

... He uses the everyday words that he learned in the streets as a boy.

These words are still explosive in print. It is probably Miller's language more than anything else that aroused the censors, and still makes it exceedingly difficult to debate pornography-obscenity issue dispassionately. There is also a problem of definition, and in the lawcourts a question of the writer's intent. Miller cheerfully admits that he is an obscene writer, but claims not to be a pornographer. He bases his distinction largely on candor: obscenity to him is direct, while pornography is suggestive. Pornography might be described simply as aphrodisiac, obscenity as disgusting. Pornography is romantic, making sex appear more alluring than it actually is; while obscenity, to the contrary, makes sex repulsive or ridiculous. By now no one challenges Miller's motives much; certainly he did not write about sex to make money - he is not a pornographer in that sense. In time the whole issue is likely to appear ludicrous, a quaint episode in a changing cultural pattern. After all, pornography has flourished mainly in a few puritanical countries during the last two hundred years or less; elsewhere and at other times, sex has almost invariably been regarded as comical. Already there are signs that the English-speaking people are growing less squeamish about reading the dozen or so words that make up the obscene vocabulary. If so, H.M. has been largely responsible for their acceptance in print.

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NO. 56

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PAMPHLETS
ON AMERICAN WRITERS

\$1.25

Henry Miller

BY GEORGE WICKES

UNIVERSITAT AUTÒNOMA DE BARCELONA
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Dionysian, anti-intellectual, instinctive; he turns to the same life-giving sources, art, religion, and sex. To use a favorite term of contemporary criticism, both are prophetic, apocalyptic writers. Here the resemblance ends. Temperamentally the two are altogether different, as different as tragedy and comedy. Where Lawrence is inclined to play the messiah, Miller prefers to play the clown.

Art, religion, and sex. Miller is easily recognized as an apostle of art and sex, but the religious element may be harder to detect in his work. By conventional standards he is immoral, profane, and blasphemous. He is not pious, virtuous, solemn, puritanical, dogmatic, or orthodox — he has none of the attributes that Americans usually associate with religion, and he clearly has no use for them. Yet Miller regards himself as a religious man, frequently mentions God in his work, and readily alludes to such religious figures as Gautama, Jesus, and, his favorite, Lao-tse. What he means by God and religion is often hard to determine, because he is so completely eclectic in his views. Often in his early works, God means simply the divine afflatus or self-fulfillment. And religion, especially in his later works, can include anything that might loosely be labeled mysticism or metaphysics. Miller has always been attracted to all kinds of exotic and esoteric systems, such as astrology, theosophy, and occultism. In rejecting organized Christianity, he did not close his mind to religion, but rather opened it to all manner of unconventional para-religious beliefs, preferably Oriental in origin. And in religion as in everything else he remains a hedonist, an anarchist, and a humorist; this combination makes it particularly difficult for more conventional minds to accept Miller as a religious person.

Sex is of course the most controversial element in his work; it assumes many forms and serves many purposes. Sometimes it is purely gratuitous, mere bawdy storytelling, but at other times it

is symbolic. At its most meaningful sex serves as the most powerful weapon against the system he is attacking. It is the life-force, the only force that can rescue man from the machine. Here again Miller resembles Lawrence; but he does not go on with Lawrence to develop a mystique of sex. With him sex is usually casual, carnal, anarchic, and indiscriminate. In writing about it, he is crude, blunt, explicit. Worse still, he uses the everyday words that he learned in the streets as a boy.

These words are still explosive in print. It is probably Miller's language more than anything else that aroused the censors, and still makes it exceedingly difficult to debate the pornography-obscenity issue dispassionately. There is also a problem of definition, and in the law courts a question of the writer's intent. Miller cheerfully admits that he is an obscene writer, but claims not to be a pornographer. He bases his distinction largely on candor: obscenity to him is direct, while pornography is suggestive. Pornography might be described simply as aphrodisiac, obscenity as disgusting. Pornography is romantic, making sex appear more alluring than it actually is; while obscenity, to the contrary, makes sex repulsive or ridiculous. By now no one challenges Miller's motives much; certainly he did not write about sex to make money — he is not a pornographer in that sense. In time the whole issue is likely to appear ludicrous, a quaint episode in a changing cultural pattern. After all, pornography has flourished mainly in a few puritanical countries during the last two hundred years or less; elsewhere and at other times, sex has almost invariably been regarded as comical. Already there are signs that the English-speaking peoples are growing less squeamish about reading the dozen or so words that make up the obscene vocabulary. If so, Henry Miller has been largely responsible for their acceptance in print.

As might be expected, Miller is as iconoclastic on the subject

GEORGE WICKES

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The bibliography of Henry Miller is somewhat confused by expatriate publication, amateur enterprises, and other unusual circumstances. Two of his books were first published in translation. Some works appeared independently and were later incorporated into others; for example, *A Devil in Paradise* (1956) became part of *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch* (1957). A number of essays were first published in pamphlet form and later collected in miscellanies, such as *Money and How It Gets That Way* (1938), anthologized many years later in *Stand Still like the Hummingbird* (1962). Some pamphlets reprint excerpts from already published works; some are merely advertising brochures. To clarify the record, the list below gives only the first edition in English and only pamphlets containing material which does not appear elsewhere.

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