in front of me set in a bright, polished billiard ball; the legs are holding me like a pair of scissors. A glance at that dark, unstitched wound and a deep fissure in my brain opens up: all the images and memories that had been laboriously or absent-mindedly assorted, labeled, documented, filed, sealed and stamped break forth pell-mell like ants pouring out of a crack in the sidewalk; the world ceases to revolve, time stops, the very nexus of my dreams is broken and dissolved and my guts spill out in a grand schizophrenic rush, an evacuation that leaves me face to face with the Absolute. (250)

In order to avoid the Modern Age's cultural vacuum and its backdrop of ineptitude, Miller has tried to win everyone over with a theosophical chimera of Daliesque proportions. But, by doing so, he has made of Woman a helpless commodity of lust.

Pleading 'no contest' to all counts of hallucinatory violence against *Cancer's* wives and maidens, the 'modern Rabelais' who lurks behind a screen of bluntness however denies having elevated misogyny to the rank of prosaic emblem:

Do I hate women? This is so strange. Not at all. To the contrary. What makes people ask that question sometimes is because I have depicted them pretty brutally and nakedly. I've often restricted love to the sex act—because I know better than anyone that love includes sex—but it's beyond it and better than it. But in writing that book and other books, being truthful and relating only my own life and own experiences, I had to tell what happened to me, and those things weren't pretty—weren't ennobling. (*This is Henry, Henry Miller from Brooklyn* 116)

Only unconsciously can the incurable *b'hoy* who has found salvation in the *Tropics* admit that, for him and all the members of his gang, *sex* and *the female*—as stated by Kate Millett—have always remained two interchangeable concepts. And unless one accuses Henry Valentine Miller of hating *sex*, this proud pauper of a man shall therefore never confess that, at least under his fictional guise, he has behaved like an abusive, vengeful despoiler. Given the peculiar ethical system elaborated for, and by, his 'autobiographical' narrator, the writer has perhaps also come to think that every torment inflicted upon the 'loved one' will forever be regarded as an act of self-defence. Squandered among his onanistic mirages, this Man's dreams of Devotion, then, cannot but shrivel and die.



Seeing that, long after each and every one of his nostalgic frauds have been exhaustively exposed, Miller's pragmatic vigilante decides to make his Second Coming in the minor scale known to the world. Hence his indiscriminate reliance on noncommittal principles: by occasionally taking part in the day's cultural warfare, this cosmopolitan jester of a novelist knows that he can always transfer his inquisitorial obligations to the cheerless courtesans whom he meets in his pudic trances. Some of these hired sirens, like the taciturn Elsie who is endowed with "a sort of impersonal personal cunt which she was unconsciously conscious of" (*Capricorn* 176), therefore contribute to publicise his belief in the Machine Age's infectious 'failure to communicate.' Others, like Mara-Marignan, the harbinger of gagged and apathetic copulation who bestows her name upon the accompanying piece to *Quiet Days in Clichy's* title story, endlessly stroll along the same dimly lit corners:

Whoever she was, she no longer had a name. She was just a woman, bruised, badgered, broken, a creature beating its helpless wings in the dark. She wasn't addressing anyone, least of all *me*; she wasn't talking to herself either, nor to God. She was just a babbling wound that had found a voice, and in the darkness the wound seemed to open up and create a space around itself in which it could bleed without shame or humiliation. (75)

An unusual sight in Miller's oblivious universe, the wandering narrator of this otherwise merely graphic novella is, for a while, actually caught listening to a girl's utterance which nobody has even bothered to hear. Soon enough, though, Mara-Marignan goes back to the (not so) simple vows of self-abuse which her partner in folly is forcing her to take.

Thus, it is Miller's conceitedly heinous tendency to transpose his nihilistic dogmata of listlessness into schematic ebbs of abatement that Millett castigates:

Miller staves off the threat of an actual sexual revolution—woman's transcendence of the mindless material capacity he would assign her—through the fiat of declaring her cunt and trafficking with her only in the utopian fantasies of his “fucks.” That this is but whistling in the dark is demonstrated by his own defeating experience with Mara, and, even more persuasively by the paralyzing fear which drives him to pretend—so that he may deal with them at all—that women are things. (312)

As the outgoing manager of the Emporium of Cumbersome Pleasures to which are sent, when deemed not close-lipped enough, all of his friends' used luxuries of lust, Val need not fear libidinal bankruptcy. No unforeseen shortage of vintage casualties can threaten his control-oriented racket as long as this boisterous teller of gender-role fables will be calling the dialogic shots. His fatuously elated warning address to ‘all and sundry’ cannot be more explicit: unless Woman acquiesces to have her Nakedness exposed and consumed by the fires of male desire, she cannot contend for a Voice of her own. *Tropic of Capricorn's* readers must therefore keep in mind that Miller's dismissal of second-rate instances of venereal soberness only means one thing: he will rather see his narrator linger in clinical despondency until the termination of his literary exile than have his mistress's doctrine of sealed moves imposed upon him. Moreover, the concern his proselyte of fervour from the ‘Land of Cockaigne’ (*Big Sur* 129) feels for Elsie's ingrained equanimity—the temperamental mutiny that kindles a stillness of the senses—rears a somatic tension which neither he nor ‘the girl upstairs’ can fight:

She was probably the best fuck I ever had. She never once opened her trap—not that night, nor the next night, nor any night. She'd steal down like that in the dark, soon as she smelled me there alone, and plaster her cunt all over me. It was an enormous cunt, too,

when I think back on it. A dark, subterranean labyrinth fitted up with divans and cosy corners and rubber teeth and syringas and soft nestles and eiderdown and mulberry leaves. I used to nose in like the solitary worm and bury myself in a little cranny where it was absolutely silent, and so soft and restful that I lay like a dolphin on the oyster banks. (*Capricorn* 177)

Long after all of the speaker's sycophantic litanies have been descried and discarded and the inexplicable magic of his lunacy has given way to more rhetorically emptied chitchats, only one categorical assertion remains vibrantly legible: Woman is at her best when She does not exist. Not since his baptismal sunbathing under the sulphurous skies of *Cancer's* Mona has Miller's narrator let himself be, when in the company of such semen-thirsty warmongers, so thoughtlessly caught off his guard. Never, until his ultimate rampage on the limits of Dusk, will this guilt-ridden forsaker of pardon have his deicidal strategies cut for him again.

At the close of his egomaniacal journey, then, the dens of vainglory which Val has customarily built for himself all curiously turn into immensely polluted, if comfortable, stalls. Furthermore, his evenings spent at the Fair of Coition suddenly become an alluring gaol from which he can no longer venture away, lest he should forget how to find its secret entrance. Val, however, need not worry: he has been lost in it for years. In "The Pitching of Love's Mansion in the *Tropics* of Henry Miller," Alan Friedman explains how this starry-eyed mercenary is able to ionise the targets of his covetousness:

The Miller of the *Tropics*, then, is a man who has trained himself to care for no one—and rather than run the risks of emotional involvement attendant upon normal intercourse, he reduces all such contact to the simply sexual. Concomitantly, when every woman becomes a whore and every whore a single anatomical feature, the process, as Miller has suggested, is a lie, or rather, the poetic technique of synecdoche. Like food, then, the simple animalistic response to sexual stimulus serves as a safe standard, for it actually involves only a minute fraction of the real personality buried beneath the brutish exterior. (In Mitchell 147-48)

Still, since Miller's supposedly harmless panderer has already been told about the fib of love-making, there must be more to his obstinate attempt at crossing the channel of delusion than meets the eye. Perhaps it reveals why he unexpectedly feels compelled to

broadcast the tales of his lifelong discontent. Perhaps it speaks of his unmitigated belief in the ethos of disaster, one that has earned him the right—a privilege which his autonovels' estranged 'cunts' will never get to enjoy—to brag about his being always able to discern, even through the heavy brumes of postorgasmic bliss, the modulating contours of sentimental Fallacy. On the day of Val's *Cancer* nativity, then, some self-reliant genitals set ablaze a make-believe realm in which monogamous *love* and polygamous *sex*—though both continue to be subjected to the speaker's active voyeurism—are relegated to distinct spheres. A quarter of a century later, disengaging his fictional alter ego's summons of rebirth from the thrusting kinesics of Paris's Van Norden and New York's Kronski, Miller formulates, in his 'revised edition' of *The World of Sex*, his own peculiar theories 'on the origin of species:'

No matter how attached I became to a "cunt," I was always more interested in the person who owned it. A cunt doesn't live a separate, independent existence. Nothing does. Everything is inter-related. Perhaps a cunt, smelly though it may be, is one of the prime symbols for the connection between all things. To enter life by way of the vagina is as good a way as any. If you enter deep enough, you will find what you seek. But you've got to enter with heart and soul—and check your belongings outside. (107)

Mystified by his exclusion from the Earth Mother's greatest scheme, the essayist of aphasic spoliation thus scornfully pictures the natal gate as a bidirectional canal where, either to join life or to enjoy a 'little death,' souls strive to pass.

Delighting in paradox, Miller's novelistic double makes sure that none of his female partners in luridness evades the chamber of subservience in which he, too, has locked himself up. And now that the march of his Anima has come to a halt—and his brittle sense of the self has been laid out of harm's way—Val can safely resume his hagiographic quest for moral resistance. While she is praising Miller's stylistic flaunting in her preface to *Crazy Cock*, Erica Jong mentions in passing that the sappy narrator of *Tropic of Cancer* "liberates himself, becomes the vagabond, the clown, the poet, but the open road he chooses is *never* open to the other sex" (ix). Even when he lets himself fall for the solemn

but menacing Beauty of his mistress, Val, either by undermining her influence over the narration or by putting the leash on her sexual impulses, never fails to assert his libidinal sovereignty over her desires. Consequently, the 'object' of his courtesy always ends up in the middle of a vast, brightly illuminated operating theatre where, after her hands and feet have been fastened and her mouth conveniently gagged, she is soon sliced into fashionably prepacked bits of passion destined to be shipped around this carnal world in individually wrapped, oven-ready servings. Thus, because of the narrowness of the typological frameworks that surround him, *Nexus's* drinker of dross comes to lean extensively on a prostrate iconography of physical fragmentation:

Any portion of her body served to inflame me. Her personality was as much in her left teat, so to speak, as in her little right toe. The flesh spoke from every quarter, every angle. Strangely, hers was not a perfect body either. But it was melodious and provocative. Her body echoed her moods. She had no need to flaunt it or fling it about; she had only to inhabit it, to *be* it.

[...] As the months and years went by this body went through all manner of changes. At times it grew taut, slender, drumlike. Almost too taut, too slender. And then it would change again, each change registering her inner transformation, her fluctuations, her moods, longings and frustrations. But always it remained provocative—fully alive, responsive, tingling, pulsing with love, tenderness, passion. Each day it seemed to speak a new language. (173-74)

And since he has already become addicted to the deadening effects of Mona's narcotic affection, Val can no longer muster up the courage to admit that, unless they mirror his own hankerings for reformation, her galvanic features mean nothing to him.

Hence the numerous beacons of mercantile concupiscence that Miller transmutes into his *Rosy Crucifixion's* figures of adulterated industrialism: transfixed among those is the overtly possessive Maude who, as an electric sundew caught under the Dadaistic scalpel of *Sexus's* opening sections, is forced to take in Val's wasted implement of lust: "She's opening and closing like a flower. It's agony, but the right kind of agony. Flower says: Stay there, sonny boy! Flower talks like a drunken sponge. Flower says: I do take this piece of meat to cherish until I wake. And what says the body, the independent hoist

moving on ball bearings? Body is wounded and humiliated. Body lost its name and address temporarily" (84). A similar floral trope blossoms later on, this time with a Yeatsian spin, stating that "The irresistible creature of the other sex is a monster in process of becoming a flower. Feminine beauty is a ceaseless creation, a ceaseless revolution about a defect (often imaginary) which causes the whole being to gyrate heavenward" (252). All in all, Miller's haphazard walking about his herbarium of helplessness merely serves to prove that Val does not care whether his present-day concubine's hypodermic meandering kill her or not. Small wonder this bucolic myth maker, holding on to some synecdochic dreams in order to make it through the dead of his Night, has to turn himself into an hourglass heresiarch: only by quieting down his urge for the next hit of Her can he aspire to be healed again.

Prior to his late complacency in his 'Land of Fuck' voluptuous verdigris, Miller has seldom failed to wink at the sordid irony exacted from his ill-fated amities. Even the solemnity which is usually attached to his phallus gives way, under the narration's nonsensical pressure, to sarcastic allegories of delusion and estrangement: "And when I said about Veronica that her laugh would break down the most 'personal' hard on imaginable I meant it: she would break down the *personal* erection and hand you back an impersonal one that was like a red-hot ramrod" (*Tropic of Capricorn* 184). And while this puppeteer of delight endeavours to outwit his vernacular fancies with a catching titter, his appointments with his jaunty accomplices threaten to subvert the 'Interlude's' farcical subversion itself:

They say a stiff prick has no conscience, but a stiff prick that laughs too is phenomenal. The only way I can describe it is to say that when she got hot and bothered, Evelyn, she put on a ventriloqual act with her cunt. You'd be ready to slip it in when suddenly the dummy between her legs would let out a guffaw. At the same time it would reach out for you and give you a playful little tug and squeeze. It could sing too, this dummy of a cunt. In fact it behaved just like a trained seal. (183)

Nevertheless, there still remains laughter on the eve of this convicted harlequin's destitution. By attempting to make a fetish of such a no-holds-barred joust of seduction, Miller's narrator is hurling fatal promises of faithfulness at some wilfully gullible pets of panting who, tamed and muzzled in their silk stockings, have nothing else to do but chuckle their lives away.



Miller, simply conceding that “It was under Kronski's influence that Mara decided to change her name again—from Mara to Mona” (*Sexus* 154), carefully omits to expose the actual motives behind the almost accidental rechristening of the autonovels' epitome of seduction. If such an expeditious substitution challenges one's taste for narratological transparency, it also renders the diegesis more liable to its collateral instances of self-induced regeneration. Nelson, in her Jungian analysis of the *Tropics*, examines the potentially catalytic effects of such a sudden change:

As Mona, she appears only briefly in *Cancer*, rising out of a “sea of faces” (and images which suggest the elementary Archetypal Feminine), sinking into the Gorgon figure in the cheap Paris hotel, her hair alive with lice. [...]

In *Capricorn*, however, the transformative possibilities of the Mara figure are clearer, although the negative and destructive elements in the archetype remain dominant. Her name in this second confession is Mara, a traditional name for her negative roles—succubus, whore, witch. (90)

In between the writing of the two *Tropics*, Miller has taught himself how to channel his vital anger: departing from the injuriously unrehearsed, but feverishly liberating, assaults of *Cancer*, he has entirely remodelled his *Capricorn* heroine so as to make of her, even of ‘Her,’ another plausibly despicable target for his arsonist of Fervour. And, now that Val has managed to turn his partner into a self-regulating masterpiece of libidinal engineering, he can playfully let her choose her own name.

The woman who jilts *Sexus's* unhinged barker at the altar of sentimental stealth obviously does not require her mates to answer for their wanton ways. Yet, by allowing herself to drink from the chalice of depredation whose rim no other human lips have ever touched, this reptilian and ectomorphic Mona knows that she is corroding her synthetic features from the inside. In *Always Merry and Bright*, Martin pictures Miller's second wife June, the flesh and blood Dark Lady whom Widmer has labelled the "machined American love goddess" (*Henry Miller* 46), as a phoenix-like predator under a swanstruck Leda guise: "She was always entering the flames yet always rising from the ashes, clothed in an asbestos robe. She complained: 'people come, and they suck the life out of me to bring life into themselves.' But this was absurd. In her stiffly starched dotted swiss dress, her figure full and her throat columnar, she was magnificent—as if she herself had dined on the lives of others" (82). Thanks to the 'seven-year itch' shared with June, Miller has been a witness—and, on occasion, an accomplice—to some of History's finest abductions of Love. In his 'autobiographical romance,' however, his rather pejorative version of himself almost too conscientiously insists on mentioning that he has been the first one to step in after the kill. Perhaps Miller wants to lose sight of the fact that, without the unyielding faith of the feline mythomaniac whose fabricated truths have, both materially and emotionally, sustained him during his chrysalidal days, his tardily born bard would never have quit mumbling the same dismal dirge again and again.

Val's earliest blueprints of his automated lustmonger already show a strong, street-smart girl who looks twice her age but can still personify Innocence, who is privy to Time's little secrets but prefers to lie for pleasure's sake. A far cry from the "Mask of a mask" and "Sphinx and Chimera joined in a protean act" (19) paradigms of deceptive duplicity which *Crazy Cock's* Hildred barely externalises, the satori-like alighting of *Tropic of Capricorn's* Mara—who must be "associated with the negative samsara wheel: Mara is the name of the prison of death" (Nelson 99) burns its way into her berated inamorato's prose. Casting her cogent spell of carnality upon *Capricorn's* 'Amarillo Dance Hall' floor,

she emerges from the crowd with her teeth sharpened for the feast and her claws ready for the catch. Living by and for the eye, this daughter of the Night can, in a split-second, rearrange her past and transpose it into her next conquest's future. Hooked on specular metonymies and camouflaged catharses, Mara revels in riding the microcosmic booster of mimesis into which Miller's whole '*historia calamitatum*' has evolved:

Even her body went through a radical change, not once but several times. [...] She changed like a chameleon. Nobody could say what she really was like because with each one she was an entirely different person. After a time she didn't even know herself what she was like. She had begun this process of metamorphosis before I met her, as I later discovered. [...] She lived constantly before the mirror, studying every movement, every gesture, every slightest grimace. She changed her whole manner of speech, her diction, her intonation, her accent, her phraseology. She conducted herself so skilfully that it was impossible even to broach the subject of origins. (*Capricorn* 233)

Still, the mutinous woman who holds an opiate cloudland in her arms so as to alleviate the next morning's sorrow cannot contemplate dropping her veils of enchantment unless she first accepts to face the deleterious cycle of her (be)longing.

Miller's famished beast of sex—whose suave hunts and cunning ways have helped to confer upon his autonovels their narrative shapes—also needs, from time to time, to reassess the purport of her own carnal demands. Because, even though Val has, consciously or not, agreed to provide her with a ceaselessly burning anger from which she is allowed to steal at will, the unbroken communion of bodies and souls which his hunter-killer mate has been asking in return appears to be, even for such a fervent preacher of benevolence as he, quite an enormous price to pay. As the *Rosy Crucifixion's* monomaniacal Mona strives to fasten shooting stars on a murky backdrop of lust, she simultaneously takes on a fluttering pose so as to have her anamorphic portrait painted over their hyperbolic trajectories:

Perhaps that mysterious quality of Mona's lay not in obscuration but in germination. True enough, the contours of her personality were not sharply defined, but that was no reason to accuse her of falsity. She was mimetic, chameleonesque, and not outwardly, but inwardly. Outwardly everything about her was pronounced and definite; she stamped her impress upon you immediately. Inwardly she was like a column of smoke; the slightest pressure of

her will altered the configuration of her personality instantly. She was sensitive to pressures, not the pressures of others' wills but of their desires. (*Sexus* 403-404)

Whether in chains with a back-room fondler or hopping on Aberration's fringe, this imperious actress who is still waiting for the part worthy of her life always manages to issue a stream of soothing forgeries in order to satiate her part-time wooers' search for the Truth. Yet, when confronted to the 'polymorph perverse' Stasia of *Nexus* (48) and her dialectic magnification of laxity, the Medusan mistress for whom *to adore* means *to emulate* candidly re-enacts the artificial bathos of "Scenario (A Film With Sound)," the *Un chien andalou* spin-off whose oneiric montage and mechanised projections flicker on the silver screen of its narrator's neurosis: "We see in the mirror not the face of Alraune, but the face of Mandra, and as we regard it intently the face of Alraune glides over Mandra's like the moon passing over the face of the sun; there is a blur and then the faces fuse and we have a composite face of Mandra and Alraune" (in *The Cosmological Eye* 85). Such an annular eclipse of somatic languor cannot however supersede the perennial lie of Life unless it first cleaves through Val's machine-gun metempsychosis of artifice like a razor blade through an eyeball.

Besides, the vacuity of the senses with which Mona's desecrated comforters always end up flirting merely functions as a metaphorical decoy. It conceals a disturbingly downplayed malaise of fleshly lore whose effects on the narration's unfolding are as pernicious as they are seminal. Val's noxious volition, for example, becomes, in the light of his Greenwich Village Lorelei's temperamental torpor, a dialogic wasteland where no one cares to tread. Borne on the same ground-glass circus where anthropophagic tournaments have once been held, Stasia's heuristic confession finishes to strip Mona of her preternatural aura: "Me? I'm just another piece of the unreality she creates around her. Or a mirror perhaps in which she catches a glimpse of her true self now and then. Distorted, of course'" (*Nexus* 54). Mona's, then, is a centrifugal ego which, when it gets hold of some sex-starved suitors, sends them on a customary Grand Tour of Herself that

invariably ends with her placid disposal of their charred remains. Hers is the Dream's bubonic embrace, a restorative falsity of the body and the soul which she freely hands out to those who have forgotten how to summon their own lies. Like the (e)motionless wanderer of *Quiet Days in Clichy* who admits that his "life seems to have been one long search for *the Mara* who would devour all the others and give them significant reality" (56), Val knows that he will never evade the monogynous system of desire which he has devised for himself. Neither will he overthrow its sublime monarch, whose emotional features are regularly remodelled in order not to jeopardise her social standing, and around whom his prospects of passion gravitate.

Yet, in between the first and last pages of his 'autobiographical romance,' Val has succeeded in unearthing several occurrences of carnivorous illumination. As underlined by Mayné, Miller's disclosure of semantic inadequacies, as well as the correspondingly inchoate materialisation of his muse are mere vestiges of his American *b'hoy's* journey into self-absorption:

Instead of evoking the ecstatic moments in which the lovers, in losing themselves, destroy each other and the community they constitute, Miller takes refuge in a torrential flow of metaphors in which Mona disintegrates into other women Miller has known, but also into parts of women, aspects of women, animals, and finally into practically everything that comes to his mind; once again, he takes refuge in a mythical reality of a narcissistic type: "the endless space of sex" [...]. (86)

When all his venerated women commingle into One, when every single word fosters its own parallel universe, the 'expatriate-narrator' has no choice but to renounce his literary throne and to bring his benumbed persona to his knees. Safely hidden behind his mask of indifference, Miller is very much aware that his antihero's ceaseless spitting at the face of Doom has never fooled anybody. By choosing to stand in front of the necropolis of modern sex with his ears wide open, he has therefore agreed, for better for worse, to forever listen to the grieving mob's howls rather than to some comfortingly harmonious, but sickeningly vain, Music of the Spheres.

Conscientiously partaking of a blissful era's gyral transience, *Tropic of Capricorn's* metalanguage coils around 'Her' onomatopoeic inflections like a phraseological *ouroboros* feeding on affective excision:

She had the gift for transformation; almost as quick and subtle she was as the devil himself. [...] It was amazing how marvelously I learned to take my cue; no matter how swift the metamorphosis I was always there in her lap, bird lap, beast lap, snake lap, rose lap, what matter: the lap of laps, the lip of lips, tip to tip, feather to feather, the yoke in the egg, the pearl in the oyster, a cancer clutch, a tincture of sperm and cantharides. (230-31)

Ironically enough, Miller has not desired to learn, from his own commando writing, how to negotiate the fictional building anew of his (love) life: when facing his stenographic recollections of 'Her,' his exalted fabulist cannot but helplessly let a few loose words of disarray slip out of his, otherwise empty, hands. If Val has somehow fallen short of the 'gold standard' of sensual release set on the eve of his pre-*Cancer* ego's demise, Henry, however, has more than satisfactorily acquitted himself of his 'doing away with Literature' task. Miller has not left any ill-defined artefacts of glee behind: all of them have been eradicated, blown to bits like the lovelorn androids from which they had sprung.

By refusing to pay attention to the customary meanings of the phrases he so liberally juxtaposes, Miller bathes his syntonic champion in a cacophonous radiance of immunity. By espousing the suffering of the earth, he becomes one with the Woman who will soon be anathema to him. And while some of his most poignant scenes have come out of this cataclysmic work-in-progress, the disruptive embraces of his saviour of Chaos still plague Miller's prose like sores that will not heal. But when, in between deafening whispers and baffled screams, *Tropic of Capricorn's* diva finally emulates the creed of abandoned believers and kisses her dazed devotees goodbye, the supreme mutation of Lust can, for good, befall:

She was transparently alive and breathing in the light of the memory of a brief afternoon on the avenue, the first tangible odor and substance of the world of fuck which is in itself a being limitless and undefinable, like our world the world. The whole world of fuck like unto the ever-increasing membrane of the animal we call sex, which is like another being

growing into our own being and gradually displacing it, so that in time the human world will be only a dim memory of this new, all-inclusive, all-procreative being which is giving birth to itself. (235-36)

The parasite of Love has found its host.

Afterword

On June 7, 1980, nearly half a century after its launching on a Parisian dunghill, Henry Valentine Miller's 'process of delivering himself' came to a standstill. His literary counterparts, however, have not been removed from the hollow of their sociopathic egocentrism yet. While they, too, may have fallen out of ire, his 'autobiographical romancers' have never ceased to rummage through the Night. All of them, they have refused to be(come) dead: dead to the psychotropic realm in which they have been expected to function like stigmatised automata; to the bodily fluids that have not quenched their thirsts; to the half-meant kisses of long-gone lovers. They have wanted to be dead, forever dead, to their lusts for loneliness. There, in their own 'little deaths,' some, at last, have found Life.

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