Chapter 2

The Dream of a Ridiculous Writer – Fyodor Dostoevsky

> *In the beginning I had dreams of rivaling Dostoievski. I hoped to give to the world huge, labyrinthian soul struggles which would devastate the world. But before very far along I realized that we had evolved to a point far beyond that of Dostoievski – beyond in the sense of degeneration. With us the soul problem has disappeared, or rather presents itself in some strangely distorted chemical guise. We are dealing with crystalline elements of the dispersed and shattered soul.*
>
> – Henry Miller, *The Wisdom of the Heart* (1960)[1]

It should not come as a surprise even to the casual reader of Henry Miller that he idolised the nineteenth-century Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky and was tremendously influenced by him in his own work. More than any other presence of influence in the work of Miller, Dostoevsky serves as a foil for the paradox of simultaneous living and creative expression in writing. Miller not only both admired Dostoevsky's writing, and subsequently revered the man who wrote it, but Miller also takes this very dual nature of idolising to the core of the creation of his own literature. In his direct musings over Dostoevsky, Miller constantly attempts to extricate the person from the persona and to combine them again in a convoluted image of philosopher-poet-compatriot. Yet Miller declares that his knowledge of Dostoevsky may not have necessarily come to him from reading his books. 'I am not sure, for instance, whether I read his *Dream of a Ridiculous Man* or heard tell about it.'[2] This admission suggests that Miller's knowledge of Dostoevsky is not about reading and recalling literature but about life experiences themselves – the gateway to the introduction of his own literary style.

The dilemma of the nature of influence in Bloom's sense of the 'anxiety of influence', such that the ancestral author creates anxiety in the later author leading to a 'misreading' in order to 'overcome' or surpass the ancestral author, becomes the very material for Miller's writing. As

Frank Marra suggests in 'The Dostoevsky/Miller Project: Investigations in Human Consciousness and Doubt' (2007), 'Each writer pursues similar ends (the achievement of a small amount of freedom and independence in restricted circumstances) with parallel struggles (de-centring the conscious centre).'[3] It is not only a metaphysical misunderstanding of mystifying the writer with the person that Miller carries out but also (perhaps resulting from that activity) the possibility of the anxiety of influence. How to become Dostoevsky? How to overcome Dostoevsky? In *Nexus* Miller admits, 'Myself, I have never pretended to *understand* Dostoievsky. Not all of him, at any rate. (I know him, as one knows a kindred soul.)'[4] Miller permits himself consideration of Dostoevsky as always in the grey area between person and persona. Dostoevsky, as both writer and person, is manifest in Miller's work in a manner making him emblematic of the hair-tearing puzzle of writing itself that plagues and compels Miller throughout his work.

Not insignificantly, to repeat an important point made in the Introduction and previous chapter, 'Dostoevsky' is a marker that refers to a dead person, as Derrida explains using 'Nietzsche' as his example in *The Ear of the Other*. Derrida writes, 'Only the name can inherit, and this is why the name, to be distinguished from the bearer, is always and a priori a dead man's name, a name of death. What returns to the name never returns to the living.'[5] In order to understand Miller's relation to Dostoevsky it is important firstly to consider the issue raised here by Derrida, which in fact is predated by Kristeva in 'Word, Dialogue, and Novel' in *Desire in Language* (*Séméiotiké*, 1969; in English, 1980), as she describes this 'zero where the author is situated' and hence where 'the *he/she* character is born', and 'at a later stage, it will become a *proper name* (N)'.[6] Kristeva explains that this is where the subject becomes the other ('subject of enunciation', 'subject of utterance') and vanishes from the work, or, more accurately, becomes 'structured as a signifier'.[7] Barthes follows this up in 'The Death of the Author', where he encourages this composite production, namely the image that is created from a person, signified through a name, in conjunction with the body of work he or she produces. Barthes writes, 'The voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death. Writing begins.'[8] The production of the work permits the creator to fall away into the work itself. Subsequently, the name that represents the creator moves from the person that it used to signify to the writer that it now signifies – a rather secret and blurry transference.

Kristeva and Barthes' works on this subject are highly complex and are not expanded upon here (particularly Barthes', in this instance, with its additional thesis on the 'death of the author' in terms the monumental

shift away from the modern cultural import placed on the value of the author itself). The issue addressed here, rather, examines how a figure represents both a body of thought and a human being who has become larger than life and whose name comes to mean something beyond that of being merely the name of a dead man. The second task is then paying attention to what Miller does with this issue: how Miller deliberately mistakes, for example, a picture of Dostoevsky for the complex nature of his image. The manner by which Miller understands this complex relation between a writer, a representation of the writer and the writer's material is both precisely his innovation and the Dostoevskian influence in his work.

This issue of 'the name of a dead man' is unavoidable for the reader, in the sense that reading a text automatically compels the reader to identify the writing with the person, the life (who is the author) with the writer (who is the producer of the work). In *The Ear of the Other*, Derrida's focus is Nietzsche and philosophers in general, because they are the writers most problematically confused by the reader in this relation of the person with the work's authorship.[9] Such writers, Derrida laments, are casually treated in biographies ('biographical novels', he writes) that claim to reveal the 'genesis of the philosophical system' as if it were empirically and straightforwardly available as such.[10] The problem is that this casual explication of the 'genesis of the philosophical system' is in no way available to such a biographer, because no such thing can be 'summed up in a *self*'.[11] Hence, such 'biographical novels' end up producing the unanticipated fictional account of a real person whom the biographer is attempting to put into words but who obviously cannot be put into words *in toto* (not simply on account of the impossibility of summing anything up completely in writing, but because a person is necessarily and perpetually incomplete, or is, rather, fundamentally an unclosed form).

This genesis cannot possibly be understood as a closed and hence accessible object that is viewable through dissecting the also closed and accessible components of the writer's life. Derrida's argument is applicable here precisely because Miller, in his work and particularly in his treatment of Dostoevsky, actively questions this sense of closedness of a name (contrary to such 'biographers'). The examined area, the 'edge' so to speak, is what Derrida calls the 'dynamis': 'that borderline between the "work" and the "life"',[12] on which resides the complex relation between a writer and his or her work. Derrida insists that what is called 'life' cannot be summed up as 'an object of science'.[13] Hence, to speak of an author's writing does not mean one can also speak of that author's life as though it were transparently available, or ever available in any

closed way, in the same way that a text can be considered to be available. Such an activity also poses problems of meaning, the generation of which becomes precisely what one does in reading a text: create an understanding; develop an interpretation that is always variable and open.

This dynamis marks a distinct separation between 'the enclosure' of the system of thought and 'the life of the author already identifiable behind the name'.[14] Yet this dynamis is also blurry in its very presence, influencing the manner in which a reader understands both the text that is written and the figure who has written it. This issue becomes overwhelmingly present in Miller's treatment of Dostoevsky, as he uses it deliberately to stump himself and to consume himself as a writer in his efforts to place, or to sum up, Dostoevsky. In *The Books in My Life*, Miller writes, 'Dostoievsky was human in that "all too human" sense of Nietzsche. He wrings our withers when he unrolls his scroll of life.'[15] Cleverly, this issue of Dostoevsky as a text and a figure, as 'infinitely more than a novelist'[16] while simultaneously as human 'all too human', also troubles Miller as a figure in the world of the text and as the writer of that text who is confounding his reader with both an understanding of this issue and a perpetual re-enacting of it. Miller's reader is made clearly to come away with two Millers: the body of work and the life behind it (now the name of a dead man), in the same way that Miller comes away with the two modes of perception that are created through his reading of Dostoevsky.

On the one hand, Miller has his idol worship of Dostoevsky as a great writer impossible to emulate, and, on the other, consequently as a great man (a dead man), an enigma behind whose face is hidden the incredible 'artist'.[17] Miller is aware of the greatness of his predecessor and is troubled by his determination to overcome him through his own writing. Fantastically, this emulation, coupled with necessary and sometimes knowing misinterpretation, comes through as an even deeper version of the name of a dead man. That is to say, Miller makes it his task to deliberately confuse the name of a dead man with the dead man's writerly output.

In *Plexus*, describing imaginary 'colloquies' that he conducts with Dostoevsky, Miller writes that he dialogues with '"the complete Dostoievsky": that is to say, the man who wrote the novels, diaries and letters we know, *plus* the man we also know by what he left unsaid, unwritten'.[18] Appearing as misguided and impossible, this task actually succeeds in Miller to the extent that it demonstrates precisely the dilemma to which it appears to succumb. By toying with this twofold use of the name, Miller ironically lays claim in his own work to a complexity usually missed by his readers. It is not just a matter of a production of

the obvious: Miller-the-author and Miller-the-persona. It is recognising that even Miller-the-author is not subsequently a name for a closed body of accessible knowledge, who is or is not Miller-the-persona.

'Miller' is simply the name of a dead man, without boundaries on his identity, while also being the name of a body of work, which does have boundaries insofar as it is contained in words, but even that containment expands through its very existence in words. Additionally, 'Miller' is also the name of a character in the text; and, further still, this character muses endlessly over this dilemma in his very own existence through resurrecting Dostoevsky as a man and as a great writer (after all, it is the Miller-the-persona who does these things, not Miller-the-author). Dostoevsky, the person, is elevated in order to become the image of him that is projected back on the man, as impossible as it is, in order to make him identical with his own legacy. Miller writes, 'I like to think of Dostoievsky as one surrounded by an impenetrable aura of mystery. For example, I can never picture him wearing a hat – such as Swedenborg gave his angels to wear.'[19] This folding one sense of Dostoevsky (the person) upon the other (the persona) is how Miller becomes deliberately troubled by his inability 'to penetrate the mystery of the being lurking behind the doughy mass of features'.[20] Additionally, however, this use of Dostoevsky, in terms of the problem of author and persona (and the sophisticated irony of it), is the key to revealing the innovative quality of Miller's own work.

This complexity of the name of Dostoevsky colours all of the various forms of manifestations of Dostoevsky in Miller's work. The first form of intertextuality concerning Dostoevsky surfaces through Miller's presentation of him from a portrait that Miller fetishises. Here is the full passage:

> I plunked myself in front of Dostoevsky's portrait, as I had done before many a time, to study his familiar physiognomy anew . . . I stood there, as always, trying to penetrate the mystery of the being lurking behind the doughy mass of features . . . Finally I saw only the artist, the tragic, unprecedented artist who had created a veritable pantheon of characters . . . each one of them more real . . . more inscrutable than all the mad Czars and all the cruel, wicked Popes put together.[21]

Right away, Miller embarks on a metaphysical impossibility with Dostoevsky's image in the sense that he wants to reconcile Dostoevsky's greatness, his body of work, with the appearance of him as a man in a picture.

Projecting this impasse onto his own writing, Miller produces the dilemma as a writer of how to understand his own creation of

characters, who are meant to be real (including, most importantly, the one who is him), who are simultaneously not real and yet more real than real. What does it mean to suggest they are more real than real? In this example of the image of Dostoevsky, again as Derrida explains, 'everything a name involves . . . cannot be summed up in a *self*.'[22] The creation of Dostoevsky in Miller is automatically more real because it is present in all that it can be: it is in the words that are it (that are 'him'). The image is as real as it could ever be as what it is said to be. Dostoevsky (the dead man himself and/or the body of work) will always be much more than his name could ever suggest and yet always only what his name suggests. Thus the literary manifestation of him (already a misnomer to call it a manifestation of 'him', that is to say of 'Dostoevsky') will always be more real than whatever could ever be real of him in the world. A text as a book, for example, necessarily provides more closure through its very creation of something as a signification (in the precise way that it does as a 'book') than a text, as a single name, can provide in its effort to re-present something, precisely because of its nature as a name. This troubling figure of Dostoevsky, as Miller's literary compatriot and influence, is beyond Miller's grasp, in the same way in which Miller's own writing is.

Miller's expectations from the portrait of Dostoevsky reveal this twofold imaging that occurs with a name, in that he treats the portrait both as the image of a man (the life) and as the image of a figure of greatness (the work). Specifically, every time Miller passes this portrait of a man with 'such a plain, homely face . . . the face of a man who might go unnoticed in a crowd',[23] as he deliberately frequently does, Miller performs 'something more than a bow or a salute . . . more like a prayer, a prayer that [Dostoevsky] would unlock the secret of revelation'.[24] Miller both expects the image to be knowable to him as he is knowable to himself (and as other human beings are knowable to him in the world) but also as a figure much more than being human, one that is mysterious, not knowable and also with a superhuman power able to reveal this 'secret of revelation' from one writer to another – and, yet, from one superhuman writer, paradoxically, to another ordinary writer. Miller is required to overlook, so to speak, Dostoevsky's very humanness in order to expect from him precisely what he, Dostoevsky, embodies: a writer elevated to superhuman stature, and whose ordinary writerliness and superhumanness are both present and, subsequently, absent in the portrait, insofar as they can only each be present in alternating and fleeting moments. The portrait is like a hologram: revealing a complete figure and, with a slight change of perspective on the part of the viewer, suddenly revealing another, creating a blurring effect where

one reflection seems to permeate the other, resulting in a certain level of indistinguishability.

The first two chapters of *Nexus* blow the image of Dostoevsky up even larger. Chapter One begins with an uneasy scene between Miller-the-persona and his wife Mona, who is overtly unfaithful to him with her female lover Stasia. The nature of this *ménage à trois* is such that not only is Miller aware of his wife's escapades, but Stasia actually lives with the couple, and the three continually engage in reciprocally degrading behaviour, constantly upping the ante of lie-telling and insults. Miller explains that Stasia lies in order to please Mona, whereas Mona lies in the attempt to reinvent herself. Miller himself lies to partake in the perversity of the game. To demonstrate Stasia's style of lying, Miller cites a curious example: 'She may take it into her head, for example, to relate some spurious incident out of Dostoievsky,'[25] which he suggests could be a lie, that is to say could be deliberately inaccurate, simply in order to test Miller's knowledge on the subject. Interestingly, he questions the nature of the example, such that he knows it may be possible that it is not at a lie at all, but may rather be Stasia citing something Miller simply may not remember of 'the thousands of incidents which crowd Dostoievsky's voluminous works'.[26] More importantly, he directly adds, 'And how can I myself be certain that she is not giving me the genuine Dostoievsky?'[27] Miller concludes by insisting that because of his great memory 'for the *aura* of things read', it is 'impossible' for him 'not to recognize a false Dostoievskian touch'.[28] Incidentally, he chooses to 'draw her out' and engage the potential lie, by not acknowledging that he knows 'she is falsifying'.[29] Miller will even argue in Stasia's favour, he explains, on points that are clearly inaccurate in her story, while Mona watches on 'aware neither of truth nor falsity, but happy as a bird because [they] are talking about her idol, her god, Dostoievsky'.[30]

Dostoevsky's presence as the subject matter for Miller's anecdote on lie telling is not incidental. Part of the significance rests in Miller's fetishising of Dostoevsky, particularly during this phase of his life when he is living in squalor with and maltreated by Mona and Stasia, subsequently romanticising his real-life role as akin to a character in a Dostoevsky novel. Dostoevsky's presence here is also significant precisely because this episode is about lie-telling and the role Miller ascribes to Dostoevsky as truth-teller. In *Sexus* Miller writes:

> Every day we slaughter our finest impulses. That is why we get a heart-ache when we read those lines written by the hand of a master and recognise them as our own, as the tender shoots which we stifled because we lacked the faith to believe in our own powers, our own criterion of truth and beauty. Every

> man, when he gets quiet, when he gets desperately honest with himself, is capable of uttering profound truths.[31]

Imagining himself not only as a Dostoevsky character but also as equal to Dostoevsky himself, Miller ruminates over the possibility of truth in the words of the everyman.

What continues to make this example with Stasia from *Nexus* so clever is that it carries on into a completely different episode directly following this hypothetical 'argument', but not before first invoking the two names of Dostoevsky in one sentence immediately following:

> 'A pity Dostoievsky himself isn't with us!' Mona will sometimes exclaim. As if he invented all those mad people, all those crazy scenes which flood his novels. I mean, invented them for his own pleasure, or because he was a natural born fool and liar. Never once does it dawn on them that *they* may be the 'mad' characters in a book which life is writing with invisible ink.[32]

Once again, Dostoevsky is presented here first as the body of work who is invoked in the discussion between Stasia and Miller (which, not incidentally, is used in the frame narrative to reveal a game of lying), and then suddenly Dostoevsky is called upon as a real person, who should be included (but cannot be, because he's dead) in a conversation about the body of work by an author called 'Dostoievsky' (*sic*).

Additionally, adding to this clever tactic of Miller's, it then becomes ironic, and even meta-textual, that Stasia and Mona are so foolish as not to question if their own 'real' lives may actually only be literary characterisations in a book of another sort. Miller alludes to the oddly meta-fictive quality of his own work in this passage, forcing the reader to acknowledge that not only are Stasia and Mona fools of the sort Dostoevsky and Miller describe, but Miller himself is (both Miller-the-persona in the text but also Miller-the-body-of-work that comes after the book is written). Furthermore, the reader is also made to acknowledge a very awkward truth in literature: how, after all, could a character, here Stasia and Mona (and, strangely, Miller himself), like James Joyce's Molly Bloom, admit to being a character?[33]

The Dostoevsky scene does not end here. Miller continues by explaining how Mona considers Miller to be 'great enough, complex enough, in her estimation at least, to belong to the world of Dostoievsky'.[34] Yet what keeps him from being 'another Dostoievsky' is the fact that 'Dostoievsky, according to Mona, never displayed the least interest in "facts".'[35] Mona believes that Dostoevsky 'lived only in the imagination',[36] Miller writes, and hence Miller-the-persona (who, as the reader knows, is a writer) is not able to measure up to such greatness, because

he is too 'inquisitive, too "bourgeois"'.[37] Once again, the peculiarity of this exchange is immediately evident. How can Miller-the-persona live in facts and not, as Dostoevsky does, 'only in the imagination' if he is, after all, possibly only a character in a book? Miller-the-author is obviously not toying with meta-fiction at this particular moment, nor is it entirely absurd for characters to talk about concepts like truth and fiction, despite themselves being the latter. This issue notwithstanding, the presence of meta-fiction in Miller is always an undercurrent, precisely because the questions like 'What is truth?' 'What is fiction?' and, more curiously, 'What distinguishes imagination from facts (particularly in writing)?' are always present. Even if the possibility of Miller-the-persona merely being a character is not in question at this point, Miller-the-author is still drawing out the issue of confusing a persona, a figure and a name with a body of work. Poignantly, there is nothing that makes Miller, in this instance during a discussion on imagination versus facts, any different from Dostoevsky.

Miller-the-author raises the question as to how one distinguishes between imagination and facts in writing after all. It is an issue that Miller-the-author is deliberately raising in his text not for the sake of whimsy, but to address the frustrating yet intriguing issue of authorship and the problem of writing. In *The Work of Fire*, Blanchot writes:

> It seems that literature consists of trying to speak at the moment when speaking becomes most difficult, turning toward those moments when confusion excludes all language and consequently necessitates a recourse to a language that is the most precise, the most aware, the furthest removed from vagueness and confusion – to literary language. In this case, the writer can believe that he is creating 'his spiritual possibility for living'; he feels his creation linked, word by word, to his life, he re-creates and regenerates himself.[38]

Miller-the-author wills himself, as a new creation (as Miller-the-persona) into the text through writing, but it is precisely that he is willing something new that necessarily creates the vast gulf between the writer and his words. Using Dostoevsky as his model, Miller extends, and wallows in, this disparity between imagination and facts, crossing boundaries between trying to write life and write imagination – the latter being the only true outcome, but one that always also results in creating the former. The text is based on life, but it is life that is produced from the imagination and ultimately stays in the imagination as it becomes the facts on the page of the book.

This scene comes to an end after Miller explains that Stasia – the great liar – is, in contradistinction to the fanciful Mona, 'after all, a little closer to reality. She knew that puppets are made of wood or papier-mâché,

not just "imagination"', and therefore, 'nothing in books frightened her'.[39] Here too, Miller alludes to the close connection between reality and imagination. If Stasia is 'a little closer to reality' and that means she is unafraid of books, then she is aware of the absolute fiction of books, regardless of their direction or content. Even if books contain facts, they are still in and of the imagination. After all, books cannot contain facts, precisely because they are words. Indeed, a book cannot contain anything in any complete sense. It is impossible to close the meaning of a word, no matter how many times it is written on a page or how precise its definition or explanation may be.

As Deleuze and Guattari explain in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (*L'Anti-Oedipe: Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*, 1972; in English, 1980), using Miller as their guiding example, 'the schizo continuously detaches [signifying chains of words], continually works them loose and carries them off in every direction in order to create a new polyvocity.'[40] The word – the fact – remains open, elusive and suggestive of infinite realities and possibilities. There is nothing to fear in books, because they are only real unto themselves. Wittgenstein reminds the reader: 'Do not forget that a poem, even though it is composed in the language of information is not used in the language-game of giving information.'[41] As much as a text feigns reality, it remains a text. As Stasia rightly knows, one need not fear books; one must not mistake them for reality.

In *Plexus* Miller adds another twist to his understanding of Dostoevsky by acknowledging that he 'never existed except in imagination'.[42] Miller refers to Dostoevsky in this instance by calling him one of the 'kindred, ghostly spirits' whom he is able 'to give [himself] to completely'.[43] This particular passage nearly becomes representative of the fourth form of intertextuality mentioned in the Introduction, as Miller does refer to the 'dialogues' he conducts with Dostoevsky as though he were a present character. However, what is interesting in this episode is not so much that Dostoevsky seems present as a character (which, ultimately, he is not) but that Miller alludes, again, to these 'colloquies' as being conducted in 'a language that does not exist, a language so simple, so direct, so transparent, that words were useless [. . .] a language which could emanate *only* from Dostoievsky'.[44] Such a dialogue is possible, because, as stated above, the language of 'the complete Dostoievsky' is, Miller writes, 'always full, resonant, veridical; always the unimpeachable sort of music which one credits him with, whether audible or inaudible, whether recorded or unrecorded'.[45] Miller again draws out this dual nature of the image of 'Dostoevsky'; he is not only what is written but also what is unwritten. Dostoevsky is a figure that speaks outside of the

pages of his work, that confounds his reader through the blending of fact and imagination, of identity in and beyond his work, as the enigma 'behind the doughy mass of features' that is the person.[46]

In his first claim on his own style, Miller writes at the beginning of *Tropic of Cancer* that what he is writing is not literature and 'is not a book'.[47] It is rather, he says, 'libel, slander, defamation of character'.[48] Insistent on pointing to a distinction between what he is writing and what others have written, Miller consciously falls prey to his own disclaimer by, of course, writing a book – a book that is not a book. In his effort to capture imagination as Dostoevsky does, Miller succeeds by not necessarily mistaking books for reality, clearly, but by drawing attention to this common error in reading literature. By disclaiming his book, Miller produces the effect of alerting his reader to the fact that the book, however full of 'facts' it may be, is always a product of imagination and that this difficult relationship is irresolvable and is the paradoxical nature of writing – something that is usually overlooked, ignored or regarded as objectionable.

Miller also aims to create, after Dostoevsky's example, 'a veritable pantheon of characters' where each one is 'more real' and 'more inscrutable than all the mad Czars and all the cruel, wicked Popes put together'.[49] For a character to be 'more inscrutable' than a real person might suggest that the character is somehow more vivid and transparent, more present or more accessible than a real person. However, this conception is not at all the case and is certainly not what Miller attempts to put forward. It is the case, rather, that a character is 'more real' both because it is thoroughly complete and hermetically contained precisely because it is necessarily restricted to a closed text and because, taking Bakhtin's concept of 'unfinalisability', it is impossible ever to outdo the possibility of the character as a completed figure. Thus the character can be nothing more than this perfection of itself, so to speak, as a literary manifestation, which perpetually remains incomplete.

The dilemma that arises from this claim is that this primary sense of completeness is also what demarcates the character's perpetual incompleteness. As a word can only ever be a word and as a word always disseminates its meaning through deferral within a system of endless meanings, then a character – made of words – can never (and will never) challenge the person that it re-presents. The character cannot compete with what really is real. It is absurd to speak in this way, yet this is the way in which literature is often spoken about and why Dostoevsky and Miller's works are so provocative, in their evocation of this conundrum. In 'The Dostoevsky/Miller Project' Marra writes, 'In short, by episodically integrating schizophrenization Miller safeguards his hero

from finalization, allowing him the possibility of developing in surprising ways.'[50] In the way that Bakhtin refers to Dostoevsky's writing as polyphonic, Miller enacts something similar through a schizophrenic, yet seemingly monological, voice.

At the beginning of *Nexus*, during a lengthy episode on Dostoevsky, Miller writes:

> Though millions among us have never read Dostoievsky nor would even recognise the name were it pronounced, they are nevertheless, millions of them, straight out of Dostoievsky, leading the same weird 'lunatical' life here in America which Dostoeivsky's creatures lived in the Russia of his imagining.[51]

The nature of literature is such that it presents unto itself a world that is somehow both a reflection of the world while also being a world of infinite possibilities. In *The Devil at Large* (1993), Erica Jong claims that the creative artist faces the paradox that 'life flows and art must stand still. But it must stand still like the hummingbird, as Miller would say. It must move and yet have form, because without form it is not graspable; without form it cannot be art.'[52] Miller takes from Dostoevsky the desire to write a literature that is more than life while putting real life in the literature at the same time.

Perhaps unlike Dostoevsky, Miller was amused by the convoluted legacy he was leaving to his biographers. Jong writes:

> [Miller] felt he had adequately chronicled his own life in his books, and wherever there was some fictionalization that did not correspond to the 'facts' (in which, anyway, he did not believe), he was more than happy to provide chronologies, interviews, conversations that elucidated the truth, *his* truth, for his rapt listeners. (Some of these 'documents' also contain plenty of fiction.)[53]

Jong only touches here on the profundity of Miller's style, particularly in relation to Dostoevsky's. Miller himself laughed at his own misleading efforts and told Jong, herself an admiring Miller biographer, 'When you write about me, make it all up!'[54]

Struggling with his desire to write the truth in literature, in *Nexus* Miller explains the difference between literature and that which he is writing and declares: 'Then to hell with literature! *The book of life*, that's what I would write.'[55] This uneasy distinction between 'literature' and 'the book of life' is akin to Miller's similarly uneasy distinction between 'imagination' and 'facts'. Subsequently, Miller would attempt to write the 'facts', but in a manner that is wholly dependent upon 'imagination', thus producing his quasi-autobiographical, anti-literature in the style of Dostoevsky.

In *The Making of a Counter-Culture Icon* Bloshteyn discusses in depth this second form of intertextuality, a sort of unconscious influence (in the sense of the influence not being verbally referenced by Miller, where the source is 'non-present'). She writes, 'According to Miller, Dostoevsky enabled new writers to discard literature, with all its staid conventions and formalities, and to create a different kind of writing, more intimately entwined with life itself.'[56] This 'different kind of writing' that is 'intimately entwined with life itself' is explicitly evident throughout Miller's *oeuvre*. Although Bloshteyn's analysis of Miller's interest in Dostoevsky is largely historical and biographical, she raises important points useful to this study. On the whole, Bloshteyn discusses Dostoevsky's significance in America and for writers like Miller, Durrell and Nin, using her extensive knowledge of Russian literature to establish a grounded account of influence. Although Bloshteyn's is not an analysis of the text (but one of the cultural and personal relationships between Dostoevsky and his modernist inheritors), many of her findings are relevant to a close study of the text.

Bloshteyn suggests that Miller considers Dostoevsky's bad writing as itself innovative, deliberately poorly written for the sake of form – a style that Miller subsequently seeks to imitate and, here argued, in his own way overcome. Bloshteyn writes: 'With *Notes from the Dead House* Dostoevsky entered the American consciousness as an autobiographical writer whose literary value resided in the authenticity of his observations and certainly not in his powers of composition.'[57] If the perception of Dostoevsky was already one of being a bad writer but that 'the authenticity of his observations' made his work appealing, then Miller, whose interest was in the destruction of conventional form, would elevate that bad writing into a purposeful style that exemplified such 'authenticity of [. . .] observation'. Thus this perception of Dostoevsky is one that Miller gratefully accepts and utilises in mastering such a craft of bad writing in his own voice. (In a letter to Anaïs Nin in 1932 Miller elaborates on this struggle of Dostoevsky having 'neither time nor money' and thus 'it is nothing short of a miracle that he accomplished.'[58])

However, Bloshteyn argues, this reading of Dostoevsky is plainly misguided based on basic historical information. Her first point is to explain that complications with translation, deliberate distortion of material and its mode of accessibility in America created a completely different Dostoevsky from the one known in his homeland, applicable both to the writer as a person and to the body of work. Bloshteyn writes:

> Dostoevsky remains one of Russia's most successful literary exports; yet it appears that in traversing linguistic, cultural, and temporal boundaries the cluster of concepts that together form the total construct of 'Dostoevsky' (a

> corpus of information about Dostoevsky's life, belief system, and canon of writings) has been radically transformed.[59]

Bloshteyn also writes that Dostoevsky himself acknowledged his poor, hasty writing, stating it was not done by volition but due to lack of time and resources.[60] Much of this information was either unknown or ignored by the time his work reached America.

Bloshteyn explains that pieces like the 'Grand Inquisitor' from *Brothers Karamazov* were often taken out of context, creating the reputation of their author as a radical, godless philosopher-poet, when Dostoevsky himself repeatedly espoused the opposite. She confirms: 'He makes it very clear that he sees his writings (fictional and nonfictional) as carefully orchestrated arguments advancing his philosophical position and not as open-ended, free-spirited explorations of religious and philosophical issues.'[61] *Brothers Karamazov*, for example, 'is nothing less than "a destruction of anarchism"', Bloshteyn states, citing Dostoevsky's letters, and 'he is "preaching God and Nationhood"'.[62] Madame Blavatsky, for one, excised the 'Grand Inquisitor' chapter and published it in her own English-language journal *The Theosophist* with the clear intention of presenting Dostoevsky as an atheist.[63] Emma Goldman also took liberally from Dostoevsky's *oeuvre* for similar ends, going so far as to fabricate facts about Dostoevsky's life as well.[64] This latter case is especially significant, as Miller cites Goldman as the monumental presence that prompted the turning point in his life, radicalising his own religious and political views as a young man.

Despite the obvious negative ramifications of these deliberately distorting literary exploits against Dostoevsky's actual disposition as a writer and a person, Bloshteyn acknowledges, 'Dostoevsky's ideas seem to invite distortions so excessive as to suggest the existence of issues beyond those ordinarily expected in the cases of interliterary or intercultural contact.'[65] That Dostoevsky's work lends itself to being misunderstood immediately raises eyebrows for the Miller reader. Bloshteyn defends this claim by stating: 'It was because Dostoevsky achieved the very peak of what could be done in literature that he had to be studied so closely: he was the gateway for the next stage, which was none other than a revolution in prose narrative.'[66] It is this quality of Dostoevsky's work that appeals to Miller in his efforts to emulate, recreate and finally move beyond into his own style in the grey area of experimental and fictionalised autobiography.

Bloshteyn notes that Americans were prone to misreading Dostoevsky for a variety of reasons. 'American readers, encouraged by the novel's publishers, were never sure which parts were fact and which fiction,

and consistently confused the persona of the narrator with that of the author.'[67] This confusion is evident to Miller, who then deliberately adopts this tool of uncertainty into his own work. In the same episode early on in *Nexus* in which Stasia challenges Miller's knowledge of Dostoevsky with her lie-telling, and Mona concedes that Miller lives in 'facts', Miller elaborates on this elusive dual nature of his idol. He writes: 'No, to believe [Mona], Dostoievsky was always in the clouds – or else buried in the depths. He never bothered to swim on the surface. He took no thought of gloves or muffs or overcoats. Nor did he pry into women's purses in search of names and addresses. He lived only in the imagination.'[68] Not only is it irrelevant that Dostoevsky's presence in twentieth-century Greenwich Village Bohemian culture may not reflect Dostoevsky's own worldview, but it is this ambiguity, this possibility of misreading that encourages Miller to revere Dostoevsky. Bloshteyn suggests that Miller saw himself as a 'post-Dostoevskian writer who had to invent writing anew, and that it was the radical vision of Dostoevsky as the last rather than the first prophet of the novel, the last writer of *literature*, that Miller expounded during his Paris years'.[69] Regardless of his misreadings, Miller uses Dostoevsky as a marker for understanding that capitulation of literature as it was known, giving him licence to explore new forms of writing.

Without summarising the entirety of Bloshteyn's findings, it is important to note that she painstakingly sets up the very specific reasons why Dostoevsky was influential in New York in the 1920s and how that influence was a distortion of the real Dostoevsky. However, in contrast to Bloshteyn's assessment that 'Miller was fully plugged into the established American stereotype of Dostoevsky, perhaps without fully realising it himself,'[70] the argument here suggests rather that this misreading is precisely what makes Dostoevsky interesting to a writer like Miller.

Although this point may not be of central importance in her work, Bloshteyn does admit that the scholar of comparative literature, for example, would consider Miller's misreadings irrelevant. Of the Villa Seurat writers she writes that 'they were never concerned with the accuracy of their interpretations. What interested them was the creative potential inherent in their wrestling with their version of Dostoevsky's legacy.'[71] The important point is to acknowledge that Miller's misreading is in many ways deliberate, in his effort to extrapolate the issues at stake in Dostoevsky as a writer, as opposed simply to coming to the same conclusions in his personal life. At stake is not this dichotomy between God and atheism or the political left and right. What Dostoevsky provokes in his readers is the sense that the values he or she holds true require examination. It may have been his hope – as a writer and a living person – that

the outcome would reflect his own sense of the right, but Dostoevsky's personal desire is not the appeal for the reader, in Miller's estimation. This twentieth-century assessment of Dostoevsky is obviously relevant to the third form of intertextuality introduced in the Introduction, which is reverse influence. Through contemporary readings, the reception of Dostoevsky changes from what it originally may have been (specifically in the Russian and in the nineteenth century), which is the work of a God-loving nationalist, to the anarchic, godless rants of an underground man in the twentieth century, specifically in America.

The appeal of Dostoevsky for Miller, and again in relation to this reversal of influence, is that he gives his reader the means and method to unflinchingly stare at and question systems of value. Contrary to Bloshteyn's position, who suggests Miller, like Dostoevsky, is of the 'searchers of apocalyptic realities',[72] the argument here asserts that Miller's interest has nothing to do with 'apocalyptic realities' but with apocalyptic writing. Miller is not establishing a polemic for living based on Dostoevsky's (whether or not it's been misread). It is a question of writing and not of a person called Henry Miller worshipping a writer/leader/philosopher/imaginary force, as a schoolboy worships a comic book hero. It is not a case of emulating Dostoevsky and failing, firstly, by not getting Dostoevsky right and, secondly, by Miller fashioning his whole (and actual) life after a cultural icon. What is taking place is an activity of writing in Miller – a form of writing that he is undertaking in his own way but that necessarily follows out of his influence from Dostoevsky. This link is hardly disputable and, even if his is a misreading, it is still not about Miller-the-writer falling short in his efforts to be something in his real and actual life.

Bloshteyn accounts for references by Miller to the following Dostoevsky works: *The Devils*, *The Idiot*, *Brothers Karamazov*, *The Eternal Husband*, *The Double*, *Crime and Punishment* and *Notes from Underground*. Although Bloshteyn does not state if she is noting direct or indirect allusions, it is clear that indirect ('non-present') references obviously run deepest and widest in Miller. As addressed earlier in this chapter, Miller does make many references to Dostoevsky, but some of them are quite offhand and seemingly random, as one addressed here, found toward the end of *Nexus*. Living in New York, Miller-the-persona is recounting how life is now passing smoothly: he has paid his debts; he and his wife Mona are getting along splendidly; they are going to the theatre and to the cinema; he is making friends with the neighbours, pleasing the landlady, borrowing books and records, learning to drive and so on. During a dinner with the Essens, a Jewish family who run a delicatessen on the corner, Reb Essen, the father and shopkeeper,

proceeds to get drunk, and while he is taking a walk, the inquisitive Jewish neighbour Mr Elfenbein arrives and proceeds to have a haphazard conversation with Miller in which a reference to a Dostoevsky novel is casually dropped.

The episode is almost nonsensical, in a playfully sloppy manner, giving the scene an authentic feel for the jovial, yet peculiar, environment where endless glasses of Kümmel liqueur are being 'drained . . . in one gulp'.[73] Mr Elfenbein, the 'Yiddish King Lear',[74] suggests that Reb's son will make a 'fine young gangster' because 'already he knows nothing from nothing. A *malamed* he should be – if he had his wits. Do you remember in *Tried and Punished* . . .?'[75] Reb's son interjects, 'You mean *Crime and Punishment*.'[76] Mr Elfenbein then corrects Reb's son, explaining, 'In Russian it's called *The Crime and Its Punishment*. Now take a back seat and don't make faces behind my back. I know I'm *meshuggah* . . .'[77] The Dostoevsky stops there, as Mr Elfenbein continues his farcical ramblings interjected with Yiddish words, following various tangents on the theatre, mysticism, singing and voice control, Irish poetry, the Bible, Jewish history and other subjects.

At the other extreme from overt and senseless references to Dostoevsky, there are particularly elusive, yet clearly Dostoevskian, non-present allusions throughout Miller's *oeuvre*, such as at the end of *Sexus*. Here the analysis returns to the second form of intertextuality, which is the non-present, unconscious form, where, again, it is the 'agency of the author being influenced', according to Clayton and Rothstein in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary Theory*.[78] The extensive episode at the end of *Sexus* seems to draw certain, yet indirect, elements from *The Double: A Petersburg Poem* (1846; in English, 1917) and, in a rather inverted manner, *A Gentle Creature* (1876; in English, 1917). Highlighting Dostoevsky's own indebtedness to the Russian novelist Nikolai Gogol (1809–52) and his short story *The Nose* (1835), *The Double* is the disturbing tale of the eventual complete breakdown of a minor civil servant after encountering, and being mentally destroyed by, his double. This figure invades the protagonist's life, ruining his career and personal relations, but more importantly diminishing the protagonist's hold on his life, on his social image and on his entire psychological well-being. *A Gentle Creature* tells the story of a pawnshop keeper who marries a timid and desperate young girl, ultimately provoking, and self-centredly suffering from, her unexpected suicide. The story begins with his young wife having already died, her body lain upon the table. In his confusion and guilt, he tries to retell the story, as if to an invisible jury that might release him from his feelings of responsibility for her untimely death. He begins relaying the story frenetically in fragments, but eventually

weaving coherency, he finally extricates himself, producing a narrative that gives it logical sense in his own mind.

Finding Dostoevsky in Miller's texts encourages Kristeva's explanation that 'every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an intertextuality)', as she claims in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (*La Révolution du langage poétique: l'avant-garde à la fin du xixe siècle, Lautréamont et Mallarmé*, 1974; in English, 1984).[79] In *Desire in Language*, Kristeva concludes, 'The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*.'[80] It is here that Kristeva borrows from Bakhtin to insist that any text is the transformation of any other, and thus the focus of intertextuality is not directed by Bloom's subjective, ancestral authority but by words themselves and their transference. This notion of the 'double', evidently, is also doubly interesting in this example. Although the allusion is subtle and arguably present only to a reader looking for such specific connections, Miller's language evokes the Dostoevsky's stories named above in an extended version of the passage from the end of *Sexus*, quoted in the Introduction as an example of Miller being 'Kafkaesque'.

Chapter Twenty-three of *Sexus* tells of the narrator's experience living in a cellar with his wife Mona and her lover Stasia and their seeming ill-treatment of him. He revels somewhat in the grime and misery of his pathetic existence but eventually decides to run away. 'I have lost the power to feel. To conceal this defect I simulate every passion. [. . .] They say I have the makings of a clown. [. . .] I am learning all the tricks of the zoo.'[81] A short time later he writes, 'A night on the floor, the three of us tossing like burning corks. Taunts and gibes passing back and forth.'[82] Until finally, he says, 'In the morning I leave stealthily while they slumber blissfully.'[83] One could actually choose to see all kinds of tones from various Dostoevsky stories such as *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* or *Notes from Underground*; however, only the two mentioned above will be read closely in relation to this passage for the purposes of establishing the point. Miller is an unhappy, rather disturbed man in this episode and describes his predicament in the harsh, dark manner Dostoevsky uses when setting up his disquieting tales. Miller writes, 'Through months of shame and humiliation I have come to hug my solitude. I no longer seek help from the outside world.'[84] Interestingly, in this episode, Miller no longer simply muses about his characters resembling Dostoevsky's (himself being one); rather they now actually are. That is to say, his characters no longer talk about Dostoevsky; instead they explicitly behave like Dostoevsky characters.

Identifying with both the young wife in *A Gentle Creature*, who is

unwillingly bound to a destructive marriage, and with the pawnshop keeper, who finds her in an extramarital love affair, Miller's narrator also struggles with his conscience and his instinct to make the right choice, whether to return to his 'kennel . . . ridiculous and pathetic . . . like a dog'[85] or flee the shameful situation for good. Where Dostoevsky writes, 'And a woman who loves – oh, a woman who loves – will worship even vice, the crimes even of the man she loves,'[86] Miller acerbically prods at the gendered roles in opposition: 'I would be grateful for any crumbs that were handed me. If she wanted to bring her lovers in and make love to them in my presence it would be all right too. One doesn't bite the hand that feeds one.'[87] Like the pawnshop keeper's wife, Miller is submissive, yet resentful. Like the pawnshop keeper, Miller accepts marital disgrace but continues 'to worship her'[88] and finally succumbs to the impending internal destruction.

Walking the streets, fluctuating back and forth, searching the dark recesses of his mind for the answer, Miller ultimately encounters his double. 'Finally I made to go through an archway . . . Then a panic seized me and I ran back to the street. On the other side of the street, close to the wall, a man was standing.'[89] This man both pursues and eludes Miller. Just like Golyadkin, Miller is petrified with fear of this encounter. Dostoevsky writes, 'Suddenly, as though struck by a thunderbolt, he stopped dead in his tracks, and spun round like a weathercock in the wind to stare after the man who had passed and was disappearing rapidly into the whirl of snow.'[90] Miller in his fear says: 'I stood stock-still, undecided which way to turn, hoping that this silent figure would move first,' then admits, 'I knew I couldn't elude him now.'[91] Despite this fear, just like Golyadkin, Miller ultimately violently confronts his double, and, in Miller's case, tackles him to the ground. He declares, 'I kicked out and caught him square in the stomach', after which Miller flees.[92] However, again like Golyadkin's encounter with his double, Miller is unexpectedly caught again, this time with the double enacting a similar but worse violence back on Miller. Suddenly, Miller is frightened into immobility and attacked. His double announces: 'I'm givin' it to you in the guts, you dirty dog!'[93] The novel ends with Miller returning to his wife and her female lover, where he proceeds to collapse into disturbing, sexual nightmares of himself as a dog begging for his wife's love.

Projecting himself into such conflicted roles that blur distinction and direction, Miller exposes for the reader conventional literary limits, and these are the limits, Marra writes, 'that both Dostoevsky and Miller attempt to stretch by infusing their work with plurality'.[94] Marra provides an original analysis of the significance of Miller's first-person account in contradistinction to Dostoevsky's third-person (as in

the example given above), significantly noting the latter's exception in *Notes from Underground*. Without treading on Marra's argument that well establishes Miller's schizophrenic, hence polyphonic, voice in his first-person narratives, it can also be said that Miller, by writing in the first person and by setting himself directly in the role of the protagonist – namesake and all – suggests, once again, that the division between life, writing and the imaginary world inhabited by writers is perpetually blurred and crossed. As Marra puts it in 'The Dostoevsky/Miller Project', 'Dostoevsky and Miller both depict men circling round and round in psychological mazes of their own creation, seemingly helpless to find their way out.'[95] In this mode of writing, Miller becomes his own double.

In the context of this first-person narrative, Dostoevsky peculiarly addresses his reader in the preface to *A Gentle Creature*, where he provides a disclaimer for the reason why this story requires the special form that it does. This special form, explained momentarily, is necessary in order to incorporate the narrator's confusion and hence fragmented narrative – a special form that Miller employs through the first person. In his disclaimer, Dostoevsky first gives the plot of the story as support for this special form, followed by an analysis of the narrator's troubled mind (his reasoning, his behaviour and so on). Finally, Dostoevsky explains that, even though a real person in the state that the narrator is in would not be able to provide an explanation such as this at that moment and in this form (that is, in printed words), this method is best for transmitting how it would be if 'a stenographer could have overheard him'.[96] Dostoevsky's disclaimer is what he calls a 'fantastic' element, because it detracts from the story's possible 'realness'.

With Miller too it is no longer a question of reading but an actual manifestation of behaviour. Once again, the line is blurred. In Miller's case, the reader understands that Miller-the-author is recounting events of his own life and putting them into words in order, in one sense, to assimilate Dostoevsky, but it is also the case that Miller's real life, of Miller-the-person, is itself being lived out, oddly, to resemble a Dostoevsky character and subsequently reflected in literature. In her diaries, Anaïs Nin once asked, 'The more I read Dostoevsky the more I wonder about June and Henry and whether they are imitations. I recognise the same phrases, the same heightened language, almost the same actions. Are they literary ghosts? Do they have souls of their own?'[97] Without jumping out of the text too far, one sees here how Miller enters books just as books enter him.

The questions that arise in this study of the unconscious form of intertextuality include asking what this figure 'Dostoevsky' does in Miller's

works, in terms of language and literary technique – how Dostoevsky affects Miller's language; what his function may be and how the reader understands it. When Dostoevsky is a presence, who is he – this figure, this writer – surfacing in Miller's work? And, more strangely, why is the writer a 'some one'? How is the writer some one? In his work, Miller fashioned for himself a similar self-enigma. Who is 'Miller'? How does the reader distinguish him from his writing? How does the reader understand and misunderstand? It's not a question if Dostoevsky was as important to Miller-the-author as he is to be to Miller-the-persona. It is rather an issue of Dostoevsky's existence itself in Miller's works and how this presence encourages Miller's style. Whereas Bloshteyn explains *how* Miller liked Dostoevsky, this analysis attempts to address *where* Miller used Dostoevsky, how he came out in Miller, and how the reader can understand the signification for Miller's writing.

A prime example of Bakhtin's theory of polyphony and heteroglossia in the novel, one of Dostoevsky's signature techniques, is the presence of both voices of a moral argument from multiple, equally developed characters, producing the effect of a 'plurality of consciousness-centres not reduced to a single ideological common denominator'.[98] However, it can also be said that this polyphony is also manifest within the same character, such as Golyadkin of *The Double* and the pawnshop owner of *A Gentle Creature*. This technique of Dostoevsky's to create a true polyphony, such that no voice can be isolated as superior (including the one professing Dostoevsky's own moral disposition, which has subsequently often been missed by future readers), is indeed evident in Miller as well. Marra argues, 'One can safely speculate either writer would be amenable to theories such as pragmatism or pluralism which produce answers that are descriptive and contextualising rather than absolute and definitive.'[99] Yet Miller, in his attempt to grasp Dostoevsky within the context of his own metaphysics, seeks not just to pull his stories toward his own personal slant while developing this radical polyphony, but to draw attention to this functioning of language itself by disturbing conventional expectations, such as highlighting his own presence in the text as a character and blurring the line between the two figures.

Bloshteyn, whose analysis is indeed very detailed and thorough but, again, has more of a biographical quality to it, seems occasionally to blur the distinction between Miller-the-author and Miller-the-persona. This blurry distinction is precisely what makes Dostoevsky interesting to Miller in the first place, as well as Miller to his readers. It is not a matter of extracting the real Miller out of the work, looking for how he understood Dostoevsky and locating where he incorporated Dostoevsky into his life. It is an issue of looking at the writing and regarding what it

does – not in the same way that Dostoevsky's writing operated but in the way that Miller's writing (in the sense of his innovative literary devices) is garnered from his reading of Dostoevsky.

Incidentally, Bloshteyn blurs the author with the persona in a reference that presupposes Miller's evident, life-long radical philosophy. She writes: 'When Miller was sixty-six, he writes that the whole world "must be razed . . . Nothing less will satisfy".'[100] Bloshteyn uses this reference to claim that Miller held the same views throughout his life, the views that are evident in his misreadings of Dostoevsky. It cannot be overlooked that this assertion is clearly metaphorical; yet, even despite that presumably being understood by Bloshteyn, she seems to ignore how this statement does not refer to a person's desire *in the world* but rather to a character's dramatic claim *in a text*. She states Miller's age as if this adds support to the image of him as a true rebel, even in old age, whereas the Miller who is sixty-six is not the same Miller who wrote the statement – not because he is now so many years older, but because the Miller of the novels is a character whereas this Miller is speaking in an interview.

Bloshteyn's next point is to say that the artist destroys the world through destroying old forms.[101] However, she does not make any allusion to understanding this destruction as a necessarily incomplete process. The artist (the writer) creates throughout a lifetime. It is not as though old forms come down, and new ones are erected in the course of an author's work. Moreover, such creation is simply not about failure or success (as if 'razing the world' is really and truly something that Miller is condoning). Writing, this act of creation, is simply something in which the writer engages, and the content of it is in many ways incidental. If Miller talks about 'the world going smash' for his entire *oeuvre*, not only does that not mean that this person called Henry Miller literally wants to smash the world, but it means that this person Miller produced a form in his writing to convey a force, that this force is precisely what he writes about – the act of writing.

This criticism may appear too literal, but the point is that this literalising of the words is imperative for recognising the significance of Miller's style and the impact of writers like Dostoevsky in his work. In writing about the portrait of Dostoevsky that he would often regard, on Second Avenue in New York Miller writes in *The Books in My Life*: 'That will always be for me the real Dostoievsky. [. . .] One does not care to know whether this man was a writer, a saint, a criminal or a prophet. One is struck by his universality.'[102] When Dostoevsky surfaces as an impenetrable presence in Miller's work, it is not enough to consider this merely a matter of sublime awe and idol worship. Miller always sees both the

man and the *oeuvre* and is unforgiving in his interest in both constantly dividing the two and rejoining them to produce a complex web of effects upon the impenetrable mythic figure.

In a chapter devoted to Miller in conjunction with Lautréamont in *The Work of Fire*, Blanchot quotes from *Tropic of Cancer*:

> And thus he comes to cast his universe 'above human boundaries . . . because to be only human seems to be too poor, so mediocre, such a wretched business, limited by meaning, restrained by moral systems and codes, defined by platitudes and isms'. Language seeks thus to separate itself from man and even from language; it penetrates underground, it becomes water, air, night.[103]

Because Miller's language invites a pursuit towards its limits, the reader often mistakes the word for the world. It seems Bloshteyn is writing about Miller as a person learning how to become a writer by emulating Dostoevsky, whereas such a search for the genesis is, as Derrida writes, impossible, because, again, such a self cannot be summed up.[104] It is the case rather that Miller-the-author is writing about his own complicated relationship with 'Dostoevsky' and how Dostoevsky's writing (and persona) influenced him, as this impossible, mythic figure.

This problem of interpretation of Dostoevsky is obviously a result of Dostoevsky's style, insofar as he writes in a manner that makes it difficult to know what the text means. Dostoevsky the person, apparently, had a faith so strong in his own beliefs and a faith in the reader him or herself that he assumed the reader would be able to grasp his beliefs from the text as if immediate and evident. Not only did this not happen with the introduction of Dostoevsky in America at the turn of the twentieth century, but his message, as Bloshteyn elaborately discusses, was taken as the opposite. In *The Books in My Life*, Miller writes: 'Dostoievsky is chaos and fecundity. Humanity, with him, is but a vortex in the bubbling maelstrom. He had it in him to give birth to many orders of humanity.'[105] Regardless of the fact that subsequent writers may hold opposing political and religious viewpoints from Dostoevsky, the key here is recognising that this adoption of Dostoevsky as a left-wing, free-thinking radical spawned many writers who indulged in this very style of the ambiguous text that both implies the writer's perspective while deliberately playing with the impossibility of such an approach to reading.

For example, Bloshteyn writes that footnotes by Dostoevsky himself indicate that he 'wanted to ensure that readers perceive *Notes from Underground* as a fictional text and his narrator as an incarnated social phenomenon separate from its creator'.[106] However, *Notes from*

Underground itself is written as a collection of notes by a writer, the narrator, 'who gleefully acknowledges his own unreliability and contradictions'.[107] Furthermore, this writer/narrator 'still imagines a readership whom he loathes and taunts, but whose responses he anticipates and counters through the text'.[108] Whether or not Dostoevsky has reign over the impact of this meta-author is irrelevant, as it is the reader who will always pass the judgement upon the text based on his or her own world of circumstances.

It is precisely this literary technique that Miller enjoyed enough in Dostoevsky to adopt it directly into his own work. Whether or not Dostoevsky was aware, many of his readers are, to be sure, his underground man, a figure who, peculiarly, does not necessarily ascribe to the same views as Dostoevsky himself – as demonstrated in the case of Miller and other writers in the forlorn and fragmented, early twentieth century. Bloshteyn writes: 'The Villa Seurat writers' effective appropriation of Dostoevsky as a writer of counterculture . . . demonstrates the ease with which the set of associations connected to a particular writer or text can be stripped and substituted to suit the needs of their new readers and the ease with which they themselves can subsequently be appropriated.'[109] It is not really that Dostoevsky influenced such writers in any overtly conventional fashion but rather that these writers found themselves in the world and discovered the work of Dostoevsky, which spoke to their convictions already in place.

Bloshteyn argues that this was the case due to the compelling evidence supporting a parallel between America and Russia as being international outsiders. According to Bloshteyn, it was the French ambassador to St Petersburg and authority on Russian literature and culture Eugène-Melchoir Vogüé who introduced Dostoevsky into the early twentieth-century American consciousness, as his work *Le roman russe* (1886) was translated into English (*The Russian Novel*, 1912) alongside the works of Dostoevsky almost simultaneously.[110] Vogüé, as a nobleman, encountered Dostoevsky in common social circles and thus related tales of the bumbling lower-class man in his account.

Such an image of Dostoevsky appealed to an American sense of being an outsider in relation to the young nation's historical European ancestors, and also reinforced the notion that Dostoevsky's work was autobiographical and passionately driven from personal experience of hardship.[111] Bloshteyn writes: 'If Russian writers after Dostoevsky had no need to slavishly imitate the European novel, then neither did the new American authors.'[112] According to Bloshteyn, 'A sense of awed recognition accompanied American readings of Dostoevsky's novels. Dostoevsky remained a writer of darkness, gloom, and extreme

states, but now he also presaged, penetrated, and depicted contemporary American reality for American men and women.'[113] Dostoevsky, quickly adopted by the American public as himself somehow embodying the essence of being American, comes to exemplify for Miller his own feelings of exile, displacement and homelessness both during his time abroad, in Paris from 1930 to 1939, and his time in America, which he vehemently disparaged.

The appeal for Miller's reader is very much the same as Dostoevsky's appeal for Miller as his imported Russian émigré. Miller is not writing to be a good writer or a writer with a message. He is provoking conventional assumptions as to the nature of literature itself. Marra sums up well: 'In broad terms both men's inquiries into the social world and human phenomenon are directed at *de-centring the reader's conscious centre*.'[114] For example, in *Nexus* Miller holds a conversation with a friend called Stymer, who is excitedly espousing his radical beliefs on Dostoevsky. Miller listens listlessly but attentively and is 'fascinated' by Stymer's philosophy on the possibility that 'all was mind' and of 'the idea of going underground, of taking refuge in the mind'.[115] However, some months later, Miller learns that Stymer dies of a brain haemorrhage, which doesn't surprise him and about which he concludes: 'With that I stopped worrying about the mind as a refuge. Mind is all. God is all. So what?'[116] Suddenly, Miller confronts his reader with this overwhelming presentation of the utter meaninglessness of all the intellectual onanism that takes place both in his own works, in Dostoevsky's and, ultimately, in writing itself.[117]

It is not a question as to whether or not the literary output is worthy or of an appropriate quality, as this idea just raises the issue again of the foundation of judgement upon which a work is praised and evaluated. Miller's writing – in its overcoming of Dostoevsky – raises the question as to how a text is read. The undercurrent suggests that a text must be read without its meaning being assigned entirely to a message that relates to the agenda of the reader or to the popular and conventional appreciation (that is valuation) of the content of the material. Writing for Miller, as derived from Dostoevsky, is directed toward a process, not an outcome. Additionally, making the distinction between the writer and the persona is also tremendously significant here, directly in a study of Miller and his influences, because it becomes evident that when Dostoevsky is spoken of, it must be made clear if this reference is to the writer or the persona – and/or a deliberate hazing of the two. Miller's work draws this issue of the figure writing the text to the fore, not just in reference to Dostoevsky but also to the ambiguous distinction between a person and persona, including in terms of his own identity in the text.

The next chapter considers Miller's relation to Carroll, the least obvious connection in his study and yet, in many ways, perhaps the most fruitful in terms of examining Miller's original and playful writing. Identified as a writer of tremendous significance by Miller, Carroll provides him not only with a profound interest in wordplay but, linguistically, in language games and the potentially humorous limits of writing.

Notes

1. *Widsom*, 28.
2. *Nexus*, 18.
3. Marra, 125.
4. *Nexus*, 18.
5. *Ear*, 7; 'Ceci . . . *ne revient plus* . . . seulement au nom, en quoi le nom, qui n'est pas le porteur, est toujours et *a priori* un nom de mort', *L'Oreille*, 18.
6. *Desire in Language*, 75; 'Ce zéro, où se situe l'auteur . . . le *il* du personnage va naître . . . à un stade plus tardif, il deviendra le *nom propre* (N)', *Séméiotiké*, 156.
7. Ibid., 75; 'L'auteur, le sujet de l'énonciation', 'le personnage, sujet de l'énoncé'. . . 'structure comme signifiant', *Séméiotiké*, 156.
8. *Image-Music-Text*, 142; 'La voix perd son origine, l'auteur entre dans sa propre mort, l'écriture commence', *Le bruissement de la langue*, 61.
9. Derrida draws from Nietzsche's claim in *Ecce Homo*, 'I am one thing, my works are another' ('Das Eine bin ich, das Andre sind meine Schriften'). *Ear*, 30; 'Une chose ce que je suis, une autre ce que sont mes écrits', *L'Oreille*, 33.
10. *Ear*, 7; 'Des romans biographiques', 'la genèse du système', *L'Oreille*, 16.
11. Ibid., 7; 'Des romans biographiques', 'la genèse du système', *L'Oreille*, 18.
12. Ibid., 5; '*dynamis* de cette bordure entre l' «œuvre» et la «vie»', *L'Oreille*, 16.
13. Ibid., 6; 'objet d'une science', *L'Oreille*, 17.
14. Ibid., 5; 'La vie d'un auteur déjà identifiable sous son nom', *L'Oreille*, 17.
15. *Books*, 221.
16. Ibid.
17. *Plexus*, 16.
18. Ibid., 110.
19. *Nexus*, 18.
20. *Plexus*, 16.
21. Ibid., 16–17.
22. *Ear*, 7; 'Tout ce qui s'y engage . . . ne se résume pas à un *moi*', *L'Oreille*, 18.
23. *Plexus*, 16.
24. Ibid., 16.
25. *Nexus*, 11.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. *Sexus*, 25–6.
32. *Nexus*, 12.
33. This reflection on characters musing over being characters in a story pre-empts the discussion of Lewis Carroll in the next chapter, where, in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Alice exclaims: 'There ought to be a book written about me, that there ought!' (46). In *The Philosopher's Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass* (1974), Peter Heath explains Alice's 'idle proposal', cleverly writing: 'If she had not already found a chronicler, she would not be around to demand one' (40).
34. *Nexus*, 12.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. *Fire*, 17–18; 'Il semble que la littérature consiste à essayer de parler à l'instant où parler devient le plus difficile, en s'orientant vers les moments où la confusion exclut tout langage et par conséquent rend nécessaire le recours au langage le plus précis, le plus conscient, le plus éloigné du vague et de la confusion, le langage littéraire. Dans ce cas, l'écrivain peut croire qu'il crée «sa possibilité spirituelle de vivre»; il sent sa création liée mot à mot à sa vie, il se recrée lui-même et se reconstitue', *Feu*, 25.
39. *Nexus*, 12.
40. *Anti-Oedipus*, 40; 'Toujours le schizo les détache, les descelle, les emporte en tous sens pour retrouver une nouvelle polyvocité', *L'Anti-Oedipe*, 48.
41. *Zettel*, 160; 'Vergiß nicht, daß ein Gedicht, wenn auch in der Sprache der Mittelung abgefaßt, nicht im Sprachspiel der Mitteilung verwendet wird', *Zettel*, 28.
42. *Plexus*, 110.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., 16.
47. *Cancer*, 2.
48. Ibid.
49. *Plexus*, 16–17.
50. Marra, 140.
51. *Nexus*, 19–20.
52. Jong, 49.
53. Ibid., 47.
54. Ibid., 6.
55. *Nexus*, 217.
56. Bloshteyn, 65.
57. Ibid., 29.
58. *Letters to Nin*, 24.
59. Bloshteyn, 5–6.

60. Ibid., 88.
61. Ibid., 5.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid., 9–10.
64. Ibid., 10.
65. Ibid., 9.
66. Ibid., 21.
67. Ibid., 29.
68. *Nexus*, 12.
69. *The Making of a Counter-Culture Icon*, 66.
70. Ibid., 44.
71. Ibid., 185.
72. Ibid., 128.
73. *Nexus*, 230.
74. Ibid., 233.
75. Ibid., 231.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Clayton and Rothstein, 6.
79. *Revolution*, 111; 'toute pratique signifiante est un champ de transpositions de divers systèmes signifiants (une inter-textualité)', *La Révolution*, 60.
80. *Desire in Language*, 37; 'À la place de la notion d'intersubjectivité s'installe celle d'intertextualité, et le langage poétique se lit, au moins, comme double', *Séméiotiké*, 146.
81. *Sexus*, 448.
82. Ibid., 449.
83. Ibid., 450.
84. Ibid., 448.
85. Ibid., 452.
86. 'A Gentle Creature', 685.
87. *Sexus*, 452.
88. 'A Gentle Creature', 708.
89. *Sexus*, 458.
90. 'The Double', 41.
91. *Sexus*, 458.
92. Ibid., 458–9.
93. Ibid., 459.
94. Marra, 134.
95. Ibid., 129.
96. Dostoevsky, 670.
97. Nin, 212.
98. Bakhtin, 17.
99. Marra, 122.
100. Bloshteyn, 129.
101. Ibid., 129.
102. *Books*, 224.
103. *Fire*, 169–70; 'Et ainsi en arrive-t-il jeter son univers «par-dessus les frontières humaines», piètre, une si misérable affaire, limitée par les sens,

restreinte par les systèmes moraux et les codes, définie par les platitudes et les ismes». Le langage cherche donc à se séparer de l'homme et même du langage, il pénètre sous terre, il devient eau, air, nuit', *Feu*, 173–4.
104. *Ear*, 7; *L'Oreille*, 19.
105. *Books*, 223.
106. Bloshteyn, 142.
107. Ibid., 143.
108. Ibid.
109. Ibid.,185.
110. Ibid., 30.
111. Ibid., 31.
112. Ibid., 40.
113. Ibid., 38.
114. Mara, 123.
115. *Nexus*, 35.
116. Ibid., 36.
117. Ibid.