Conclusion

The Classics! Slowly, slowly, I am coming to them – not by reading them, but by making them. Where I join with the ancestors, with my, your, our glorious predecessors, is on the field of the cloth of gold.

– Henry Miller, *The Books in My Life* (1952)[1]

In the 'Autobiographical Note' at the end of *The Cosmological Eye*, Miller writes: 'My greatest influences were Dostoievski, Nietzsche and Elie Fauré. Proust and Spengler were tremendously fecundating. Of American writers the only real influences were Whitman and Emerson.'[2] Although this study strays slightly from Miller's self-made list of his influences to some extent, the impetus behind the selection is not meant to reflect exactly what Miller may have thought of himself but rather to present a momentous and stimulating collection of Miller's ancestral authors. All those discussed here, at the same time, are included on Miller's list, apart from Lawrence, as previously explained. This study also seeks to raise the issue of the difficulty in making a meaningful and concrete selection of authors of influence, which establishes the more important point of the very absurdity of trying to assess the manner of influence of any given writer in a complete and concrete sense. Importance must instead be placed on intertextuality, such that the focus of this kind of study rests in its ability to reveal and articulate references and citations without attempting to draw conclusions of textual autonomy but instead to open fissures for further exploration into the nature and effects of intertextual relations.

Influence naturally remains as obscure and even dubious as ever, which hopefully leaves the critic to look for moments of intertextual reference and thereby draw attention instead to literary effects and also to greater historical and social contexts of a work. In a review of *Sons and Lovers* from 1935, included in Geoff Dyer's 1999 introduction to the novel, Jessie Chambers writes: 'Lawrence possessed the miraculous

power of translating the raw material of life into significant form.'[3] Focusing on literary effect, this passage is also reminiscent of Miller's assessment of Proust in *Tropic of Cancer* where he declares that Proust's writerly talent permits him 'to so deform the picture of life' that he is 'capable of transforming the negative reality of life into the substantial and significant outlines of art'.[4] The parallel between Chambers' comment on Lawrence and Miller's comment on Proust is both in their reverence of these authors' *influence*, or perhaps impact, upon the entire nature of their craft as a literary method, and in their positive criticism that attests to these authors' capacity for creation out of destruction – which, *intertextually* speaking, can be historicised and socialised in terms of the way in which literary expression was transforming during the early twentieth century, out of certain traditions and into new ones, marked by an expanding conglomeration of literary voices.

Wallace Fowlie makes a similar claim upon creation from destruction with reference to Rimbaud and Orpheus, stating that Miller 'inherited from them the will to break with the world in order to recreate it'.[5] Miller inherits this quality not only from all of the ancestral authors in this study obviously but from all of those not mentioned, and those particularly mentioned throughout Miller's *oeuvre*. Apart from writers, Miller personally includes philosophers and artists as well, such as Nietzsche, Spengler, Heidegger, Emerson, Van Gogh, Cézanne, Picasso, Buñuel and Eisenstein among others, without restriction to medium.

Beyond traditional definitions of influence, Chambers and Miller's remarks also elicit a sense of the fundamental significance of intertextuality, in Kristeva and Bakhtin's conceptualisation, of the transference of words and ideas across texts and through time. In every text there is always already a heteroglossia of voices surging and resurging within an array of historical contexts, overlapping and penetrating one another with seen and unseen force and effect. The way in which language is always already influencing and being influenced by the histories of itself is, again, what Kristeva calls 'dialogic' language, occurring through a 'translinguistic procedure'.[6] Every new voice includes all those of the past while also annihilating them through their assimilation into something new – but even the 'new' holds within it an entirety that is simultaneously without containment.

Particularly in light of Miller's popular reputation as a 'rebel buffoon' or 'bad boy', these elucidations of the intertextuality in Miller's work serve to bring about a reconception of him as a notable writer, not just for his part in exploding writerly conventions on certain taboos of his time, but also in terms of his relation among other writers of major stature, both in form and quality. It is not a question of whether Miller

is better, more popular or worthy than a Proust or Hemingway. It is rather simply that Miller contributes to a complex literary tradition as a strong, unique writer both directly in relation to traditional figures of influence and also in consideration of their very presence in his work (distinguishing 'presence' both as reference and allusion). Furthermore, Miller's interest as a writer is to write about writing, to investigate its boundaries, it structures, its roots, connections and paths, such that his relevance and significance within a study on intertextuality and the nature of the literary form in general should not be underestimated.

Part of Miller's significance as a writer comes out of his ability to appear casual, nondescript and unassuming, all the while creating a literary style that defers to an infinite series of meta-questions as to the nature of literature itself, using the history of literature both for his examples and for his comrades. Subsequently, a forceful emphasis must be placed on Miller's interest in, and ability to, write about writing – a craft with an assumed form but with unnamed possibilities within it that are necessarily already beyond that form – and thus to engage in the dilemma of the role of intertextuality in the creation of future writing. Not only does Miller engage, he thrashes, he laments, he is confounded, he struggles. In *Sexus* he writes:

> No man would set a word down on paper if he had the courage to live out what he believed in. His inspiration is deflected at the source. If it is a world of truth, beauty and magic that he desires to create, why does he put millions of words between himself and the reality of that world?[7]

The struggle of writing as a procedure, and as a collection of ideas transmitted to word with the aid and handicap of writers past, becomes the subject of Miller's literary pursuits.

In his *interchapter* 'A Manifesto for Antithetical Criticism', Bloom echoes Miller: 'If influence were health, who could write a poem? Health is stasis.'[8] Miller is the critic of his own intertextual references: rewriting them into existence while searching in vain for the capacity to write them out of existence – to complete the task that they began. Yet every sentence on an ancestral author makes a new image of that author, just as much as it eradicates him or her by taking the author up through new words.

Not only is Miller victim, so to speak, to this unavoidable circumstance of writing, he makes it the subject of his writing, but he does so in very curious ways. Chapter 17 of *Plexus* begins directly with a quotation from Spengler's *Decline of the West*, in which his indebtedness to Goethe and Nietzsche is announced. 'And now, finally, I feel urged to name once more those to whom I owe practically everything:

Goethe and Nietzsche.'[9] The passage only subtly reveals itself as a citation through its quotation marks but could still be taken as the voiced claim of one of Miller's characters. This statement could just as well have been made by Miller as by Spengler and, in fact, it is being made by Miller despite (or perhaps in addition to) being made by Spengler. The passage continues: 'Goethe gave me method, Nietzsche the questioning faculty.'[10] It is only at the end of the paragraph that a location and date are named ('Blankenburg am Harz, December 1922'), followed in the second paragraph by an acknowledgement of their origin. Such direct references exist in multitude throughout Miller's work, indicating the importance he places not only on ancestral influence but also on the fluidic nature of writing and on the disembodiment of authorship. Intertextuality is Miller's subject.

Approaching this subject from as many angles as possible, Miller includes writers as characters in his work, finally introducing the fourth form of intertextuality most substantially, as mentioned in the Introduction of this study. Of those writers who enter Miller's *oeuvre* as characters, Knut Hamsun and Thomas Mann are the most striking. In *Nexus*, passing by a German bakery brings Miller to thoughts about Mann. He writes:

> Dear old Thomas Mann. Such a marvelous craftsman. (I should have bought a piece of *Streuselkuchen*!) Yes, in the photos I'd seen of him he looked a bit like a storekeeper. I could visualize him writing his *Novellen* in the back of a delicatessen store, with a yard of linked sausages wrapped around his neck.[11]

Not exactly a character in a traditional sense, Mann manages to enter Miller's text as a caricature: he is a writer brought back to the realm of being a human, but this presence necessarily morphs him into a curiously puppet-like figure, neither real nor imaginary but somewhere in between and somehow, as mentioned in the chapter on Dostoevsky, 'more real than real'.

Knut Hamsun receives the same treatment. Immediately following the Mann reference, Miller writes:

> A street car rattled by. I caught a glimpse of the motor-man's flowing moustache as it rushed by. Presto! The name leaped to mind like a flash. Knut Hamsun. Think of it, the novelist who finally earns the Nobel Prize operating a street car in this god-forsaken land![12]

In 1884 Hamsun worked as a bus and cable-car conductor in Chicago while spending several years in the US working odd jobs before returning to Norway to become a writer. Casually and humorously injected into Miller's text, Hamsun's presence alerts the reader to the peculiar

division between text and reality. Adding to this issue is the potential influence that Hamsun, both as a person and as writer, has on Miller. Somewhat akin to Miller's desire to penetrate the portrait of Dostoevsky, Miller's rendition of Mann and Hamsun is an attempt to take the image of the writer and from that create a 'real' image of a man. At the same time, Miller only toys with this possibility, which is actually an impossibility, knowing that instead he must create 'real' caricatures instead that simply provoke this impossibility itself directly. The creation of himself as 'Henry Miller' in the text also produces precisely this effect.

Miller raises this issue of the division between a character and its creator in 'The Universe of Death', where he remarks on Proust's *inner*textual critique of Dostoevsky, found in the fifth volume of *In Search of Lost Time*, *The Captive* (*La Fugitive*, 1925; in English, 1927). Miller refers to the debate between Albertine and Marcel concerning Dostoevsky, in which Marcel seems unable to provide Albertine with any satisfactory responses to her questions. Miller writes how Proust's depiction of Marcel as 'feebly endeavoring to give a satisfactory response to Albertine's questions' is actually cleverly overcome by Proust himself, through his creation of the character of Charlus. Miller makes this claim because Charlus is so different from his creator, according to Miller, that his creation confirms Marcel's response to Albertine concerning Dostoevsky's preoccupation with murder. Of Dostoevsky Marcel says: 'And it is not perhaps necessary that he himself should have been a criminal. I am not a novelist; it is possible that creative writers are tempted by certain forms of life of which they have no personal experience.'[13] Miller contends that Proust's creation of Charlus itself proves Marcel's point. Miller writes: 'In both Dostoievski and Proust there existed a Stavrogin, a Charlus, far more real than the actual figures.'[14] Suddenly, as with Dostoevsky's characters being 'more real, more potent, more mysterious, more inscrutable than all the mad Czars and all the cruel, wicked Popes put together',[15] and Miller and his wife and her lover living like characters in a Dostoevsky story, the lines between textual figures and real people is deliberately blurred nearly beyond recognition.

What an author is capable of creating is not a reflection of his or her personal self or personal experience but innately belongs to the realm of art and literary creation. It cannot be reduced to the dominion of the real. In 1932 Miller writes to Nin:

> Proust points out numerous examples, *but* ... how do we know that he knows what he is talking about? It is splendidly convincing because there is no real, tangible Albertine, or Andrée, or Duchesse de Guermantes to jump up and contradict him. It has the verisimilitude of art, and that is all I can concede. Of course, his frequent reiteration that 'we are absolutely alone,

> isolate, incomprehensible and mysterious' is the admission of his ineffectuality. But we need to say it over to ourselves again and again, day after day.[16]

Despite Proust's persuasive ability at character creation, Miller questions the 'real' of Proust's writing. Perhaps his characters are perfect, but in that way they are too perfect. They are art at its finest; and for this reason, Miller asserts that Proust's admittance to ultimate incomprehensibility of reality is a testament to the impossibility of writing to produce anything but art. The figures that writing produces cannot be anything more than their appearances, even though it is precisely that appearance that makes them ultimately more real – 'more potent, more mysterious, more inscrutable . . .' – than if they actually were real. This effect is similar to Proust's capacity for creating a stronger sense of the 'real' through highly exaggerated description. Thus Miller as a character himself, Knut Hamsun, Thomas Mann and others are given their chance in Miller's work to live in a grander sense than is possible to live in real life.

When Mona recalls the artists she's met during a short trip to Paris in *Nexus*, they are presented as 'real', and the text itself in which their descriptions are given is understood, then, somehow, to be a document reporting a 'real' experience, further complicated by the fact that they are real experiences (of June Mansfield) despite being 'fictionalised' by Miller-the-author. After Mona lists her encounters, Miller-the-character reports he does not know but a few from the list: Zadkine, Edgar Varèse, Hans Reichel, Tihanyi, Michonze and Marcel Duchamp. He then asks her what Duchamp was like 'as a person', to which Mona responds: 'The most civilized man I ever met.'[17] The reader, in this instance, can either treat the exchange as a fictional conversation about fictional characters – as anyone would do when reading a novel – or the reader can consider the material historical and imagine Henry Miller's wife encountering these famous artists, sizing up her assessments of them as something that might be done when reading a news report or a biographical study. Either approach delimits the role of the figure, filtered through one conventional form of reading or another.

It is no wonder Miller is taken to task for his words, and it is also no wonder that he is misunderstood for the same reason. Instead of permitting the world of the text to retain its curious dualism of form, the reader most often makes a choice. Miller himself is written into the reading and imagined to be of a certain character himself, in the eyes of the reader. For consistency, the reader thus chooses to imagine, for example, Dostoevsky harbouring dark secrets of murder, Proust gazing out of his cork-lined room in the deep hours of the night with profound

melancholy, Lawrence sternly, shrewdly working with his hands worn with calluses from hard labour. Such writers who leap beyond the boundaries of falling prey to this categorical syllogistic fallacy themselves often become victims anyway to a rather all-consuming ontological romanticism. The writers represented here tend themselves to read in the awareness of this tendency that confuses the writer with the name of a dead man, and hence to write with the interest of engaging this theme. These writers curiously become part of the very structure of idealisation in language that they write about. They are humans who are also writers who are subsequently personae and caricatures.

Texts are also given this chance to exist between the real and imaginary in Miller's work. Joyce's *Ulysses* and Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* peculiarly enter *Nexus* in a playful manner, doing so in the same episode. Miller begins by telling Mona a story in order to demonstrate to her his will '*to live* . . . live at any cost . . .'[18] The story that he recounts occurs at a time when Mona was in Paris, and Miller had hopes of getting the money to go and be with her. Within the story, Miller is speaking to an acquaintance about *The Sun Also Rises* and suddenly has the idea to ask this person for the fare to Paris from New York. Endlessly evoking subtle literary references as he tells the story, Miller says to Mona, in a Dostoevskian fashion: 'I was about ready to do anything to raise the necessary passage money' [. . .] 'anything short of murder.'[19] Realising the acquaintance wanted nothing short of sexual favours, however, Miller decides to spend the night on the sofa, though he 'didn't sleep a wink'.[20] At dawn, quietly preparing to leave, he 'spied a copy of *Ulysses*' and instead takes time to read Molly Bloom's soliloquy, casually 'taking a seat by the front window'.[21] He thinks of stealing the book, he reports to Mona, but 'a better idea occurred' to him, and instead he rummages through the man's pockets and takes his remaining seven dollars.

All of the allusions in this passage only hint at any connection to their literariness. They are otherwise incidental details in an incidental story, amounting to nothing but a brief episode in a logodaedalous novel. Just as with the figures of Mann and Hamsun, the novels *Ulysses* and *The Sun Also Rises* become caricatures, in the sense that they are random, fictional objects that maintain a certain aura of realness in the text, but an aura which has been tarnished or even diminished by their very real quality of being-in-the-world. The fact that this quality of being-in-the-world comes through a fictional text further removes them from their original purpose as texts themselves, just as the figures of Mann and Hamsun are removed both from being writers and from being men in the world.

A few pages later, Miller is quoting from Arthur Machen's *The Hill of Dreams* (1907):

> He who reads wonderful prose or verse is conscious of suggestions that cannot be put into words . . . The world so disclosed is rather the world of dreams, rather the world in which children sometimes live, instantly appearing, and instantly vanishing away, a world beyond all expression or analysis . . .[22]

The world Machen speaks of, the world to which Miller alludes with the reference, is the same world inhabited by these imaginary figures that populate Miller's texts. The space that the text creates is neither imaginary nor real but somehow both, in that it provides the idea of a reflection of the world, but what it actually produces is something else entirely, an entirely new creation, which brings together person and persona, the real and the imaginative.

Somewhat similar to Proust's Albertine entering Miller's text in *Tropic of Cancer*, certain other 'fictional' characters, particularly from paintings, also surface directly in Miller's work, such as Cézanne's card players in *Nexus*, as well as figures from Bosch, Chagall and Matisse paintings in *Sexus*, a Rembrandt in *Plexus* and unnamed Renoirs in *Black Spring*.[23] Happily mixing mediums, Miller also makes references concerning one artist or writer in the context of another form of composition completely, such as in *Tropic of Capricorn*, where he writes: 'Long before I read Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* I was composing music to it, in the key of sassafras.'[24] Partially playing off his interest in synaesthesia, particularly in light of his interest in Baudelaire and Rimbaud's fascination with the mixing of the expression of sensory experiences, Miller makes connections that are deliberately difficult, if not impossible, to interpret. This mode of writing again raises Miller's interest in Carroll and word play and, as referenced here, Wittgenstein and *Sprachspiele* ('language games').

Once again, Miller is not simply providing an obvious and straightforward reference but, as usual, is engaging in multiple forms of intertextuality. These include a meta-textual, self-reflexive component that points to the abstruse nature of writing, as seen through Miller's engagement with the act of reading. There is also a referential component to the text itself that does nothing more than raise the complex issues of Wittgenstein's language games generally. Miller also adds an oblique form of textual criticism in this passage by combining sensory experiences somewhat nonsensically, also trampling on conventional perceptions of time, or at least of theorising about time and space in writing. This passage is also a critique on the conventional conceptions of what

writing does, what art is and the nature of the creation of art in general. It calls into question how forms of art are separated and assumed to make sense only, and necessarily, in certain ways. Finally, the tone of the passage itself draws attention to the ontological absurdity of the concept of truth as a whole, by ironically claiming to know something before it even exists.

Manipulating and consciously and unconsciously borrowing from his illuminating predecessors, Miller's dismissal of conventional language forms leads to a type of literary fragmentation that opens up new avenues for exploring the possibilities not only in writing but also in reading, in terms of understanding the complex and non-linear trajectory of intertextuality and influence. Miller's often unconventionally improper language is best regarded as a means of empowerment and creation instead of being both excluded and considered exclusive.

Before his publication career began, Miller perfectly, and perhaps naively, articulates his writerly goals to Schnellock in 1930, summing up the impossible task he set before himself: 'What I must do, before blowing out my brains, is to write a few simple confessions in plain Milleresque language.'[25] The ironic points to this statement include the fact that Miller lived to be eighty-eight years old, that he created a form of writing that blurs the definition of 'confession' and that his other literary innovations add to the realisation that language can hardly ever be 'simple' or 'plain'.

Whether or not the reader could ever locate, then, what 'Milleresque language' itself might be (and what exactly writing 'a few simple confessions' could amount to, particularly in light of Miller's sarcasm and irony), the important point is to recognise that reassessing the roots of experimental forms, such as those found in Miller, is a productive endeavour. Not only does it recuperate the significance and value of 'Henry Miller', it also reveals a tremendous amount about multiple histories of reading and about the interpenetrability of texts. Such an undertaking, in turn, restricts judgements of aesthetic deficiency and instead promotes such writing as a means of expressing originality but also influence, revolution but also convention, singularity but also interdependency, and diversity but also community – regardless of the time or place in which such literary dialogues are continually forming.

Notes

1. *Books*, 316.
2. *Cosmological Eye*, 370.

3. Dyer, xlii.
4. *Cancer*, 163.
5. Fowlie, *Rimbaud*, xi.
6. *Desire in Language*, 37; '. . . une démarche *translinguistique*', *Séméiotiké*, 146.
7. *Sexus*, 18.
8. *Anxiety*, 95.
9. *Plexus*, 444.
10. Ibid., 444.
11. *Nexus*, 309.
12. *Séméiotiké*, 309.
13. *Research*, online; 'Et ce n'était même peut-être pas la peine qu'il fût criminel. Je ne suis pas romancier; il est possible que les créateurs soient tentés par certaines formes de vie qu'ils n'ont pas personnellement éprouvées', *Recherche*, online.
14. 'Universe', 123.
15. *Plexus*, 16.
16. *Letters to Nin*, 27–8.
17. *Nexus*, 104.
18. Ibid., 201.
19. Ibid., 202.
20. Ibid., 203.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 215.
23. For an in depth analysis of this kind of referential ekphrasis, see my work *The Secret Violence of Henry Miller* (Camden House, 2011).
24. *Capricorn*, 226.
25. *Emil*, 65.