Introduction

I suspect that Henry Miller's final place will be among those towering anomalies of authorship like Whitman or Blake who have left us, not simply works of art, but a corpus of ideas which motivate and influence a whole cultural pattern.

– Lawrence Durrell[1]

Henry Miller is likely to outlast a great many writers who at the moment seem more important. Fifty years from now, a hundred years from now, he will remain a significant figure of our time. The future will remember him for a variety of reasons, not all of them literary. For Henry Miller is not only a writer, he is a phenomenon.

– George Wickes[2]

Henry Miller occupies a curious position in the world of fiction. He is well-known and highly regarded in countercultural circles, where he is seen as a proto-Beat and occasionally regarded as an experimental prose writer, continuing the pioneering experiments in form of Joyce, Proust and Céline. His freewheeling work prefigures various contemporary genre transgressions and the rise in literary non-fiction and life writing, yet he has been written about by academics sparingly. The predominant reason is likely his lingering reputation for writing pornography instead of literature, and perhaps his tendency to blur the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, often mixing autobiography, travel writing and literary criticism. The book at hand seeks to provide access to an unfamiliar but ambitious, challenging but rewarding, late modernist, set in relation to a significant handful of ancestral writers who arguably affected his work most profoundly.

Despite the endless self-deprecating references to his lack of formal education, Miller was a serious reader and a genuine book lover. Not only did he himself write prolifically, producing nearly fifty books over the course of his lifetime of eight-eight years (not to mention numerous articles, essays and an extensive body of correspondence), but he was

also a very well read, self-educated bibliophile. In *The Books in My Life* (1952), a non-fiction account of Miller's literary interests, he writes:

> I read – for me, at least – the most difficult books, not the easiest ones. I never read to kill time. [. . .] As I look back it seems to me I was always reading in an uncomfortable position. (Which is the way most writers write and painters paint, I find.) But what I read soaked through. The point is, if I must stress it, that when I read I read with undivided attention and with all the faculties I possessed.[3]

At the same time, in the same book's preface, Miller concludes: 'I have not read nearly as much as the scholar, the bookworm, or even the "well-educated" man – yet I have undoubtedly read a hundred times more than I should have read for my own good.'[4] Miller's position on the value, purpose and use of books is deliberately contradictory. Because it is 'direct experience of life' that is essential,[5] Miller advises his readers to 'read as little as possible, not as much as possible!'[6] Specifically, he claims: 'All that is set forth in books, all that seems so terribly vital and significant, is but an iota of that from which it stems and which it is within everyone's power to tap',[7] namely real-life experience. Nevertheless, Miller identifies his very personality with being a reader. Indeed, the very purpose of the book that he is writing, specifically in this instance *The Books in My Life*, is to set down his thoughts on all the books that he has found to have influenced him, as a person and as a writer.

Thus Miller himself also cannot cease writing. He is aware that writing, as far removed from real life as it may be, is a necessary and quite essential activity in life. Miller considers his experience of writing to be similar, as Miller says, to 'encounters with other phenomena of life or thought. All encounters are configurate, not isolate. In this sense, and in this sense only, books are as much a part of life as trees, stars or dung.'[8] Consequently, Miller's encounter with writing is an encounter with life, albeit a mere 'iota' of life, but it is an activity that engages him, as he sees it, in 'the creation of new and better things', as opposed to an endeavour to render some kind of access to a fullness of life in the past, which 'would be a vain and futile' task.[9] Miller sets to work in *The Books in My Life* detailing his thoughts on his own influences, while never forgetting to remind his reader that it would be impossible not only ever to complete the task, but even to say 'all that [he] means to say' on any particular writer of interest to him.[10] Among many others, to be sure, Miller is referring here to Faure, Cendrars, Céline, Emerson, Dostoevsky, Maeterlinck and Powys, who, as a 'rather a kind of Spenglerian actor', is 'bewitching' as 'the master' and hence 'put a spell' on Miller.[11]

Under such a spell, Miller's focus as a writer is to write about writing itself. As a result, his work is replete with endless references and allusions to, as well as styles and techniques from, various writers whom Miller himself read and usually admired in some form. The following analysis considers Miller's relation to a handful of his precursors: both those whom he directly references as influences and muses over concerning this very anxiety and indebtedness, and those who are present in the very fibre of his texts but remain unacknowledged and often unnamed but whose style is clearly present, sometimes only thinly disguised. The writers about whom Miller writes are manifest in his works in many ways, like in *The Books in My Life* as straightforwardly articulated sources of influence and as figures of his own personal readerly interest. They are also acutely present in his fiction, which is the predominant concern here and which raises an important distinction between Miller-the-author and Miller the figure in the text, that is to say Miller-the-persona.

In terms of influence and intertextuality, not only can Miller's style, form and language as a writer be analysed, but his writing can also be analysed intertextually in relation to Miller-the-persona in the text, insofar as this character of Miller often deliberately speaks the language of other writers or refers to them and discusses them. Writers occasionally live in Miller's fiction. In many ways, as characters themselves, such writers can take on larger-than-life qualities or, alternatively, be referred to just in passing, or perhaps in a book being read by a character or as the writer of a book being discussed. Writers populate Miller's work in the following ways: troubling Miller-the-persona in the text with their philosophies like Nietzsche and Spengler, fraternising with him like Van Gogh and Mann, intimidating him at his own attempt at writing like Dostoevsky and Proust, passionately inspiring him like Balzac and Cendrars, who 'give us the French equivalent of Dostoievsky's outpourings',[12] or simply occupying his back pocket, like Hemingway or Joyce.

Aside from the allusions and direct references, however, writers are also present in an entirely *non-present* way, as embedded sources of influence in Miller and directly intertextually in the language of the text itself. These are the same writers (those figures who made up Miller's reading hours beyond his actual book-writing), but their influence comes through in the writing necessarily in the form, style and language of the text. Writers are present in Miller in a Bakhtinian 'heteroglossia', such as in the Kafkaesque sequence in the last chapter of *Sexus* (1949), where Miller writes: 'If I could become an animal I would be getting somewhere.'[13] Mysteriously opaque yet flatly literal, this passage exemplifies Miller's fascination with existential incertitude and the symbolic

potential of literature, as well as demonstrating his playful insistence on the words standing for themselves. As the passage advances, Miller becomes a dog much in the same way Kafka's figures become animal, pointing to his likely readership and subsequent affinity.

Writers are also present, completely and significantly distinctly, in direct character discussions, such as that on Dostoevsky between Miller-the-persona and his friend Stymer in *Nexus* (1960), where Miller claims, 'That doesn't sound exactly like the Dostoievsky I know,' discounting Stymer's exposition, because 'it has a hopeless ring to it'.[14] Again, influential writers also become characters themselves, such as the imagined vision of Thomas Mann in *Nexus* 'writing his *Novellen* in the back of a delicatessen store, with a yard of linked sausages wrapped around his neck',[15] or, finally, in any combination of both Miller's conscious and unconscious efforts in his writing that must include the forms, styles, language and other qualities of figures of influence.

In their essay 'Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality' from *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary Theory* (1991), Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein distinguish influence from intertextuality most clearly by suggesting that 'influence has to do with agency, whereas intertextuality has to do with a much more impersonal field of crossing texts'.[16] Both concepts are relevant in this book, although it is not always possible to be entirely clear-cut between the two. For example, the term 'influence' is also used here simply as a term in the generic sense of something having an effect upon something else. Without restating Clayton and Rothstein's entire argument and introduction to intertextuality, the study at hand focuses upon such contemporary interpretations of intertextuality, including its foundational presentation by Julia Kristeva and subsequent views by Roland Barthes, both of whom provide theories on the possibility of diverse forms of influence and cross connections between texts that are not simply restricted to the concept of an ancestral author affecting the method of a later one.

Although an old-fashioned sense of influence is crucial here as well, insofar as the development of Henry Miller's authorship is the central concern, the approach taken locates that concern within an intertextual understanding of the terms. The key distinction is to note that influence here does not imply an inherent authority of the ancestral author in contrast to the unoriginality or humility of the later author. It also regards components otherwise considered incidental facts of biography as active and crucial to a work, such as 'allusion, originality and expression', as Kristeva suggests.[17] In her reading of Bakhtin, she makes plain the notion that any utterance is already imbued with a variety of

intertextual components, none being favoured over any other. In this way, Kristeva brings the issue of influence into semiotics by demonstrating that all language is 'dialogic', that is to say words are always already in dialogue in the moment of their utterance. Borrowing from Bakhtin, Kristeva calls this a 'translinguistic procedure'.[18] However, Kristeva takes this a step further than Bakhtin, employing Derrida's notion of *différance* to her theory, which adds the possibility (and necessity) of endless dissemination within a text.

On this note, Roland Barthes' theory of intertextuality comes into play from 'Death of the Author' ('La mort de l'auteur', 1968), which asserts: 'A text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.'[19] Barthes is concerned not simply with authorial intention, or even authorial presence, but with the effects of authorship on the text, on the reader and on the author. In this approach, Miller himself is considered the reader, thus turning traditional influence on its head.

Under examination in this study are four overlapping forms of intertextuality in Miller in relation to a significant selection of ancestral authors – the first two forms being the most crucial. Supported by Barthes' theory above and as explained by the art historian Michael Baxandall, the first form is a 'reverse [of] the active/passive relation which the historical actor experiences and the inferential beholder will wish to take into account'.[20] Baxandall's explanation is useful here because it suggests that influence works counter to conventional thinking, such that it is not the 'historical actor' (the ancestral author) who impacts upon the later author; rather, influence is present in the reader's understanding and adoptive understanding of the ancestral writing. Miller is the central figure dictating that influence directly, whether it be conscious or unconscious. The key point to this approach is that Miller is aware of, and in some ways responsible for, the exchange between himself, his interest as a writer and his sources of inspiration. This form can be divided into two interrelated forms, which serve as the two most important forms addressed in this study. The first form accounts for conscious portrayals and the second for unconscious. The first is *present* (allusion and reference), whereas the second is *non-present* in the text, pointing to sources of influence unknown to Miller (in the sense of intertextuality as a perpetual interfusing and overlapping of texts).

The first form, specific to the purposes of this study, includes Miller's direct allusions to his influences, whereas this second form looks more to styles that are unconsciously borrowed (taking cross-textual connections as its basis for this assumption), such as the Kafkaesque passage mentioned previously. This unconscious form, although it appears to come from a more conventional or old-fashioned sense of influence,

actually takes as its impetus contemporary intertextual theories rooted in Bakhtin's dialogism and heteroglossia, including Baxandall and Barthes' approaches, which suggest that it is 'the agency of the author being influenced', according to Clayton and Rothstein.[21] In *S/Z* (1974) Barthes writes, 'This "I" which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost.'[22] The reader sees that Miller, as the reader, comes to his sources of inspiration already as a complex arrangement of interests, codes and desires. Not only is it impossible and irrelevant to extract one such element, but also to attempt as much would be for the literary critic to misunderstand that Miller-the-author, a man who wrote works of literature, can be equated fluidly and seamlessly with the personas that his literature creates.

The third form is a *reverse* influence, which is concerned with the manner in which the manifestation of the writer of influence in Miller's work has perhaps affected a new reception of that figure of influence in subsequent criticism, again speaking to contemporary intertextuality that understands the flow and intersections of texts to be a-temporal. In *The Books in My Life*, Miller himself makes the following claim: 'The man who spreads the good word augments not only the life of the book in question but the act of creation itself.'[23] Baxandall uses a clear visual analogy of a snooker or billiard table to demonstrate the dynamic of this form of 'reverse influence': each time the ball symbolising Picasso hits upon any other ball (Cézanne, in this instance), not only is Picasso's billiard ball affected and repositioned but so too is Cézanne's, and likely many others.[24] One instance explored here is first discussed by Maria Bloshteyn in *The Making of a Counter-culture Icon: Henry Miller's Dostoevsky* (2007), persuasively explaining how contemporary readings of Dostoevsky are coloured by the work of his literary inheritors. This form is taken up most strongly, however, in the chapter on Proust in relation to the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

In particular, Miller's hand in creating a certain image of the writers here discussed has been significant and instrumental in how they are consequently perceived. This form of intertextuality is of the least concern, since the study at hand focuses upon Miller's writing roots and not upon contemporary writers influenced by him. However, it is still a significant enough form to make it worth addressing in this study, in a backward-looking sense, as in the context of several of the writers addressed here, such as Dostoevsky (again, as Bloshteyn well demonstrates), Lawrence (whose reputation is now intimately tied with Miller's, particularly in consideration of the law suits that ultimately liberated sexually explicit prose) and Proust, again taking into account

the importance of figures like Deleuze and Guattari whose work has had a tremendous impact on contemporary literary and cultural studies and who used their insights on Miller in their work on Proust and who also worked on both simultaneously, allowing one to merge with the other.[25]

Finally, the last form of intertextuality is also acutely present in Miller's work, but even more overtly, with Miller presenting the writer of influence as a figure in the text, occasionally even as a character. These may hardly be considered moments of influence, but rather Miller's cheeky tactic of highlighting his interest in blurring the line between fiction and reality in writing, drawing attention to the issue of distinguishing between 'the writer' and 'the person who has written'. Derrida makes it his task in *The Ear of the Other* (*L'Oreille de l'autre*, 1982; in English, 1985) to unravel this issue in regard to Nietzsche. He writes: 'And if life returns, it will return to the name but not to the living, in the name of the living as the name of a dead man.'[26] Not only does Miller play with the complicated distinction between ancestral figures as writers and as actual people, he does the same with his own persona: existing in his own works as a character who is a writer called Henry Miller, while also recognising his own necessary (and automatic) removal of himself from the text as the author Henry Miller but also as the person called Henry Miller who lived 1891–1980.

Although the cameo appearance of ancestral authors is somewhat widespread throughout Miller's *oeuvre*, it curiously does not really apply to the ancestral authors who had the greatest import to his work. For this reason, the passages that reflect this form of intertextuality are elaborated upon in the Conclusion. More than as sources of influence, they instead exemplify Miller's clever writing style and are used for this study of the presence of ancestral authors in his work. Miller creates characters (or even caricatures) of Mann, Hamsun, Duchamp and Balzac; more generally, he also refers to Abelard and Héloïse, Petrarch, Rabelais, Goethe, Swedenborg, Sade, Sacher-Masoch, Villon, Petronius, Nietzsche, Pascal, Boccaccio, Hugo, Spengler, Machen, Valéry, Strindberg, Faure, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, as well as his contemporaries Hemingway, Joyce, Stein, Cendrars, Anderson, Crane, Céline and Pound, and a handful of painters including Bosch, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Miró, Gauguin, Man Ray and Matisse, as being noteworthy to his writing. The six figures examined in this study are Walt Whitman, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Lewis Carroll, Arthur Rimbaud, Marcel Proust and D. H. Lawrence.

Adding to Miller's contemporary importance, and one of the strongest factors that have been momentous to Miller's reputation as a writer

of significance and influence in his own right, is the role of his ten-year Parisian residence upon his work and upon his cultish reputation subsequently. Place is very significant to Miller and in his work, despite his ridicule of America as the origin to which he felt he never belonged. In *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945), the non-fiction travel narrative resulting from Miller's roughly year-long automobile trek across America after his return from Paris, he writes: 'I felt the need to effect reconciliation with my native land. [. . .] I didn't want to run away from it as I originally had.'[27] Miller does not paint a fond picture of America while in Paris or before. In *Tropic of Cancer* (1934), Miller's first book, written within the first two years of his arrival in Paris, the narrator (Miller-the-persona) recounts his detachment:

> And the funny thing is again that I could travel all around the globe but America would never enter my mind; it was even further lost than a lost continent, because with the lost continents I felt some mysterious attachment, whereas with America I felt nothing at all.[28]

This passage demonstrates, however, that Miller's work itself is decidedly impacted by his self-exile in greater ways than even he could have imagined.

Miller's identification with other such writers in his work (and distinctly not with his contemporaries, such as Joyce, Hemingway and Stein, also Anglophones residing in Paris around the same time) indicates the rather dramatic importance that he places not only on his own living and writing in a place different from his place of origin, but the insistence on completely rejecting that origin – implying the need to accept it as a force behind his very identity. It is akin to the way in which Miller perceives Kafka with his tortured writing, alienated from the Germanic-Czechoslovakian culture in which he lived; or Rilke abandoning his family in Austria to sacrifice himself to his writing, working for Rodin in Paris, suffering war in Russia, Germany and elsewhere, finally succumbing to leukaemia and dying in Switzerland; or Dostoevsky exiled to Siberia, enduring profound suffering for his writing, ostracised by his Mother Russia.

Miller compares himself directly with his influences, to their sufferings and their tragic, often short-lived lives, writing in a letter to Emil Schnellock in 1933:

> I am not going to live very long. I know it. I feel it in my bones. [. . .] Maybe I want to immortalize myself. I don't care what it is. I am pushing myself on, driving with all the steam that's in me, to say what I have to say, before the curtain falls. And when I have said it all, I will fall over. I know it as sure as Fate. I am built along those lines. It is a classical fate for such as myself.

(Vide – Gauguin, Van Gogh, Strindberg, Nietzsche, Lawrence, Proust, Dostoievski.)[29]

As if instinctively, yet quite deliberately, Miller associates himself not just with 'the greats', but with those greats who endured alienation, displacement and often a form of homelessness or of not-belonging.

In *American Expatriate Writing and the Paris Moment* (1996) Donald Pizer writes, 'Miller heightens to an almost unremitting presence the principle metaphoric analogues provided by the Paris scene for the expression of these themes', which are 'the essential expatriate subject matter of Paris as a crucible for the refining of the creative spirit into gold or dross.'[30] For Pizer, Miller's work expresses the epitome of 'the creative imagination of feasting and mobility within the Paris moment',[31] which other expatriate writers only used as tropes. Although the philosophical and intertextual dimension of this work moves away from discussions of place and cultural geography, it is still very important to 'place' Miller, particularly to identify how this capacity of 'feasting and mobility' is present in Miller and how it not only distinguishes him from his contemporaries but how it aligns him with his ancestral writers of influence. Generally speaking, it is also necessary in order better to explain the relationship that Miller has with (and the role he plays in) both European and American writing. In another letter to Emil Schnellock in 1933, Miller writes: 'France is where I belong. Or somewhere here in Europe. I am no longer an American. I can swear to that.'[32] Miller is constantly writing such things in his notes and letters, aggressively and definitely, letting this conviction make its way into every word of his prose as well.

In *Americans in Paris* (1969) George Wickes also highlights Miller's singular import on the early twentieth-century image, and imagining, of Paris. He writes, 'Miller penetrated far deeper into Paris than any other American writer and projected a vision of the city that was altogether different. He succeeded only as Céline had done in making its ugliness symbolic of private and universal anguish, a sordid modern-day inferno, a labyrinth of cancer and despair.'[33] Considered an expatriate writer, Miller's physical placement in Paris gave him a sharper perspective as a writer on his homeland than he would otherwise have had, had he stayed in Brooklyn. In *Transatlantic Modernism: Moral Dilemmas in Modernist Fiction* (2006), Martin Halliwell writes, 'The view of "homeland" as an anchor for personal identity and moral orientation is a perspective American expatriate writers treated with extreme suspicion: for Miller, New York was "a whole city erected over a hollow pit of nothingness" . . .'[34] Despite his self-proclaimed affinity with culturally

displaced and exiled writers (including Kafka, Rilke, Dostoevsky and Beckett, as well as the writers around him including those who were to make up his writing circle known as the 'Villa Seurat', such as Cuban-Catalan-Spanish, France-residing Anaïs Nin or the Indian-British, France and Greece-residing Lawrence Durrell), Miller never really wanted to identify himself as an expatriate writer in the vein of his contemporaries Joyce, Hemingway or Stein. These latter writers weren't at all as impressive as the public took them for, in Miller's contention, derisively calling Hemingway a 'craftsman' and 'not the great writer they make him out to be'.[35] The comparisons between Hemingway and Miller in particular are more prevalent than one might expect, and for this reason perhaps Miller desired to distinguish himself as much as possible.

Joyce, Hemingway, Stein and others also did not necessarily consider themselves 'expats' either, which was considered rather derogatory. In *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), Hemingway explains that it refers to foreigners who have 'lost touch with the soil' and live according to 'fake European standards', who 'spend all [their] time talking, not working' and who 'hang around cafés'.[36] Living in Paris a decade later, Miller was able to distance himself even from the conventionally adapted 'expat' moniker that came to represent Stein's 'Lost Generation' – these figures who fled America, fought on French First World War battlefronts, wrote modern prose and poetry in Parisian cafes and generally lived so-called avant-garde or bohemian lifestyles during the 1920s. In his non-fiction essay 'The Universe of Death' (1938) on Joyce, Proust and Lawrence, Miller writes: 'Joyce, though still alive, seems even more dead than Proust ever was.'[37] In *Plexus* (1953), he refers to Stein's poetry as 'cold-blooded nonsense',[38] and in *From Your Capricorn Friend* (1978), a collection of letters and essays, Miller writes, 'For each person it will be another different set of baggage he wants or needs to carry through life. [. . .] One can forget Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald, Thurber, and their likes.'[39] His reference concerns significant figures and experiences that are worthy of posterity, such as a first romantic crush and the poetry of Walt Whitman, and those that are not worthy, such as the writers mentioned in the passage above.

In his comparative critique of Hemingway and Miller in *Americans in Paris*, George Wickes writes that *Tropic of Cancer* 'is sometimes compared to *The Sun Also Rises*, not for the similarities but for the differences between them. The comparison is absurd yet apt, for it shows how much the world had changed between the mid-twenties and the early thirties.'[40] Such writers as Joyce, Stein and Hemingway (these being several of the most prominent Anglo writers living in Paris during the first third of the twentieth century) enjoyed far more success and thus

may have been viewed as a challenge to Miller, who disguised his intimidation as distaste and disdain and so ridiculed their work, claiming, on the whole, to be unimpressed.[41] Bloshteyn agrees and recognises the obvious mechanism at work here when she writes that 'at least part of the Villa Seurat writers' dissatisfaction with and ultimate rejection of the work of their contemporaries . . . had to do with their desire to be major literary figures in their own right . . .'[42] Miller's lack of popular success is directly related to his interest in the vision of himself as a self-exiled, peripheral writer, necessarily an underdog.

Undeniably contradictory at times, Miller demands an exploding of traditional canonicity, while maintaining an image of himself as a kind of self-flagellating, life-affirming martyr. Miller desired fame and popular success on some level, but not at the expense of his 'bad boy' reputation and his vision of greatness by way of hardship, isolation and singularity. Comparing Miller and Joyce, George Orwell writes in 'Inside the Whale' (1945):

> As a novel, *Tropic of Cancer* is far inferior to *Ulysses*. Joyce is an artist, in a sense in which Miller is not and probably would not wish to be, and in any case he is attempting much more. He is exploring different states of consciousness, dream, reverie (the 'bronze-by-gold' chapter), drunkenness, etc., and dovetailing them all into a huge complex pattern, almost like a Victorian 'plot'.[43]

Miller's contemporaneous critics were, on some level, aware of what Miller was attempting in his works. Orwell's early critique provides his understanding, explaining that such are books 'of the sort to leave a flavour behind them – books that "create a world of their own," as the saying goes. The books that do this are not necessarily good books, they may be good bad books . . .'[44] This topic of 'good bad books' surfaces again in Chapters 2 and 4 on Dostoevsky and Rimbaud, in terms of bad writing being equated with mythic, legendary writing.

For these reasons, Miller can be seen not just as a modernist but also as a strong influence on postmodern writing, being conceptually grounded in tools of contradiction, radical exploitation of conventional forms, as well as manipulative usage of techniques that open up fissures in how literature is read and received. It is not quite as simple as calling Miller a misogynist, for example, when a postmodernist understanding just as easily – and solidly – regards so-called sexist or pornographic passages as ironic, deliberately elusive, absurd and fragmented. Such writing calls attention to itself as a new form and not simply as a medium of specific (or even significant) content.[45] In *The Work of Fire* (*La part du feu*, 1945; in English, 1995) Maurice Blanchot writes of

this particular quality of Miller's work when he says: 'Language seeks thus to separate itself from man and even from language; it penetrates underground, it becomes water, air, night. It enters into the way of metamorphoses.'[46] Miller is constantly directing his work out of itself, into life but life that is always necessarily contained in the creativity of the work itself. When Blanchot talks of these 'metamorphoses' in relation to Miller, he is also directly talking about Miller's 'obscene' language. As with postmodern works, the point is not to stagnate over the literal content of the work but to transform what the reader is able to make of that content in terms of language under the pressures of literature. This kind of writing evokes an otherness that demands attention from the reader on the level of moving beyond the obvious but with the need for the obvious precisely in order for it to be undermined. Such writing has meaning (and *not-meaning*) as language play. Blanchot writes of Miller's style: 'Humor here is the threat of a complete metamorphosis of language that would change the meaning not into an absence of meaning but into a thing, a mirage in face of which any correct reading is soon transformed into stupor.'[47] From here, one sees Miller's flight forward into the postmodern, as well as backward into a Carrollian universe, addressed in Chapter 3.

In *The Books in My Life*, Miller laments, 'I believe they are woefully mistaken who assert that the foundations of knowledge or culture, or any foundations whatsoever, are necessarily those classics which are found in every list of "best" books.'[48] He follows up with his solution: 'It is my opinion that each man has to dig his own foundations. If one is an individual at all it is by reason of his uniqueness.'[49] The reader may wonder how it is that Miller's list of 'The Hundred Books That Influence Me Most' includes, on the whole, such usual classics such as Conrad, Balzac, Emerson, Hugo, Dumas, Cooper, James, Twain, Mann, Plutarch, Swift and others. These are listed alongside other seemingly surprising selections including Sade, Nostradamus, Lao-tse, Breton and Gutkind. There are several on Miller's list as well who would have not been considered classics at his time but whose presence is more familiar on today's lists of 'great books', such as E. Brontë, Huysmans and Joyce. Miller addends his claim when he writes, 'The good reader will gravitate to the good books.'[50] Without opening a complex argument on the validity of this statement, it may simply be a segue for supporting the choices taken for this study: six of what appear the most prominent writers in Miller's work, through both direct and indirect reference.

For a neutral presentation of these writers of intertextual significance in Miller's work, they are included in this study by chronological

order of birth. Chapter 1 is devoted to Whitman, followed by chapters on Dostoevsky, Carroll, Rimbaud, Proust and finally Lawrence. Dostoevsky and Proust may be seen as probably the most prominent figures in all of Miller's work of those included here: the first Miller worshipped, the second was his alter ego. Rimbaud and Lawrence come as no surprise to Miller's readers. They are the two influences from whose grasp Miller struggled to escape while simultaneously serving as the writers after whom Miller verily fashioned himself, by the end of his life having written a study on each. Whitman and Carroll may be the least obvious on first glance, but their carefree, life-affirming styles deeply affected Miller in his personal spiritual pursuits and hence affected his own take on infusing Nietzschean affirmation and whimsical humour into his texts. In several instances, these last two influences are the least named by Miller-the-persona but are two with whom he often seems to be engaging or to whom he seems to be responding. It is almost as if a correspondence or actual dialogue were taking place between the writers within Miller's work, or if a dialogue could take place through the words themselves – outside of the time and space that, monumentally, separates the writers' own existences. This sense of correspondence is specifically addressed in Chapter 1 on Whitman but should be considered to pervade the entire study, summing up with an essence of Miller as developing a literary camaraderie with all of his ancestral writers, transcending time and place.

Particularly in light of Miller's popular reputation as a 'bad boy',[51] this elucidation will hopefully bring about a reconceptualisation of Miller as a notable writer, not just for his assistance in exploding writerly conventions on certain taboos, but also in terms of his position among other writers of major stature, both in terms of form and quality. As Deleuze and Guattari write in *A Thousand Plateaus* (*Mille plateaux*, 1975; in English, 1987), 'It is undoubtedly Miller who has taken the modern figure of the writer as cosmic artisan the farthest, particularly in *Sexus*.'[52] The book at hand has two specific endeavours that highlight Miller's play with language while grappling with the notions of influence and writing. The first is to uncover the exact references in Miller's texts that refer to influence and influences and to extract the nature of those references (purpose and effect, if possible). For example, Whitman is included not simply to address how Miller's style is similar, but because Miller directly responds to Whitman's poetry. In 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry' (1856) Whitman declares:

> Come on, ships from the lower bay! pass up or down, white-sail'd schooners, sloops, lighters!
> Flaunt away, flags of all nations! be duly lower'd at sunset;

> Burn high your fires, foundry chimneys! cast black shadows at nightfall!
> cast red and yellow light over the tops of the houses;
> Appearances, now or henceforth, indicate what you are.[53]

Miller seems directly to respond to him in *Black Spring* (1936):

> Thus when the fleet maneuvers in the Pacific it is the whole saga of youth flashing before your eyes, the dream of the open street and the sound of gulls wheeling and diving with garbage in their beaks; or it's the sound of the trumpet and flags flying and all the unknown parts of the earth sailing before your eyes without dates or meaning, wheeling like the tabletop in an iridescent sheen of power and glory.[54]

The connection is not simply the allusion to Whitman but the nature of that allusion. Miller not only calls upon Whitman but also engages with him in his work.

The second endeavour in this book is to reveal how Miller enacts a progressive take on Bloom's 'anxiety of influence' of not overcoming ancestral authors (that is, not by comfortably re-creating the new, as Bloom discourages as a possibility), but remaining necessarily unfulfilled through misreading, which includes Miller parodying, emulating and bringing to life his ancestral authors. The fact that Miller writes about writing serves as the impetus in dissecting Miller's influences, partly because he is a good example of a writer who remains perpetually in pursuit of the pursuit itself.

In comparing Miller with Lautréamont in this vein, Blanchot writes that Miller's work expresses the same 'fundamental conflict in which violence and slowness associate, acceleration of acts and unified control of rhythm, explosion of metamorphoses and arrest of all duration' because of 'the extreme intrepidity of his movement, this rapidity of existence, this multiplicity of presents that the language expresses seem like the returning shock of a consciousness that lacks a future and that seeks only to live again in the past'.[55] The anxiety of influence is somehow even more problematic and compelling, such that Miller is not just calling out to the past (while trying to manage his anxiety of 'priority' and 'authority', in Bloom's sense of the terms), but he is relentlessly paying attention to the push and pull of this tradition of influence (the history and necessary chronology of influence) by writing about this very undeniable and impossible task of writing.

The kind of analysis found here is in distinction to critics like Kingsley Widmer and William Gordon, who, in their critiques *Henry Miller* (1990) and *The Mind and Art of Henry Miller* (1967), respectively, discuss how they consider Miller to be a product of the American Romantic tradition. They both read directly into Miller's philosophical

interests as a human being (as divulged in his writing without regard to the distinction between the author and the persona, much as critics also continue to read Whitman), instead of regarding the form of Miller's prose on its own, and subsequently in relation to the prose and poetry of those very American Romantics such as Whitman. Another critical text on Miller and influence is John Parkin's *Henry Miller, the Modern Rabelais* (1990), which aligns Miller with Rabelais. Parkin considers Miller to be a 'picaresque hero', analysing Miller's experiences in New York, Paris and Greece. A significant work on Miller in relation to Rimbaud is Bertrand Mathieu's *Orpheus in Brooklyn: Orphism, Rimbaud and Henry Miller* (1976). A substantial and thorough analysis, *Orpheus in Brooklyn* discusses Miller's parallels first with Orphism, then with the *Symbolistes* and finally directly with Rimbaud. As Mathieu himself explains, previous critical works on Miller's influences have paid more attention to 'matters of ideology and attitude' and not to 'Miller's devotion to Rimbaud the craftsman' as does he.[56] Chapter 4's treatment of Rimbaud as an intertextual reference includes a notable acknowledgement and explication of Mathieu's work.

For Miller, writing is the paradoxical mode for getting at the world. Awkwardly, through writing, however, life is immediately suspended. Miller declares, 'I wanted to describe the world I knew and be in it at the same time.'[57] Miller spends his entire literary corpus trying to write through the very dilemma that is literature. The reader sees how writers such as Proust and, in this instance, even Lewis Carroll made their way, in both conscious and unconscious ways, to the top of Miller's list of influences. Miller's concern is writing itself and the capacity of language as a tool to create new and incredible universes, while also peculiarly reflecting, distorting and imitating reality. On the one hand, writing is seen necessarily to pale in comparison to reality, if one considers the duty of writing to concretise life, while on the other hand, writing moves beyond life, often through flamboyant or humorous efforts. Miller explains:

> It took me ages to understand why, after having made exhaustive efforts to induce these moments of exaltation and release, I should be so incapable of recording them. I never dreamed that it was an end in itself, that to experience a moment of pure bliss, of pure awareness, was the end all and be all.[58]

This passage is a significant point of departure for an examination of intertextuality in Miller's work, because it highlights the problem that will plague Miller throughout his *oeuvre*, which is how he can both be part of the tradition of great writers like Dostoevsky and Whitman while also trying to live in the world that they create and to write that

world down in his living of it. This conundrum (the problem of priority and authority) preoccupies Miller in all of his work. The first upcoming analysis is on Miller's relationship with Whitman and this sense of a transcendent literary correspondence.

Notes

1. *The Henry Miller Reader*. New York: New Directions Publishing, 1969, p. ix.
2. *Henry Miller*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966, p. 5.
3. *Books*, 264–5.
4. Ibid., 11.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 23.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 15.
11. Ibid., 135–6.
12. Ibid., 73.
13. *Sexus*, 451.
14. *Nexus*, 32.
15. Ibid., 309.
16. Clayton and Rothstein, 40.
17. Ibid., 15.
18. *Desire in Language*, 37; 'Une démarche *translinguistique*', *Séméiotiké*, 146.
19. *Image-Music-Text*, 148; 'L'unité d'un texte n'est pas dans son origine, mais dans sa destination', *Le bruissement de la langue*, 66.
20. Baxandall, 58. In 'Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality' Clayton and Rothstein acknowledge that others have made this claim before Baxandall including D. W. Robertson's study on Chaucer and Earl Wasserman's on Pope.
21. Clayton and Rothstein, 6.
22. *S/Z*, 10; 'Ce «moi» qui s'approche du texte est déjà lui-même une pluralité d'autres textes, de codes infinies, ou plus exactement: perdues (dont l'origine se perd)', *S/Z*, 16.
23. *Books*, 28.
24. Clayton and Rothstein, 60.
25. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987; *Mille plateaux, vol. 2: capitalisme et schizophrénie*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1980.
26. *Ear*, 9; 'Et si la vie revient elle reviendra au nom et non au vivant, au nom du vivant *comme* nom du mort', *L'Oreille*, 21.
27. *Nightmare*, 10.
28. *Cancer*, 177.
29. *Emil*, 121–2.

30. Pizer, 123.
31. Ibid.
32. *Emil*, 113.
33. Wickes, 261.
34. Halliwell, 113.
35. *Conversations*, 220.
36. *Sun Also Rises*, 120.
37. 'Universe', 109.
38. *Plexus*, 234.
39. *Capricorn Friend*, 73.
40. Wickes, 261.
41. There are instances, however, where Miller refers to Joyce's work, specifically the Molly Bloom soliloquy of *Ulysses*, with a certain complimentary regard, even if it is unclear as to whether the final judgement of that regard is admiration. In 'The Universe of Death', Miller refers to this piece as a 'timeless reverie', also calling the preceding chapter 'the work of a learned desperado', about which Miller gives Joyce credit for 'dynamiting the dam' in order to destroy 'the last barrier of tradition and culture which must give way if man is to come into his own' (132).
42. Bloshteyn, 94.
43. Orwell, 38.
44. Orwell, 34.
45. For more on this particular topic of misogyny and Blanchotian theory, see my work *The Secret Violence of Henry Miller* (Camden House, 2011).
46. *Fire*, 169–70; 'Le langage cherche donc à se séparer de l'homme et même du langage, il pénètre sous terre, il devient eau, air, nuit. Il s'engage dans la voie des métamorphoses', *Feu*, 173–4.
47. *Fire*, 174; 'L'humour ici est la menace d'une complète *métamorphose* du langage, qui changerait le sens non pas en une absence de sens, mais en une chose, mirage en face duquel toute lecture correcte se transforme bientôt en stupeur', *Feu*, 178.
48. *Books*, 32.
49. Ibid., 32.
50. Ibid., 32.
51. Miller is perhaps rather, as Kingsley Widmer dubs him in *Henry Miller* (1963), 'a rebel-buffoon' (vii).
52. *Plateaus*, 551; 'Miller a sans doute poussé le plus loin la figure moderne de l'écrivain comme artisan cosmique, surtout dans *Sexus*', *Plateaux*, 427.
53. Whitman, §§128–30.
54. *Spring*, 12.
55. *Fire*, 168; 'D'une discordance fondamentale où s'associent violence et lenteur, accélération des actes et tenue unie du rythme, explosion de métamorphoses et arrêt de toute durée' [. . .] 'l'intrépidité extrême de son mouvement, cette rapidité d'existence, cette multiplicité de présents qu'exprime le langage apparaissent comme le choc en retour d'une conscience à qui l'avenir fait défaut et qui ne cherche qu'à revivre au passé', *Feu*, 172.
56. Mathieu, 7.
57. *Plexus*, 39.
58. Ibid., 40.