

**Blast and Bless:**  
**Radical Aesthetics in the Writings of Henry Miller and**  
**Ezra Pound**  
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## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to provide a new way of reading Henry Miller by drawing attention to his unlikely aesthetic and moral intersections with Ezra Pound. It traces the lineage of a particular strand of radical modernist expression that is exemplified in Pound's critical essays between 1909 and 1938 and finds its way – incongruously – into Henry Miller's semi-autobiographical novels of the 1930s. In the process, I will illuminate hitherto underexplored territory that is shared by two seemingly incompatible writers, pointing the way to a better understanding of the aesthetic and moral contradictions in Miller's – and indeed Pound's – work.

Crucially, I propose that Miller's literature is morally engaged rather than amoral or unwittingly counter-revolutionary, two common and reductive assumptions. By reading him in the context of Pound's often suspect pronouncements on hierarchy and order it is possible to reassess George Orwell's widely accepted conclusion that Miller is simply a 'passive, unflinching' recorder of life.<sup>1</sup> It is also possible to treat his textual violence as an important part of his aesthetic, rather than condemning or glossing over it. This thesis will define a set of aesthetics that are common to Pound and Miller and involve complex, often paradoxical impulses – most crucially between the desire to cultivate a radically inclusive artistic approach and the instinctive adherence to a set of absolute tastes and values.

Taking as my starting point a little known review by Pound of Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, I demonstrate that the latter's often brutal, anti-humanist rhetoric enables rather than undermines his larger humanistic project. I show that Miller's idiosyncratic assimilation of high modernist reactionary tropes and ideas were integral to his original and influential view of art, ethics and reality. Concomitantly, this comparison of two very different writers seeks to generate a new perspective on the slippage between retrograde and progressive elements in both their works as well as the period in which they were writing.

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<sup>1</sup> George Orwell, 'Inside the Whale' in *Collected Essays*, ed. by George Packer (London: Harvill Secker, 2009), pp. 95-137, p. 128. Originally published in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1940).

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### Literature review

My primary reading consists of a selection of Ezra Pound's essays and manifesto writings between 1909 and 1938 and Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and *Max and the White Phagocytes*, two of his semi-autobiographical novels from the 1930s. Of Pound's essays, I will focus on his initially unpublished review of *Tropic of Cancer*, written in 1935, on 'Joyce' and 'Ulysses' - his essays on James Joyce' value to English literature in the 1910s - and *Guide to Kulchur*, his 1938 treatise on culture, politics and economics. Pound's review of *Tropic of Cancer* provides the basis for my re-reading of Miller's moral philosophy; the Joyce essays help me to delineate his principal aesthetics of the 1910s; and *Guide to Kulchur* explains his application of these early aesthetics to a conspiracy theory that connected impure literary expression to usury, liberal democracy and a general decline of values in the Western world.

My secondary reading can be broken down into six main categories: a small body of Miller criticism that reads him in the high modernist tradition; theoretical studies of modernism - in particular a selection of books that provide definitions of 'late' or 'minor' modernisms which are applicable to Miller; Miller's essays on art, literature and philosophy from the 1940s to the 1960s; a substantial range of work on Pound as a literary and economic commentator in the first half of the twentieth century; 1930s and 1940s reviews of Miller's novels that provide points of comparison with Pound's; and literary philosophical and theoretical writings that inform both primary subjects.

There are very few studies of Miller in the context of Anglo-European modernism and none at all that focus on the relationship between his and Pound's writing. A small clutch of texts have dealt with Miller specifically in the context of psychoanalysis and Surrealism - Jane Nelson's *Form and Image in the Fiction of Henry Miller* (1975), Gay Louise Balliet's *Henry Miller and Surrealist Metaphor: Riding the Ovarian Trolley* (1996), James M. Decker's *Constructing the Self, rejecting modernity* (2005) and Caroline Blinder's *A Self-Made Surrealist: Ideology and Aesthetics in the Work of Henry Miller* (2000). These works provide interesting ideas as to Miller's

appropriation and reworking of André Breton's automatic method and his position within that modernist-related methodology. Besides Blinder, whose work has been important to my research and whom I shall come on to shortly, these writers do little in terms of locating Miller's prose within the ideological or stylistic context of his more celebrated high modernist predecessors and contemporaries. Nevertheless, they have been useful for their commentaries on Miller's inheritance of Breton's aggressive stance against 'literature', an area I explore throughout my comparison of Miller with Pound.

Of the even smaller group of critics who deal specifically with Miller in the context of Anglo-European modernism, English academic Sarah Garland is the most relevant to my study. Her 2010 essay, 'The Dearest of Cemeteries', is the only attempt to make a sustained connection between Miller and Pound, identifying their shared interest in the apocalyptic and the egomaniacal tone that results from this. I have found her approach crucial for its understanding of the correspondence between Pound as co-writer of the Vorticist manifestos and the autodidactic passages of *Cancer*. Moreover, it has provided me with the foundations for my research into Miller and Pound as adopters of eschatological language and theory in the 1930s – pointing the way to many of the theorists I cite in Chapter Three, 'The Festival of Death': Eschatology, Economics and Fascism'. Treating Miller as a 'magpie', a collector of diffuse literary ideas, tones and textures, Garland identifies Pound as one of many contributory influences on his work.<sup>2</sup> This topographical perspective has helped me to form my own understanding of Miller's position in relation to inter-war modernism, allowing me to think about Miller as a 'syncretic' and 'parodic' appropriator of suspect prophetic rhetoric.<sup>3</sup> This thesis picks up many of the threads from Garland's essay

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<sup>2</sup> Sarah Garland, *Rhetoric and Excess: Style, Authority, and the Reader in Henry Miller's 'Tropic of Cancer', Samuel Beckett's 'Murphy', William Burroughs' 'Naked Lunch', and Vladimir Nabokov's 'Ada or Ardor'* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia, 2005), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Garland, 'The Dearest of Cemeteries', *European Journal of American Culture*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 29 (2010), 197-215, p. 200.

and develops them by narrowing the focus from a general study of Miller in the context of 'canonical high modernism' to a direct comparison with Pound.<sup>4</sup>

Garland's 2005 PhD thesis *Rhetoric and Excess: Style, Authority, and the Reader in Henry Miller's Tropic of Cancer, Samuel Beckett's Murphy, William Burroughs' Naked Lunch, and Vladimir Nabokov's Ada or Ardor* deals more closely with Miller's narrative style, highlighting an aggressive dynamic between writer and reader that I use to connect Miller with Pound. Similarly, Katy Masuga's *The Secret Violence of Henry Miller* (2011) uses Gilles Deleuze's theory of 'minor' literature to present Miller as a covertly antagonistic writer whose language and syntax is purposefully excessive and frustrating, intended to draw attention to the impossibility of language as a stable means of expressing reality. It is relevant to this study because its theoretical discussion of Miller's incendiary construction of sentences helps to inform and consolidate my own ideas about his incendiary use of equally unbearable moral positions to draw the reader's attention to the problems inherent in ideology and morality.

Though it does not refer to Pound, Blinder's thesis *Henry Miller's Sexual Aesthetics: A Comparative Analysis of Selected Twentieth-Century Influences on Henry Miller's Writing* (1995) and her book *A Self-Made Surrealist: Ideology and Aesthetics in the Work of Henry Miller* have been useful for their focus on morality in *Tropic of Cancer*, *Black Spring* (1936) and *Tropic of Capricorn* (1939). Blinder's translation and close analysis of the essay 'La Morale de Miller', by French literary theorist Georges Bataille (1946) informs my arguments on Miller's use of violent and ostensibly anti-humanistic language to arrive at a position of optimism and tolerance. It also provides a vital counterpoint in my comparison of Miller and Pound's approaches to expenditure, both sexual and economic. My own analysis of Bataille plays an important part in the thesis - I shall discuss his work in detail later on in this review - and Blinder's criticism has provided me with interesting angles from which to develop my own ideas, particularly when it comes to the blurring of boundaries between radical avant-gardist aesthetics and the totalising rhetoric of fascism.

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<sup>4</sup> Garland, 'The Dearest of Cemeteries', p. 200.

To the same end, Gilles Mayne's *Eroticism in Georges Bataille and Henry Miller* (2001) presents Miller as a writer whose subversive project is disingenuous since it seeks to replace one set of totalising values with another, more extreme and less accountable. My conclusions about Miller's rebellion against conventional conceptions of humanism are tested against Mayne's comparative analysis of Miller with Bataille as well as Indrek Manniste's more recent study, *Henry Miller: The Inhuman Artist* (2013). While I agree with Mayne about the suspect overtones of Miller's professedly progressive program, and with Manniste about the importance of his self-presentation as 'inhuman', I contend that Miller is more aware of his contradictions and absurdities than these scholars allow for. Similarly, I take an interested but cautious approach to work that deals enthusiastically with Miller's sexual and spiritual aesthetics – work by Kenneth Rexroth ('The Reality of Henry Miller', 1959), Charles Glicksberg (*The Sexual Revolution in Modern American Literature*, 1970), Norman Mailer (*Genius and Lust*, 1976) and Michael Woolf ('Beyond Ideology: Kate Millet and the case for Henry Miller', 1992) – since I argue that Miller's project relied on a certain irreverence and self-deprecation about his purposes and ideas.

Besides *Tropic of Cancer* and *Max and the White Phagocytes*, I have found evidence of Miller's subversive moral code in his other semi-autobiographical novels of the 1930s – *Black Spring* (1936) and *Tropic of Cancer's* prequel, *Tropic of Capricorn* (1939) – and various essays he wrote between the late 1930s and the 1960s. *Black Spring* and *Tropic of Capricorn* describe Miller's early life in New York before his self-imposed exile as artist in Paris and are mainly useful for the protests they contain against American modernity and the restrictions of family and the workplace. For Miller's explicit theories about the artist's role and the relationship between art and life my main source has been the essay 'Un Être Étoilique'. Written about his lover and literary ally Anaïs Nin in 1939, it lays out his recommendations for a sane and healthy approach to life, art and moral behaviour. Crucially, it contains his most explicit statements on a new form of sympathy that takes count of the complexity of pluralistic subjective experience. 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere' – published in 1938 - and *Time of the Assassins* - his short study of the poet Artaud Rimbaud from 1946 – develop these ideas by providing the philosophical grounding



for Miller's beliefs about the primacy of the excessive 'monstrous' individual over the 'timid' collective.<sup>5</sup> These beliefs are expanded on in various collections of Miller's correspondence with friends and literary allies – namely *A Literate Passion: Letters of Anaïs Nin and Henry Miller 1932-1953* (1988), *Art and Outrage. A correspondence about Henry Miller between A. Perlès and Lawrence Durrell* (1959), *Hamlet: The Michael Fraenkel – Henry Miller Correspondence called HAMLET* (1933) and *Letters to Emil* (1989). The last of these, comprising of Miller letters from Paris to his childhood friend Emil Schnelllock, is particularly useful since he it contains his feelings about *Tropic of Cancer* as it is being written.

In my attempts to place Miller within the wider historical context of Pound, Wyndham Lewis and T.E. Hulme's modernising project, I have consulted Rod Rosenquist's survey, *Modernism, The Market and the Institution of the New* (2009). Rosenquist provides the template for my understanding of Miller as a 'late' modernist, both indebted to and reactionary against the radical manifestos of the 'men of 1914'.<sup>6</sup> He has also helped me understand Miller's contradictory desires to reject and be included within the modernist canon as a distinctively 'late' modernist characteristic. *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism* by Richard Sheppard – another overview of modernism cited throughout Garland's 'The Dearest of Cemeteries' – gives a good account of the evolution of ideas that took place between W.B Yeats, Pound, T.S. Eliot and Joyce's era of the 1910s and the 1930s when Miller's *Cancer* appeared. By the same token, Ihab Hassan's *The Literature of Silence* and Frank Kermode's *The Sense of An Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (both 1967) are referred to in Chapter Three for their analysis of the ways in which apocalyptic ideas and rhetoric manifested themselves in work by modernists before and after World War Two.

K.K. Ruthven's 1990 text *Ezra Pound as Literary Critic* has provided invaluable guidance in my close analysis of Pound's literary reviews between 1909 and 1938.

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<sup>5</sup> Henry Miller, *The Time of the Assassins: A Study of Rimbaud by Henry Miller* (New York: New Directions, 1962 [orig. ed.: 1946]), p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Rod Rosenquist, *Modernism, The Market and the Institution of the New* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 10.

Ruthven's analysis of Pound's review work benefitted my study by its uncomplicated, comprehensive approach and its methodical negotiation of inconsistent terrain. He manages to piece together a coherent aesthetic and moral theory from Pound's constantly mutating and contradictory essays, building up a picture of Pound as critic and literary ideologue that is convincingly supported by primary evidence. *Ezra Pound as Literary Critic* has also been particularly useful for its explanation of Pound's complicated metamorphosis from literary critic interested in championing truthful, 'concrete' literary expression to economic theorist who saw writing as means of reflecting and realigning economic and social relations.

Hugh Kenner's seminal 1972 text *The Pound Era* makes useful if partisan attempts to explain the imagery at the core of Pound's Imagist and Vorticist aesthetic and political proscriptions. While these have helped me in my comparison of Pound and Miller's rhetorical modes, Kenner's analysis - undertaken in a decade when his subject's pro-fascist wartime activities still rendered him unacceptable to Anglo-American literary circles - is overly influenced by a desire to restore Pound's reputation. The counter-offensive efforts of critics like Kenner, Marshal McLuhan ('Pound's Critical Prose', 1949) and metaphysical philosopher Brian Soper ('Ezra Pound: Some Notes on his Philosophy', 1950) - steeped in the notion of Pound's desire for understanding and communication - help illuminate the paradox of Pound's insistence on art that records 'the full gamut of values' and his increasingly fierce intolerance towards people and groups who did not share his particular value system.<sup>7</sup>

As Kenner, Marshal McLuhan and Soper all note, Pound's ideas about order and values are heavily influenced by his reading of the Ancient Chinese philosopher, Confucius. For this reason, I refer to Pound's 1928 translation of Confucius' 'Ta Hsio: The Great Digest', his 1937 essay 'Immediate Need of Confucius' and various of his 'China Cantos' throughout the thesis. Of the academics who have focused specifically on this aspect of Pound's aesthetic and moral approach I have found Ira B. Nadel's 2003 essay 'Constructing the Orient: Pound's American Vision' and Feng Lan's 2005 study

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<sup>7</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', in *Critical Essays on Henry Miller*, ed. by Ronald Gottesman (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1992), pp. 87-90, p. 88.

*Ezra Pound and Confucius: Remaking Humanism in the Face of Modernity* to be most pertinent to my reading – Nadel for his understanding of Confucius as a touchstone Pound shared with Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman and Feng Lan for his thoughts on the paradoxes inherent in Confucius and Pound’s arguably humanist ideas.

In my sections on Pound and Wyndham Lewis’ Vorticism I have used William Wees’ *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* (1972) to explain the militaristic and masculinist atmosphere out of which their ideas emerged. Martin Puckner, a more recent, less apologetic commentator on Imagism and Vorticism, is representative of a twenty first century critical consensus when he points out the anachronism of what he calls ‘offensive clichés, racist portraits, patronising characterizations [and] sexist obsessions’ in the Vorticist Manifesto.<sup>8</sup> Paul Edwards, in his introduction to the 2003 collection of essays he edits, *The Great London Vortex: Modernist Literature and Art*, and Mark Antliff in his 2010 essay ‘Sculptural Nominalism/Anarchist Vortex: Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Dora Marsden, and Ezra Pound’ have also been useful for their explanations of the crossover between visual artistic and literary aesthetics at this time. Both present an equally critical but more substantial reading on the anarchistic and anti-humanist nature of Pound, Lewis, T.E. Hulme and the Vorticist sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska’s work. Moreover, they have helped me crystalize my ideas about the contradictorily misogynistic and progressive nature of these artists’ instructions for the future. Mary Ann Caws anthology, *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (2001) and Marjorie Perloff’s *The Futurist Moment* (1986), which deal with the rhetorical devices of the manifesto form have also contributed to my understanding of what happens when violence is converted into language; namely, the combination of attraction and repulsion through complicity that it evokes in the reader.

Although my study is not explicitly political, I have made use of various analyses of Pound’s politics to shore up my discussion of morality and rhetoric. By this I refer in particular to the excessive and potentially fascistic implications of the rebellion

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Puckner, ‘The Aftershocks of Blast: Manifestos, Satire and the Rear-Guard of Modernism’ in *Bad Modernisms* by Mao & Walkowitz (London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 78.

against reasonable bourgeois and humanistic moral values identified by Bataille in 'La Morale de Miller'. William Chace's *Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot* (1973), Michael North's *The Political Aesthetics of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound* (1991) and Alec Marsh's essay 'Politics' (2010) give good close readings of Pound's work as evidence of his ever-changing and elusive political identity. Chace is interesting for his thoughts on Pound's attraction to fascism as a theory that rejects ideology, an arena for discourse - whether political or literary - that accepts the sort of self-contradiction I identify in Pound and Miller. Similarly, North seeks to explain the seductive power fascism held over Pound, charting with precision the slow trajectory of his journey from crusader for individual freedoms and the toleration of national and racial difference to a fierce adherent of what he came to see as 'the eternal truths' propounded by Mussolini. I attempt to make use of the ground that is cleared by these Poundian critics to test Miller's narrative modes as anti-rational and potentially fascistic in their foundational impulses.

This interest in the anti-rational is also commented on by Leon Surette, whose texts *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.B Yeats, and the Occult* (1993) and *Pound in Purgatory* (1999) understand Pound's descent into economic radicalism, anti-Semitism and fascism as the direct result of his attraction to occult ideas that were popular amongst early twentieth century modernist writers. Along with Bruce Comens (*Apocalypse and After: Modern Strategy and Postmodern Tactics in Pound, Williams and Zukofsky*, 1995) and Roger Griffin (*Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of A Beginning Under Mussolini and Hitler*, 2007) Surette provides much of the background for my analysis of Pound and Miller as writers who were seduced – respectively - by the language of the archeologist Leo Frobenius and the meta-historian Oswald Spengler. Frobenius' *The Voice of Africa* (1913) and Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1918) both contain theories relating to essential cultural virtues that connect civilisations across epochs and are central to my analysis of Pound and Miller's eschatological leanings in Chapter Three. Suzanne Marchand's essay, 'Leo Frobenius and the Revolt against the West' (1997), gives valuable contextual information about Frobenius and also Spengler's influence on literature in the 1920s and 30s.

Chapter Three also explains these ideas in relation to the connections Pound made between corrupt economics and aesthetic and cultural impurity. For this purpose I have analysed the unorthodox 'Social Credit' theories of American economist Major C.H. Douglas, theories that Pound promoted as a solution to the problems of usury and modern capitalism. Alongside Douglas' 1935 pamphlet 'The Use of Money' and Pound's response to it, *Social Credit: An Impact* (published in the same year) I have relied on Tim Redman's 1999 essay 'Pound's politics and economics' as a summary guide. For the links Pound made between Frobenius, Douglas and fascism I have examined his full-length studies, the aforementioned *Guide to Kulchur, The ABC of Economics* (1933) and *Jefferson And/Or Mussolini* (1935).

A core tenet of my argument is that Pound's review of Miller's work correctly identifies a consistent and clear moral code undergirding his narrative persona. Significant to my formulation of this premise is my analysis of the review work on Miller that provides evidence of a counter-argument, which has for decades influenced public opinion on Miller – that he was an expressly and inherently amoral author. In his 1940 essay about Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, 'Inside the Whale', George Orwell shows himself to be the most explicit exponent of this viewpoint and he undergoes a thorough examination in my study for that reason. Orwell's central proposition – that Miller's especial talent and significance lies in his detachment from the burdens of moral agency – is directly contradicted by Pound's position on Miller. As such, my assertion that Miller's narrative is moral partly in a Poundian sense requires a detailed analysis of the more popularly accepted view of him as a 'passive everyman' figure.<sup>9</sup>

For the same purpose, I include reviews of Miller's debut novel that agree with Orwell's assessment of him as amoral. Philip Rahv and Edmund Wilson, two prominent left-wing literary journalists of the 1930s, 40s and 50s are both useful for their understanding of *Cancer* as an anachronistic homage to less politically urgent times, damning Miller with patronisingly faint praise for his lack of interest in the moral questions that occupied his contemporaries in the run-up to World War Two.

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<sup>9</sup> Orwell, p. 36.

Rahv and Wilson provide foils against which to test my ideas about the presence of Poundian morality in Miller's narratives and his fulfillment of Pound's moral criteria. Equally useful are the various early reviewers who dismiss Miller as immoral. By assessing work by conservative critics like Montgomery Belgion, an Anglo-French contributor to T. S. Eliot's periodical *Criterion*, I am able to throw light on the moral debate surrounding Miller, and to demonstrate the crossover between his and Pound's definitions of morality in literature.

Finally, alongside Bataille – whose 'La Morale de Miller', *Literature and Evil* (1938) and economic study *The Accursed Share* (1949) help me show key difference between Miller's emphasis on excess and Pound's on control - the principal philosophical touchstone for my thesis is Henri Bergson's 1907 magnum opus, *Creative Evolution*. Through Bergson's conception of a 'pluralistic universe' I elucidate the paradox between conservatism and democratic humanism that exists throughout Miller's 1930s writings, connecting him to a certain inter-war radically right-wing strand of thinking represented by T.E. Hulme.<sup>10</sup> Hulme's writings on Bergson (in particular 'The Philosophy of Intensive Manifolds' (1911?) and 'A Notebook', published in installments between 1915 and 16) prosaically and rigorously accommodate a belief in the multiplicity of subjective reality with totalising ideas about absolute values. Crucially, this enables me to discern a similar accommodation of opposing positions in Miller's work and to make sense of his unique aesthetic approach as an inheritance as well as a critique of the high modernist period he was succeeding.

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<sup>10</sup> William James, 'A Pluralistic Universe', in *A Pluralistic Universe* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 113.

## Introduction

'Some thought it great, some thought it vile; some thought it mortally dull, others wildly exciting. A few copies got out through to the critics; T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound were splendidly appreciative.' Jack Kahane, proprietor of Obelisk Press; publisher of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*<sup>11</sup>

In 1935, a year after it was published, Ezra Pound gave Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* its first unreservedly complimentary review.<sup>12</sup> The Brooklyn expatriate's debut novel, a first person narrative from the perspective of a penniless writer on the streets of Paris, arrived on Pound's doorstep as part of a self-funded and self-orchestrated publicity campaign. Banned for obscenity in the English speaking world and saddled with a small local publisher who was unwilling to face the legal and financial ramifications of promoting his book internationally, Miller had taken marketing matters into his own hands, personally mailing copies to many of the prominent literary figures of the period. From Pound and fellow Anglo-American T.S. Eliot through to John Dos Passos and John Steinbeck, anyone he thought might further his cause with a favorable write-up was sent a covering letter and first edition. According to Jack Kahane, Miller was 'the most useful collaborator a book publisher ever had.'<sup>13</sup> While many of these high-profile recipients responded enthusiastically to *Cancer* as an honest confessional text, Pound's review - intended for publication in T.S. Eliot's *Criterion* but only printed recently in Ronald Gottesman's 1992 collection, *Critical Essays on Henry Miller* - stands alone for its declaration of a rare synchronicity of literary vision with its subject and an unexpected belief in the novel's symptomatic importance to the future of English and American literature.

Pound's admiration for Miller rested primarily on his belief that *Cancer* was a necessary link in the chain of literary evolution begun by James Joyce's *Portrait of an*

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<sup>11</sup> Jack Kahane, *Memoirs of a Booklegger* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1939), p. 263.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005 [orig. ed.: Paris: Obelisk Press, 1934]). Referred to hereafter as *Cancer*. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>13</sup> Kahane, p. 263.

*Artist as a Young Man* (1916), developed through Joyce's later work *Ulysses* (1922), and fiction by Pound's Vorticist ally Wyndham Lewis. In an era defined, Pound claims in his review, by 'a ruck of third rate stuff' representing and contributing to the stagnation of literature as a form of expression, Miller offers 'deliverance' to 'the harassed and over-serious critic' because his work is progressive and veracious enough to stand next to Joyce and Lewis'.<sup>14</sup> 'Here we have' Pound conjectures, the only other 'man-sized' writer in a field dominated by insignificant mediocre practitioners (88). From an early point in his career, then, Miller was assimilated by Pound into his elite circle of innovating and modernising Anglo-American literary artists.

In spite of this apparent affinity, a distance has always existed between the two writers in critics' imaginations. One reason is Miller's reputation for 'lateness' when it comes to both American expatriate writing and ideologically driven definitions of what constitutes Modernism. Because he arrived in Paris in 1930, when American artists were leaving the city in their droves and six years after the departure of Pound – who was christened 'the lion of the Latin Quarter' by Donald Hall at *The Paris Review* - there was a tendency among Miller's few early reviewers to read *Tropic of Cancer* as a crepuscular homage to a fading era.<sup>15</sup> Left-wing American critic Edmund Wilson set the tone in 1938 when he described Miller as a documenter of the 'Twilight of the Expatriates', and it was picked up by Philip Rahv and George Orwell in the early forties, both of whom wrote reviews of *Cancer* in which Miller is portrayed as an anachronistic figure, stylistically and ideologically reminiscent of writers of the 1920s rather than his thirties contemporaries, but not quite belonging to either decade.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 87. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>15</sup> Donald Hall, 'Ezra Pound', in *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, ed. by Van Wyck Brooks (London: Secker and Warburg, 1963), p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> Edmund Wilson, 'Twilight of the Expatriates' in *Critical Essays on Henry Miller*, ed. by Ronald Gottesman (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1992), pp. 91-94, p. 91. Originally published in *The New Republic* (March, 1938)



Another explanation for the underexplored link between Miller and Pound might be the reluctance Miller himself expressed about being categorized as part of a collective group of artists, and particularly any group defined as 'modernist'. When asked in a 1963 interview with the *Paris Review* whether he had had any ties to Gertrude Stein during his time as an expatriate, Miller replied proudly to the contrary, declaring that he had 'never met her, no, knew nobody belonging to her set.'<sup>17</sup> He went on to voice a sentiment he would repeat at various points throughout his career, that he was 'always against groups and sets and sects and cults and isms and so on'.<sup>18</sup> We shall come to see that the second of these statements is contradicted by Miller's affiliation with a number of lesser known artists and writers in Paris, but it is clear that Miller was careful to cultivate the image of lone author operating from a position of independence and minority, and in this way has played his own part in securing his absence from canonical lists of the modernist period under discussion.

This projection is contradicted, however, by his career-long compulsion to make his readers aware of the writers, philosophers and artists who influenced his method and philosophy. By referencing - in essays, interviews, letters he always intended to publish and intertextually in his fiction - the writers he considered his forebears, Miller attempted to exert an unusual level of control over critical perspectives on his work. With this in mind, it is important that Pound does not feature prominently. Miller had no difficulty declaring his ideological and methodological debt to such groups as André Breton's Surrealists, writing that 'scarcely anything has been as stimulating to me as [their] theories and the products'<sup>19</sup> or individuals such as Welsh anarchist socialist poet John Cowper Powys, described by Miller in the same *Paris Review* interview as 'my god, my mentor, my idol', but neglects to pay any public homage to Pound.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Pound is excluded from 1952's *The Books In My Life*,

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<sup>17</sup> 'An Interview with Henry Miller', in *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, ed. by Brooks, pp. 150-159, p. 151.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>19</sup> 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere', in *The Cosmological Eye* (New York: New Directions, 1961 [orig. ed.: 1939]), pp.151-196, p.181. Originally published in *Max and the White Phagocytes* (Paris: Obelisk Press, 1938).

<sup>20</sup> 'Henry Miller', *Writers at Work*, p. 156.

Miller's attempt – at the age of sixty - to explain his artistic process in relation to the works of literature that have inspired him. In it, Miller gives detailed accounts of his sentimental and educational attachments to an extensive and wide-ranging list of international writers including the aforementioned Powys and Breton, D.H. Lawrence, Blaise Cendrars, Knut Hamsun, Arthur Rimbaud and Rabelais but Pound receives no mention whatsoever.

While Pound is conspicuous by his absence from this publically mapped hinterland, Miller expressed some admiration for him behind closed doors. In 1922, eight years before immigrating to Paris and starting to write *Cancer*, he sent a letter to his childhood friend Emil Schnellock thanking him for the loan of the early 'cantos', poems that would become Pound's magnum opus:

Say, many thousand thanks to you for introducing me to Ezra Loomis Pound ... Boy, I can swallow it like Home Brew. And what is more, I can understand it, that's the mystery! Sounds like stuff I say to myself all day long.<sup>21</sup>

These two short sentences reveal a great deal about the dialectics within Miller's relationship with Pound's work. The surprise he registers at being able to understand *The Cantos* demonstrates a preconceived notion of intellectual and cultural distance, the overtones of which are evident in his own and critics' reluctance to make and sustain a link between their works. It is also possible to glean that Miller's lower middle class Brooklyn background and his status as a self-educated, college dropout might have placed him in a position of sensitivity when faced with work by the classically educated, prodigiously talented and internationally acclaimed Pound.<sup>22</sup> Yet, by his ironic exaggeration of his native Brooklyn vernacular, Miller also implies a feeling of mysterious familiarity, an

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<sup>21</sup> *Letters to Emil*, ed. by George Wickes (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1990 [orig. ed.: New York: New Directions, 1989]), p. 4, March 10<sup>th</sup> 1922.

<sup>22</sup> Miller's insecurities about his background, education and relatively late development as a writer are apparent in many of his critical and personal responses to works he considered high-brow, and particularly those that are generally included in the modernist canon. As will be shown in Chapter Three, 'The Festival of Death': Eschatology, Economics and Fascism', he approaches Oswald Spengler from the same 'lowly Brooklyn boy' perspective, further enriching the relationship between Miller and Pound in their jeremiad poses.

unexpected and inexplicably intuitive communication between them that will be shown to exist despite these differences and the significant disjunctions between their narrative voices and choice of subject matter.

The sense of an unlikely and incongruous aesthetic correspondence between two ostensibly very different artists is rooted in an equally unlikely and incongruous notion of shared moral approaches. In the first place, Pound was the only pre-war English or American reviewer to recognize a value system of any kind in Miller's writing. Miller was reductively regarded by most of his early critics as an amoral artist, symptomatic of the period leading up to the Second World War in his fatalistic disengagement from the moral decision-making process. Indeed, George Orwell's 1940 essay 'Inside the Whale', the first full-length analysis of Miller's writing in English, takes up an important position in this study because of the limiting effect it had on contemporary and successive discussions of Miller. By focusing on the narrator as 'a voice from the crowd', an autobiographical everyman operating from a position of total passivity, Orwell wrongly defined Miller as essentially disinterested in morality.<sup>23</sup> It will be argued that, by failing to distinguish between author and narrative persona, and assigning symbolically anti-political, anti-moralistic qualities to Miller's narrator, Orwell set the tone for seventy years of misguided interpretations of his work. At this early stage, however, it is important simply to recognize that the reading of *Cancer* offered in 'Inside the Whale' is indicative of some of the reviews and essays from the thirties and forties that took Miller's narrator to be both a cut and dried, fully accurate representation of the author himself and a wholesale rejecter of moral codes.

Edmund Wilson is important among those who shared Orwell's perspective. His assessment of *Cancer* as 'the lowest book of any merit I have ever read' will be discussed later in this chapter for the light it sheds on the moral connections between Pound and Miller.<sup>24</sup> Like Phillip Rahv, his colleague at left-wing periodical *The New Republic*, who agrees almost verbatim with Orwell when he writes that Miller is

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<sup>23</sup> Orwell, p. 128.

<sup>24</sup> Wilson, p. 92.

'above all morally passive in his novels ... a naturally garrulous American who has been through hell', Wilson is useful for his restrictively historical reading of *Cancer*.<sup>25</sup> In his review of the novel, 'The Twilight of Expatriates', Wilson defines Miller's writing as symptomatically immoral, an accurately sordid reflection of the politically and morally redundant atmosphere that pervaded Paris in the 1930s. The text is therefore simultaneously criticized and venerated as corrupt and corruptive. Orwell, Rahv and Wilson's active refusals to engage with *Cancer* beyond simplistic and totalizing ideas of his work will be shown later on in this chapter to provide useful contextual background against which to discuss Pound's reading of Miller as morally forthright and admirable.

At root, my identification of a system of morality in Miller's work is built around Pound's ideas of literary rather than social or political morality, and is grounded in Pound's fundamental conviction that truthfulness in literature is 'moral' and falseness 'immoral'. As Pound puts it in his essay 'The Serious Artist', 'good literature cannot be immoral'.<sup>26</sup> While the principal ethical questions in this study therefore relate to a particular code of aesthetics, Pound's development of an obsession with political-economic issues in the 1920s and 30s means that my discussion inevitably includes the ways in which politics impose themselves on aesthetics. It will be seen that Pound sought a symbiosis between art and the economic sphere as he was writing his review of *Cancer*, generating even more surprising correlations with a writer who was expressly indifferent to economic theory. Indeed, as we shall see in Chapter Three, Miller scoffed at Pound's attempt –

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<sup>25</sup> Philip Rahv, 'Henry Miller: Image and Idea' in *Henry Miller: Three Decades of Criticism*, ed. with an intro. by Edward B. Mitchell (New York: New York University Press, 1971), pp. 27-34, p. 31. Originally published in *The New Republic* (April 21st, 1941).

<sup>26</sup> Ezra Pound, 'The Serious Artist' in *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. with an intro. by T.S. Eliot (London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1954), pp. 41-57, p. 44. Originally published in *The New Freewoman* (1913).

via their mutual acquaintance James Laughlin – to ‘get him to swing the bat for his crazy Social Credit theories’.<sup>27</sup>

My questions about Pound and Miller’s codes of morality also gravitate around a crucial paradox inherent in Pound’s moral theory: in the first place, he recommends work that truthfully represents its author’s instinctive values and tastes and resists the pressure to conform to collective codes of taste and judgment; in the second, he advocates writing that demonstrates its author’s ability to precisely discern and represent the indisputable differences between the impressions he or she receives. It is a theory, crucially, that relies on a very problematic notion, namely the ability to discern indisputable differences between human beings and groups of human beings – in appearance and character, but most importantly in terms of their values. This is the origin of a slippage in Pound’s writing between a democratic approach to subjective experience and a suspect and eventually totalitarian approach to values and society. That slippage, we shall see, also lies at the root of Pound and Miller’s unlikely artistic alliance.

Since this study responds to critical readings that regard Miller as ‘amoral’, Miller’s moral system must equally be defined in contrast to definitions of its absence. ‘Amoral’ in Orwell’s review of *Cancer* means ‘passive to experience’, disengaged from the past and the future. As we shall see, Orwell compares Miller to ‘the ordinary man’ who ‘far from endeavoring to influence the future ... simply lies down and lets things happen to him’.<sup>28</sup> Implicit in this reading is the assumption that ‘amoral’ means disengagement from cause and consequence, problems and solutions. Indeed, Orwell goes on to claim that:

[Miller] is neither pushing the world-process forward nor trying to drag it back, but on the other hand he is by no means ignoring it ... he believes in the ... impending ruin of Western civilisation much more firmly than the

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<sup>27</sup> Henry Miller, *Durrell-Miller Letters, 1935-1980*, ed. by Ian S. MacNiven (New York: New Directions, 1988), p. 69, April 5<sup>th</sup> 1937.

<sup>28</sup> Orwell, p. 105.

majority of “revolutionary” writers; only he does not feel called upon to do anything about it.<sup>29</sup>

According to this definition, ‘moral’ implies active engagement with cause and consequence, with problems and solutions and with human experience in order to arrive at conclusions about the human condition. Moreover, it means concern for the welfare of the individual within society, within history. Using Pound’s definition of morality and Orwell’s definition of its absence in *Cancer*, I argue that Miller’s apparent anti-humanism masks an emphatic attempt to understand and improve the human condition, to redefine notions of ‘sympathy’, ‘empathy’, ‘compassion’ in a way that takes count of the full complexity of human experience.<sup>30</sup> Henri Bergson, the French philosopher whose theories of a ‘pluralistic’ universe were a major influence on Miller and Pound’s philosophical and artistic ally T.E. Hulme, provides important insight into this use of anti-humanist language to expound profoundly humanist ideas.

By the same token, Miller’s creation of infernal conditions in *Cancer* also connects him in surprising ways with Pound’s own understanding of values and aesthetics in literature, as well as on a wider societal level. Miller deliberately positioned himself within a mode of discourse -widespread among avant-garde writers of the 1930s - concerned with ideas relating to death, judgment, heaven and hell. ‘Eschatology’, as this school of thought has been termed – by Jacques Derrida, Northrop Frye and, most pertinent to this study, Frank Kermode in his essay ‘The Sense of an Ending’ (1967) - finds its way into work by Pound, W.B. Yeats, D.H. Lawrence and various other literary artists who are now categorized as part of the high modernist

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>30</sup> Indrek Manniste’s recent study, *Henry Miller: The Inhuman Artist* (2013), which analyses the philosophical – and specifically the Nietzschean – roots of Miller’s rejection of ‘human’ moral positions, provides some relevant ideas around this issue. While my thesis accepts Manniste’s claim that Miller was expressly interested in distancing himself from the restrictions imposed by collective human ideas, it looks at the latter’s attitude towards the human condition in the more prosaic light shed by Ezra Pound and T.E. Hulme’s anti-humanism. Consequently, in contrast to Manniste but in line with Sarah Garland (‘The Dearest of Cemeteries’, 2010), I am concerned with Miller as a partly parodic, partly earnest appropriator of the anti-humanistic trends that pervaded literature and philosophy in the 1910s, 20s and 30s.

vanguard. In Chapter Three ‘The Festival of Death’ - Eschatology, Economics and Fascism’, Kermode’s article will be used to explore and develop this definition of eschatology, with reference to related works on apocalyptic thinking at the time.

In this way, I present a clearer picture of the cultural landscape in which Miller’s eschatological interest came about. It will be shown that Pound’s own eschatological bent is most clearly manifested in his social, literary and economic essays of the 1930s, which depict Europe in the aftermath of the First World War as a kind of post-apocalyptic inferno. The language he uses in these essays will be shown to carry over into his review of *Cancer*. More importantly, it is mirrored in Miller’s novel itself. By contrast with Miller, however, Pound’s eschatological vision of pre-Second World War Europe is heavily influenced by his interest in the economic theories mentioned earlier, generating vital questions about Pound’s promotion of *Cancer*. First and foremost, how can Pound – who invests himself seriously in a scheme for post-apocalyptic, economic, and social revolutionary change, find an ally in a writer who treated these ideas playfully, even parodically? As part of this, it will be seen that Miller straddled fascinatingly but dangerously contradictory positions of urgency and irreverence in his appropriation of eschatological tropes, an aspect of his approach that is suggested by Caroline Blinder in her thesis *Henry Miller’s Sexual Aesthetics: A Comparative Analysis of Selected Twentieth-Century Influences on Henry Miller’s Writing* (1995) and her 2000 study, *A Self-Made Surrealist: Ideology and Aesthetics in the Work of Henry Miller*. More importantly, this area is tackled head-on by Sarah Garland in her 2010 essay ‘The Dearest of Cemeteries’.

Integral to this are the influences of Oswald Spengler on Miller’s writing and of Spengler’s collaborator Leo Frobenius on Pound’s. A meta-historian of the 1910s and 20s who was inspired by nineteenth-century social anthropological theories, Spengler’s beliefs in the cyclical nature of cultural progress and dissolution have been identified by Northrop Frye as the blueprint for a century of eschatological thought. Having enjoyed Spengler as a fledgling writer in New York, Miller rediscovered his bestselling tome, *The Decline of The West* (1918), in 1931 while he was struggling to complete *Cancer*. As a consequence he credits Spengler with having

helped shape the book's ideas, themes and structure. Received via his friend and literary ally Michael Fraenkel, with whom he assimilated its apocalyptic pronouncements into a collective theory called 'The Festival of Death', Spengler's text is talked about by Miller as 'biggest and best of all', a work containing 'great music, great literature, great ideas'.<sup>31</sup> As Garland points out in 'The Dearest of Cemeteries', Miller's fascination with the principal theme in *The Decline of the West*, of individuals within early twentieth century urban communities as spiritually decomposed and defunct, as 'dead' while alive, is evident both explicitly in the narrator of *Cancer*'s philosophical musings and implicitly in his street-level observations. Since Spengler was profoundly influenced by archeologist Leo Frobenius' theory of 'cultural morphology' – which identifies certain cultural virtues that unite civilisations across time - and Pound used Frobenius' ideas to prove many of his economic, political and racial hunches, these two German theorists offer troubling but useful ways of reading Pound and Miller.

*The Decline of the West* also provides a basis for the themes and rhetoric in Miller's 'The Universe of Death', a chapter from his posthumously published *The World of Lawrence* that first appeared in his 1939 collection *The Cosmological Eye*, and compares the artistic approaches of D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce and Marcel Proust. Miller's position in relation to these major influences on his work is comprehensively covered by Sarah Garland in *Rhetoric and Excess*. It has also been looked at by John Parkin in *Henry Miller, The Modern Rabelais* (1990), Gay Louise Balliet in *Henry Miller and the Surrealist Metaphor: "riding the ovarian trolley"* (1996) and James Decker in *Henry Miller and Narrative Form* (2005). There is, however, a noticeable lack of critical material relating to Spenglerian eschatological theories as the catalyst for Miller's appreciation of these prominent figures of the early twentieth century modernist period. The role of *The Decline of the West* in shaping Miller's ideological perspective and the infernal system that Pound recognises both in *Cancer* and in works by James Joyce, will be shown to correlate with apocalyptic elements in Pound's own literary worldview. Paradoxically, it will also be shown that the imaginative and expansive

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<sup>31</sup> *Letters to Emil*, p. 74, February 5<sup>th</sup> 1931.



quality of Miller's Spenglerian vision is one of the key areas in which he differs from Pound.

These thematic and rhetorical correlations will also be seen – crucially – to complicate Orwell's historically specific understanding of amorality in Miller's work. This thesis proposes a re-reading of Orwell's notion that Miller was 'amoral' because of his acceptance of and refusal to oppose the 'fear, tyranny and regimentation' represented by the rise of totalitarian systems of government.<sup>32</sup> 'What is he accepting?' Orwell asks:

Not an epoch of expansion and liberty, but an epoch of fear, tyranny and regimentation. To say that "I accept" in an age like our own is to say that you accept concentration camps, rubber truncheons, Hitler, Stalin, bombs, aeroplanes, tinned food, machine-guns, putsches, purges, slogans<sup>33</sup>

On these terms, *moral* implies the active resistance of 'fear, tyranny and regimentation', the individual's assertion of his or her freedoms in an age of social and political oppression. Accordingly, Chapter Three addresses Miller's moral position in relation to the economic and political circumstances of inter-war Europe. If Orwell understands Miller as disengaged from the moral and political process, Pound sees *Cancer* as a moral text partly because it represents the individual's potential for liberation through experience of the economic and social evils generated by the 'Armageddon' of World War One. In this context, Pound will be seen to have jeopardized his mission to divorce aesthetics from the real-politic of his age while Miller's relative success in his own attempt to free art from ideology will be seen to constitute a major difference between them.

Crucially, there are also very serious ways in which Pound misappropriates Miller's use of eschatological rhetoric for increasingly fascistic social and economic ends. This naturally complicates the moral question further since Pound sees freedom represented in the fascist social and economic policies of Mussolini's state, one of the totalitarian systems of government that Orwell refers to when he talks about 'fear, tyranny and regimentation'. Thus Pound misinterprets Miller's quest for perceptual

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<sup>32</sup> Orwell, p. 104

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

liberation or rebirth as a desire for what Bruce Comens, in his study *Apocalypse and After: Modern Strategy and Postmodern Tactics in Pound, Williams and Zukofsky*, calls 'literal' or 'historical' apocalyptic change (1995).<sup>34</sup> In Chapter Three I argue that Miller does in fact make a stand for freedom against oppression, but it is freedom of the senses he desires rather than Pound's social or economic liberty.

Using Pound's definition of morality in literature, I highlight elements in Miller that prove his clear and identifiable set of ideas about the human condition, about good and bad, natural and unnatural ways of behaving. Beneath Pound's apparently straightforward cooption of Miller, I identify an unlikely affinity between them that reveals a contradictory conservative impulse at the heart of Miller's positivist theories. Moreover, the ways that Pound misreads Miller also sheds light rather than obscurity on the moral thinking behind Miller's semi-autobiographical and confessional project. Ultimately, I aim to demonstrate that Miller cannot be usefully read according to Orwell's reductive conflation of 'moral' and moralistic work nor through a direct application of Pound's proscriptive aesthetics. Like Pound, Miller was - as Orwell, Phillip Rahv, Lawrence Durrell, Karl Shapiro and Kenneth Rexroth all claim - opposed to the use of literature to instruct the reader according to partisan codes. Although this certainly renders him an anti-moralist, it is incorrect to call him 'amoral'. His moral system might be fraught with a tension between progressive and regressive impulses that permeates Pound's work, but his fundamental message is one of profound optimism about the artist's potential for self-liberation and a universalist communion with humanity.

Finally, the paradox of progressiveness and conservatism also indicates Miller's unique position between versions of modernism in the early twentieth century and later modernisms that appeared in the 1940s and 50s. While his positivist principles will be shown to corroborate categorisations of him as a late modernist - a precursor to the rebellions of Norman Mailer, Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs - Pound's appreciation of his writing provides a starting point from which to understand

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<sup>34</sup> Bruce Comens, *Apocalypse and After: Modern Strategy and Postmodern Tactics in Pound, Williams and Zukofsky* (The University of Alabama Press: Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1995), p. 35.

Miller as an appropriator of earlier modernist tropes and ideas that contradict his wider project in crucial ways. By incorporating brutal, anti-humanist and apocalyptic elements in a parodic and autodidactic fashion, Miller will be seen to connect the work of Pound and his literary collaborators, Wyndham Lewis and T.E. Hulme, to experimental modes of literary expression that came after the Second World War. Rod Rosenquist's *Modernism, The Market and the Institution of the New* (2009), a survey of late modernist aesthetics, is particularly helpful in this area – providing a way of understanding Miller as someone who inherited Pound, Joyce and Lewis' self-consciousness about their place in history but also bucked against the high style and seriousness of these early, iconic modernist figures. If theorists like Art Berman and Stan Smith have pointed out that Pound is representative of a 'modernism become self-conscious of itself as a historical event', then Miller will be seen to be an artist whose reverence about history is proved, in fact, by his self-conscious irreverence towards it.<sup>35</sup>

This further paradox – of anti-literary iconoclasm masking a desire to enter literary history - is also identifiable in Pound' aesthetic. Miller's self-contradiction on the same front echoes what Michael Levensen defines as the vacillation from 'provocation to consolidation' that occurs in early twentieth century modernist thinking,<sup>36</sup> Indeed, this will be addressed in Chapter Two as part of their common debt to the rhetoric of the manifesto form. In line with Pound, Miller's presentation of himself as a provocateur is perennially compromised by his obsessive drive to consolidate his position as an established writer through the creation of myths about his life. In other words, by deliberately casting himself in the role of iconoclast, he himself becomes the icon. The same can be said for his rejection of standard moral codes; his desire for moral, existential liberation, which appears to be motivated by the desire to seize rather than cede control over the universe he creates. That tension

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<sup>35</sup> Art Berman, *Preface to Modernism* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1994), p 64. Quoted in Rod Rosenquist, p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism - a Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 218. Quoted in Rosenquist, p. 11.

– we shall see - is another crucial area of crossover between Miller's autobiographical impulse and Pound's centralizing of the artist.

Chapter One begins with a rudimentary mapping of Pound's ethical and aesthetic approach through detailed analysis of his early review work. Through a close reading of Pound's review of Miller's *Cancer*, as well as relevant writings on those authors to whom Pound compared Miller - namely James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis and Henry James - Pound's literary propensity begins to emerge. Through this, and similar examinations of Pound's many essays on the nature and purpose of literature, a topography of his system of values will be drawn up in order to lay foundations for the subsequent analysis of Poundian elements in Miller that have so far been overlooked.

## 1. Pound's 'Moral' Reading of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*

### 1.1 Purging the Literary Landscape: Pound's essays and reviews (1905-1935)

'As to twentieth century poetry, and the poetry which I expect to see written during the next decade or so, it will, I think, move against poppy-cock, it will be harder and saner ... 'nearer the bone'. It will be as much like granite as it can be, its force will lie in its truth, its interpretative power ... I mean it will not try to seem forcible by rhetorical din, and luxurious riot. We will have fewer painted adjectives impeding the shock and stroke of it. At least for myself, I want it so, austere, direct, free from emotional slither.' Ezra Pound, 'A Retrospect' (1918)<sup>37</sup>

'It is of the permanence of nature that honest men ... come repeatedly to the same answers in ethics, without need of borrowing each others ideas.' Ezra Pound, 'Mang Tze or the Ethics of Mencius' (1938)<sup>38</sup>

Ezra Pound's literary critical outlook between 1905, the year in which his first essay was published, and 1935, when he wrote his review of Henry Miller's debut novel, was largely founded on the conception that a writer should represent subjective reality in as concentrated and undiluted a fashion as possible. His literary essays and reviews from the period are permeated by a theory of two polarized positions – one of artistic purity and of work that is substantial because it presents its subject in its authentic shape, the other of artistic contamination, of work that is a weak and inauthentic imitation of its subject. The poems of 1930s American Imagist William Carlos Williams, for example, represent the first position. They are considered valuable by Pound because he believes they successfully realize their author's mission statement to 'understand something in its natural colors [sic] and shapes.' 'There could', he says in his essay 'Dr Williams' Position', 'be no better effort underlying any literary process.'<sup>39</sup> Likewise, James Joyce is praised repeatedly in

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<sup>37</sup> Ezra Pound, 'A Retrospect', in *Literary Essays*, ed. by Eliot, pp. 3-14, p. 3. 'A Retrospect' is a 1918 compilation of extracts from various essays Pound published during the 1910s. This passage originally appeared in 'Credo', published in *Poetry Review* (February, 1912).

<sup>38</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Mang Tze or the Ethics of Mencius', in *Selected Prose, 1909-1965*, ed. with an intro. by William Cookson (London: Faber, 1973), pp. 73-98, p. 96. Originally published in *Criterion* XVII (July, 1938).

<sup>39</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Dr Williams' Position', in *Literary Essays*, ed. by Eliot, pp. 389-398, p. 390. Originally published in *The Dial* (November, 1928).

Pound's reviews for his 'efficiency', his ability to 'squeeze the last drop out of a situation'.<sup>40</sup>

Behind this belief in the purity and authenticity of Williams and Joyce's work is a binary system concerning an author's relationship with his or her material. In 'Dr Williams' Position', Pound presents the poet in a superior relation to what he calls 'the post-realists [who] deal with subject matter, human types ... so simple that one is more entertained by Fabre's insects' and 'the perfumed writers [who] aim ... at olde lavender but [whose] ultimate aroma lacks freshness.'<sup>41</sup> Williams manages, Pound implies, to present the unadorned truth of his experience without either boring the reader through oversimplified representations and aesthetic barrenness or repulsing him or her by contrived attempts at traditional refinement. Williams, in other words, gets across the 'real' without stripping it of its beauty or embellishing it with false effect.<sup>42</sup> The positioning of Williams as the antithesis to two villainous extremes exemplifies Pound's belief in a vital and indisputable truth to each person's subjective experience. The world, Pound contends, presents itself in 'natural colors' to each individual and it is the responsibility of the serious artist to reflect the colors he or she perceives with honesty.

The reference to Joyce's 'efficiency' demonstrates another aspect of Pound's understanding of good, pure artistic creation. If the artist must be able to see and feel the world naturally, he or she must also be able to focus accurately on the detail of

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<sup>40</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Ulysses' in *Literary Essays*, ed. by Eliot, pp. 403-409, p. 405. Originally published in *The Dial* (June, 1920).

<sup>41</sup> 'Dr Williams' Position', p. 395.

<sup>42</sup> Pound's objection to the two extremes of post-realism and post-aestheticism was also a major factor in his attitude towards visual art as a member of the literary-artistic Vorticist group (1913-14). The aesthetics Pound helped develop as co-founder of Vorticism will be seen later to have provided the basis for much of the common ground he shares with Miller. In the context of Pound's art criticism, however, it is notable that the Vorticists were fiercely opposed to contemporary art schools they regarded as staidly post-Edwardian. As Philip Rylands puts it in his introduction to the 2010 collection of essays, *Vorticism- Manifesto for a Modern World*, the group stood out against 'the elitist aestheticism of Bloomsbury and ... the lower-middle-class realism of the Camden Town painters' (Philip Ryland, 'Introduction', in Mark Antliff and Vivien Greene (eds.), *Vorticism: Manifesto for a Modern World* (London: Tate, 2010), p. 23).

his or her material. In order to present the world in 'its natural colors', Pound is saying, the artist needs to 'squeeze' the vital truth from a character, situation, feeling or thought, excluding all unnecessary elements from his or her vision. This approach is helpfully summed up by Marshall McLuhan – who, along with Hugh Kenner was one of the strongest academic proponents of Poundian literary ideas – in his 1949 essay 'Pound's Critical Prose':

If there is one theme which emerges everywhere [in Pound's essays] it is the seeking out of those qualities and techniques in a writer which lead to the economical rendering of complex actualities.<sup>43</sup>

This notion of the worthwhile literary artist as a distiller of experience, a producer of a pure and truthful substance from the obscure and incoherent mess of subjective reality underpins Pound's work as a literary critical essayist. It will be seen in chapters 1.2 and 2 to have been one of the principal reasons for Pound's interpretation of Miller's work as aesthetically significant. Miller is described in Pound's review of *Cancer* as a writer who shares James Joyce's sensitivity to 'tonalities', a term that implies both the artist's ability to discern what he or she truly feels and the ability to apprehend the subtle differences between the people, objects and scenarios he or she depicts. Moreover, Pound's interest in Miller as a tonal writer highlights a crucial paradox at the heart of both their aesthetic projects; namely, the understanding that serious, virtuous art arises out of anarchic conditions even if this anarchy can only be delineated by applying order to it.

Discounting Joyce, Williams and a handful of others, Pound's general view on modern literature held that it had been badly damaged by a tendency among popular writers – chiefly those 'perfumed writers' he mentions in the Williams review - to 'dilute' the truth of experience. He castigates the average author and poet

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<sup>43</sup> Marshall McLuhan, 'Pound's Critical Prose', in *An Examination of Ezra Pound*, ed. by Russell, pp.165-171, p. 170.

of the 1910s for expressing his or her characters' thoughts, conversations and actions 'abstractly and ornately' rather than in 'exact', 'direct' and 'austere' fashion.<sup>44</sup>

Of these perceived technical faults, 'Abstraction' is the central problem.

Incorporating it into the rhetoric of disease as metaphor that appears throughout his review work, Pound uses the idea of abstract expression to build an analogous framework for his theory on literature. Indeed, in 'The Teacher's Mission', his 1934 essay on the future of English letters, he calls this 'the disease of the last hundred and fifty years', implying a strain of inherently bad literary technique that has corrupted the correct and desired approach.<sup>45</sup> Abstraction, Pound's goes on to say in this essay, has been the main cause of 'dilution' and 'dispersal' in literary expression and it is vital that its contaminative influence be isolated and removed from the cultural bloodstream.<sup>46</sup>

It is this sort of belief that leads Hugh Kenner, whose 1971 book *The Pound Era* charts Pound's influence on early twentieth-century modernism, to describe him as an adherent to certain 'specifications for technical hygiene'.<sup>47</sup> Although Kenner refers specifically to Pound's programme as architect of the Imagist movement (1914-17) - an area that will be analysed later in this chapter - the description also applies to his role as literary critic before and after the existence of that school. Indeed, throughout his essay-writing career Pound assumed a position of sanitary authority in relation to contemporary and antecedent writers, believing at every stage that the future of English Literature depended upon revolutionary acts of culling and purification.

In works with didactic, pedagogical titles such as 'The Serious Artist' (1913) and 'How to Read' (1931), Pound laid down a strict set of rules for the production and appreciation of literature. In this prose, permeated by imagery relating to dirt, cleanliness, disease, diagnosis and cure, he takes up the position of self-appointed

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<sup>44</sup> 'Dr Williams' Position', p. 392; 'Rev. G. Crabbe', in *Literary Essays*, ed. by Eliot, pp. 276-279, p. 278. Originally published in *The Future* (February, 1917); 'A Retrospect', p. 12.

<sup>45</sup> Ezra Pound, 'The Teacher's Mission', in *Literary Essays*, ed. by Eliot, pp. 58-63, p. 59. Originally published in *The English Journal* (October, 1934).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>47</sup> Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), p. 185.



scourge to the literary establishment, in charge of 'cleaning up' what he calls in his review of Wyndham Lewis' *Tarr*, 'a great lot of rubbish, cultural, Bohemian, romantico-Tennysonian, arty, societish, gutterish', and of exposing English and American fiction as endemically flawed and in desperate need of reform.<sup>48</sup> Kenner follows his aforementioned comments about 'technical hygiene' with a suggestion that Pound's Imagist 'criteria ... were also a screen though which some contemporary work could pass', a metaphor that provides useful ways of thinking about his literary and moral position.<sup>49</sup> Believing that he was working in literarily unproductive, corrupt and corruptive times Pound couched his criticism in deliberately radical, revolutionary and totalising terms.

This perspective on Pound's literary theories hints strongly at his later affiliations with the Italian fascist movement. The idea of removing certain contaminative groups of words and methods to permit the healthy progression of the overall language puts the reader clearly in mind of 1930s and 40s fascist theories relating to race and civilisation, connotations which are brought sharply into focus by philosopher Brian Soper when he defines Pound's key literary interest in the 1920s as 'the study of literary eugenics'<sup>50</sup> According to Soper, who directs his criticism away from the literary or political context in which Pound is writing and towards the framework of metaphysical philosophy, the desire to arrest the decline of literary thought and method by cutting out certain undesirable elements is 'for [Pound] the teleology of writing'.<sup>51</sup> In Pound's opinion, Soper suggests, the development of literary art by disposing of areas in which it is failing is not only important, it is its final cause for existence. The connections between these ideas and Pound's later support for Mussolini will be delineated in detail in my third chapter, 'The Festival of Death' - Eschatology, Economics and Fascism'. Crucially, Pound's admiration for

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<sup>48</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Wyndham Lewis', in *Literary Essays*, ed. by Eliot, pp. 423-430, p. 427. Originally published in *Instigations* (1920).

<sup>49</sup> Kenner, p. 185.

<sup>50</sup> Brian Soper, 'Ezra Pound: Some Notes on his Philosophy', in *An Examination of Ezra Pound: A Collection of Essays*, ed. by Peter Russell (New Directions, New York, 1950), pp. 231-247, p. 247.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

Miller also rested heavily on the assumption that he understood and reiterated various essential truths about racial and national difference through a courageous and uncompromisingly discerning aesthetic method. As we shall see, in his review of *Cancer* Pound takes solace from the notion that 'Miller's Americans are very American, his orientals, very oriental and his Russians, oh quite so' (88). By drawing clear and indisputable distinctions between groups, he contends, Miller ensures that 'the sense of the sphericity of the planet presides.' (88).

In a literarily historical context, K.K. Ruthven, whose 1991 study tracks the trajectory of Pound's essay-writing career, makes connections between his campaign for efficiency and clarity of expression, his opposition to the overreliance on 'unnecessary adjectives' and the purgatory recommendations of other early modernist writers:

In the drive to make the language more efficient and bring it "close to the thing" (SP41) various parts of speech came under attack in the modernist period. [Wyndham] Lewis wanted to get rid of prepositions and articles, Gertrude Stein of nouns and Pound of the 'decorative' frill adjective.<sup>52</sup>

In other words, the 'literary eugenics' that Soper identifies as Pound's chief motivation also constitute a decidedly high 'modernistic' trope, a radical response by a number of 1910s and 20s writers to what they regarded as harmful syntactical excesses in the works of their contemporaries.<sup>53</sup> Ruthven overstates his case in regard to Wyndham Lewis, Pound's chief literary ally of the 1910s: while the prose narrative style of Lewis' novel *Tarr* does aim at directness by the suppression of prepositions and articles, Lewis did not attack 'parts of speech' in the same programmatic way as Pound. Gertrude Stein, on the other hand, is correctly identified by Ruthven as a writer who set out to change the way grammar was used in literature, complaining in various essays and lectures of the 1920s and 30s about the overuse of nouns as opposed to verbs.<sup>54</sup> It is Lewis rather than Stein, however, who is of particular interest in relation to Pound in this study since his antagonistic narrative style – built

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<sup>52</sup> K.K. Ruthven, *Ezra Pound as Literary Critic* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 114.

<sup>53</sup> Soper, p. 247.

<sup>54</sup> Stein gives a detailed explanation of this position in her 1935 lecture 'Poetry and Grammar', published in *Lectures in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1935).

out of this eschewal of commonplace parts of speech – makes him a useful subject for comparison, both with Pound’s own narrative style, and with Miller’s as interpreted by Pound in his review of *Cancer*.

Ironically (and maddeningly) Pound is reluctant to explain or offer textual evidence of what he means by ‘the disease of abstraction’. The closest he comes to a definition of it appears in his 1913 essay ‘A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste’:

Use no superfluous word, no adjective which does not reveal something. Don’t use such an expression as ‘dim lands of *peace*’. It dulls the image. It mixes abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer’s not realizing that the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol.<sup>55</sup>

The ‘abstract’ word in the example here, taken from Pound’s friend and early mentor Ford Madox Hueffer’s poem ‘On the Marsh Road: Winter Nightfall’ (1904), is singled out for its failure to correspond productively with the sentence in which it is situated. Pound is wary, then, of unnecessary and unrelated adjectives that detract from the core meaning and emotional sense created by a sentence. Elsewhere, in his commentary on other writers, the word ‘abstraction’ appears most often as a by-word for the use of language that generalizes or maximizes, that aims to conform to or present an idea without paying necessary attention to the minutiae of the picture or the voice it is describing. Indeed, in ‘The Teacher’s Mission’, he rallies his readers to stigmatize literature and literary criticism that indulges in ‘vague, general statements’.<sup>56</sup> He follows this with a more specific condemnation of critics who generalize, attacking those who ‘use terms so vaguely that the reader thinks he agrees with their statements when he doesn’t.’<sup>57</sup>

The same principle is implicit in Pound’s approach to writers of poetry and of prose fiction. When he talks about Hueffer’s irresponsible use of ‘such terms as “dim lands of peace”’, he highlights the dishonest concealment of meaning. The image might function well in terms of sound and rhythm, it might even appear to contain the

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<sup>55</sup> ‘A Retrospect’, p. 5. The cited passage originally appeared in ‘A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste’ in *Poetry* magazine (March, 1913).

<sup>56</sup> ‘The Teacher’s Mission’, p. 61.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61

possibility of beauty, but its definite meaning is difficult to pin down. In diluting 'the concrete with the abstract', the writer allows him or herself to be seduced by the possibility of shallow, aesthetic effect; losing sight of his or her primary obligation – to find the combination of words that expresses a particular experience in an exact way.

Elsewhere, he synonymizes 'Abstraction' with words like 'ornamentation', 'embellishment' and 'confections' - claiming that its root lies in the lazy Victorian preference for eighteenth and early nineteenth century Romantic poets rather than their more serious and substantial contemporaries. William Wordsworth, whom Pound provocatively and amusingly describes as 'an idiot who occasionally makes beautiful (or ornamental) verses', should never have been venerated over the Reverend George Crabbe, a gifted 'realist' who depicts the poor in his parish with the 'greatest exactness' and who 'refrains from commenting' at all times.<sup>58</sup> The recommendation of Crabbe over Wordsworth is indicative of Pound's literary program – he makes it his mission in his essay work to promote the 'concrete' and the exact over the 'abstract', placing significant emphasis on the 'value of writing words that conform precisely with fact ... without evasions or circumlocutions'.<sup>59</sup> Most importantly, he cannot abide poets or authors who present material misrepresentative of the complex reality they purport to capture and who privilege the lyrical effect of their words over direct engagement with their subjects.

This tracing back of Edwardian literary defects to the skewed values of the Victorians was commonplace among Pound's literary contemporaries and allies. Wyndham Lewis, who co-founded the Vorticist artistic movement with Pound (1913-14), echoes the latter's contempt for Victorian aesthetics. According to Lewis, mid to late nineteenth-century Britain had 'produced a morass of sugary comfort and amiableness' in the arts. Indeed, Victorian writers and artists had 'indulged men so

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<sup>58</sup> 'The Rev. G. Crabbe, LLB', p. 278. This iconoclasm is typical of Pound. He had a disposition and knack for audaciously criticising writers he felt were wrongly regarded as national institutions. Other treasured English figures he debunked include Tennyson, Browning and H.G Wells. Pound will also be seen to have used Wells time and again as an example of the techniques new writers ought to avoid.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

much that they became guys of sentiment.’<sup>60</sup> His and Pound’s modernising project, Lewis goes on, was part of a widespread ‘brutal’ reaction to the “sentimentalism” that had entered British letters as a result of Victorian tastes and attitudes.<sup>61</sup> Equally, Pound and Lewis’ great friend and ally, the philosopher T.E. Hulme was ‘dedicated’, as Philip Rylands puts it, ‘to rejecting the Victorian values that had lingered in Edwardian London’.<sup>62</sup> Hulme’s interpretations of Henri Bergson’s theories of ‘creative evolution’, and his subsequent anti-humanist, anti-renaissance art criticism will be seen later in this chapter to have had an instrumental role in the development of Pound’s aesthetic.

Pound’s anxiety about writers who devalue their work through aesthetic affectation opens up interesting questions about the role of the imagination in the production of literature. As will be further examined in Chapter Two, Pound’s desire for a form of expression that ‘conforms precisely with fact’ is seemingly contradicted by his simultaneous recommendation for the artist’s application of a subjective set of tastes and values. The same contradiction – between the desire for penetrative, unflinching documentation and personal, aesthetic interpretation – also constitutes a fundamental problem at the heart of Miller’s project. As we shall see, although Miller obsessively claimed to be moving away from ‘art’ and ‘literature’ and towards what he called a ‘human document’, his various essays about the creative process emphasize the importance of the individual artist’s aesthetic imaginative world, his or her vision. The paradox is enriched by the fact that Pound understood Miller as both a documenter of the ‘life as he has seen it’ and a corroborator of what we might call Pound’s own idiosyncratic vision.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Wyndham Lewis, ‘The Caliph’s Design’, in *Wyndham Lewis: The Artist* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1939), p. 207-320, p. 268. Originally published as *The Caliph’s Design* (London: The Egoist, 1919).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

<sup>62</sup> Philip Rylands, ‘Introduction’, in *Vorticism: Manifesto for a Modern World* (London: Tate Publishing, 2010), pp. 1-21, p. 21.

<sup>63</sup> Pound, ‘Review of *Tropic of Cancer*’, p. 88.

Returning to Pound's didactic literary essays, his objection to his contemporaries rests on a clear, intransigent vision as to how literature should be written. A writer's chief purpose, he believes, is singular and indisputable - to distill the essence of a particular moment, thought, feeling or experience and present it directly and meaningfully in words. With very deliberate minimalism, he summarizes the principle in his 1929 essay 'How to Read', writing that 'great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree'.<sup>64</sup>

Marshall McLuhan puts this preference for direct, concentrated and precise expression into a wider literary historical context. Where Pound pits Crabbe against Wordsworth to demonstrate the error of 'abstraction' and 'ornamentation', McLuhan discusses Pound's own ideology and style in relation to the works of Ben Jonson, Chaucer and Shakespeare. 'The values of plastic hardness and precision in Chaucer and Ben Jonson', he writes 'are readily overlooked [by English and American critics] in favour of the rich associations of Shakespeare'.<sup>65</sup> To McLuhan, the 'direct' and 'concrete' method Pound recommends is embodied in the style he uses to make his recommendations; a style suggestive of the author's refusal to meet conventional expectations of 'causally connected conceptions'.<sup>66</sup> Ideas, McLuhan suggests, do not need to be linked methodically and logically to one another. Indeed, he goes on to claim that Pound's discursive method usefully challenges the misconceived 'expectation that prose is obliged to carry the reader forward'.<sup>67</sup> Where Pound extols the virtues of 'hard' or 'concrete' modes of expression, McLuhan talks about 'plastic hardness and precision', recommending that a good writer – like Pound, or Chaucer or Jonson – uses words like 'an engraver's tools', presenting his or her images and ideas in sharp focus by a method that is 'analogical' rather than connective or fluid.<sup>68</sup> As McLuhan says of Pound's 1938 study *Guide to Kulchur*, his prose often works 'without any overlaying of underlying concepts but ... by the affirmation of the

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<sup>64</sup> Ezra Pound, 'How to Read', in *Literary Essays*, ed. by Eliot, pp.15-40, p. 23. Originally published in *The New York Herald Tribune* (January, 1929).

<sup>65</sup> McLuhan, p. 169.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

proportions which are present in the juxtaposition of persons, places, things'.<sup>69</sup> McLuhan sees this 'method of direct comparison', as a means of arriving at 'a point of decisive discrimination'.<sup>70</sup> In other words, Pound measures each thing, person, sound, thought or idea he perceives or feels sharply and clinically against the other in order to discern the subtle differences between them and the 'complex actualities' of the world.<sup>71</sup>

*Guide to Kulchur* will be seen in Chapter Three, 'Eschatology, Economics and Fascism' to have been one of four texts of the 1930s that marked Pound's shift in focus from literature to culture, politics and economics. Along with *The ABC of Economics* (1933), *Social Credit: An Impact* (1935) and *Jefferson And/Or Mussolini* (1935), it lays out a system of thought that connects the unorthodox ideas of inter-war American economist Major C.H. Douglas, the meta-historical and morphological theories of early twentieth century German anthropologist Leo Frobenius and the politics of Benito Mussolini. These texts are crucial to an understanding of Pound's appreciation of Miller since they delineate his notion of social, political and economic evil after the First World War and 'the prospect' of a solution in the future.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the language Pound uses to express these ideas is not only strikingly similar to the language he uses to champion Miller, it bears a marked resemblance to the meta-historical and eschatological imagery and tone of Miller's *Cancer*.

For McLuhan, the writer's ability to generate an expressive contrast between various ideas, places and people constitutes the 'copula of agglutination ... the copula of existential reality and not the copula which connects enunciations and conceptions in rational discourse'.<sup>73</sup> In this way, new impressions and images are accumulated without the usual causal explanation that aids understanding, in a manner that mirrors the 'existential reality' of the random visions and thoughts genuinely experienced by the subjective mind. We shall see that McLuhan's ideas are related to

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 170. See my p. 31.

<sup>72</sup> Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1952 [orig. ed.: 1938]), p. 96.

<sup>73</sup> McLuhan, , p. 170.

Pound's use of Chinese pictorial characters - ideograms – to get past the representational and communicational limitations imposed on writers by western, linear sentence structures. As Pound puts it in *Guide to Kulchur*, 'the ideogrammic method consists of presenting one facet and then another until at some point one gets off the dead and desensitized surface of the reader's mind, onto a point that will register.'<sup>74</sup> For Pound, the Chinese pictorial method enabled the artist to harness the inconsistencies and incoherencies of thought and argument that are an essential part of the individual's interior life. As Pound explains in *The ABC of Economics*, 'none of these 'incoherent' or contradictory facts can be omitted. A problem in the resolution of forces can only be solved when all the forces are taken count of'.<sup>75</sup>

For McLuhan, Pound's use of apparently irrational and unconnected combinations of ideas, examples and images enabled a clearer and more advanced form of insight than that found in standard, rational discourse: 'the anecdotes and reported conversations which enrich [Pound's] essays [create a sense of] solidity and sharpness of particularized actuality ... that baffles the reader who looks for continuous argumentation.'<sup>76</sup> In Chapter Two of this thesis, these ideas will be seen to relate to Miller's own interest and appropriation of what he calls the 'ice-box madness' in André Breton's Surrealist approach. Indeed, Pound and Miller both experiment with aesthetics to arrive at a truth that exists below 'the dead and desensitized surface of ... the mind.' However, as we will see, while Pound controls the conditions of his experiment to achieve particular results, Miller is expressly interested in the clarity that comes from a loss of control.

Pound's theories of 'hardness', 'precision' and juxtaposition were given programmatic shape in the various essays he wrote as the co-founder of Imagism (1914-19) and Vorticism (1914-15). Based on premises set out in politico-artistic manifesto form, the schools are closely related in terms of rhetoric and ideology. In both instances, Pound's imaginative focus was fixed firmly on notions of 'energy', 'dynamism', 'concentration' and 'force'. Likewise, there is a binding conception of

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<sup>74</sup> *Guide to Kulchur*, p. 51.

<sup>75</sup> Ezra Pound, *The ABC of Economics* (London: Faber & Faber, 1933), pp. 37-38.

<sup>76</sup> McLuhan, p. 170.



reality (or the individual's perception of it) as a chaotic mass to be forcefully channeled and represented through the concentrated use of thought and word. As Richard Sheppard puts it in his study *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism*, '[Pound's] major concern is with the dynamism that things can release once they have been transformed into verbal images.'<sup>77</sup>

For Pound as Imagist, the writer needed to meditate on the picture, sound, or feeling he or she was aiming to express until an image had been generated that could encapsulate its subject to the fullest degree. This is connected to a tenet he lays out in his brief manifesto for Imagism, 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste', which was initially published in *Poetry* magazine in 1913 then included in 1918's 'A Retrospect' and will be dealt with in detail later in this chapter. 'An "Image"' Pound writes, 'is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time'.<sup>78</sup> His emphasis is on what he describes in 'The Serious Artist' as the 'maximum efficiency of expression', when 'the writer has expressed something interesting in such a way that one cannot re-say it more effectively.'<sup>79</sup> In other words, the writer must aim to compact the meaning and emotion of a moment into his or her images. Pound values this above both the amount of ground covered and the narrative unity of a body of work, a point that is well illustrated by another maxim from 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste': 'It is better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works'.<sup>80</sup>

It is important to keep in mind that Miller's own pronouncements on literary practice frequently contradict Pound's recommendation for compactness, efficiency and restraint, a difference that will be explored in Chapter Two. Miller admires writers who were prone to 'overelaboration' and identifies this as a vital element of his own artistic approach. As he puts it in *Cancer* 'what is called their "overelaboration" is my meat'; it is the sign of struggle, it is the struggle itself with all the fibers clinging to it,

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<sup>77</sup> Richard Sheppard, *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), p. 112.

<sup>78</sup> 'A Retrospect', p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> 'The Serious Artist', p. 56.

<sup>80</sup> 'A Retrospect', p. 4.

the very aura and ambience of the discordant spirit' (254). By his instinctual attraction to 'the great and imperfect ones', and his career-long mission to retell the story of his own life, Miller consciously resists recommendations towards concentrated and measured succinctness that appear throughout Pound's literary essays and reviews (254). In marked contrast to Pound's assertion that 'great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree', Miller writes that 'when you show me a man who expresses himself perfectly I will not say that he is not great, but I will say that I am unattracted'.<sup>81</sup> These statements are indicative of the crucial dichotomy between control and excess in Pound and Miller's aesthetics, which will be explored in chapters Two and Three. It relates, unsurprisingly, to their writing approaches as well as to their ideas about the individual's place within bourgeois utilitarian moral and economic systems.

Indeed, Pound's Imagist approach relied on the controlled use of excessive forces, since it recommended channeling frictional energy created by oppositional images. Just as Marshall McLuhan focuses on the importance of the juxtaposition of images and ideas in Pound's literary essays, in *The Pound Era* Hugh Kenner argues that the principal ideology behind Poundian Imagism was 'energy ... effort [that] does not appease itself by reproducing what is seen but by setting some other thing into relation'.<sup>82</sup> Kenner defines the relationship between language and subject in this situation as antagonistic, indeed directed by the notion that words are meant to operate as 'lord over fact',<sup>83</sup> as deliberately chosen units that do not simply describe, but aim to encapsulate and ultimately *dominate* their material:

The action passing through any Imagist poem is a mind's invisible action discovering what will come next that may sustain the presentation – what image, what rhythm, what allusion, what word - to the end that the poem shall be ... not the transcript of one encounter but the Gestalt of many.<sup>84</sup>

By handling disparate images, rhythms and allusions violently, Kenner is saying, and ignoring conventional notions that ideas must be connected to one another

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<sup>81</sup> 'How to Read', p. 23; *Cancer*, p. 254.

<sup>82</sup> Kenner, p. 186.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

logically and methodically to create a controlled and satisfactorily complete picture, the Imagists aimed at a more profound existential truth. The placement of literary devices in opposition to each other – not only word and image but ‘rhythm ... allusion’ – has, according to Kenner, the paradoxical effect of illustrating a universal pattern. This notion of ‘Gestalt’ and the presence of natural patterns in literature is again related to Pound’s ideogrammic method – and particularly its origins in Pound’s use of the Ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius. As we will see, Pound’s translation of Confucius’ *Ta Hsio* (‘The Great Digest’) led him to view written language as a means of replicating and so unlocking cosmological energies. Moreover, the compacted aphorisms he found in this text helped him crystalize and refine his own feelings about the relationship between the individual and the world and the artist and his or her material.

For Pound as Vorticist, the guiding metaphorical vision - of the writer situated ‘at the heart of the whirlpool [the Vortex] ... a great silent place where all energy is concentrated’ – worked according to a very similar premise.<sup>85</sup> As he put it in *Blast 1*, the first installment of the Vorticist manifesto, literature should represent ‘every conception, every motion’ in its ‘primary form’, expressing ‘the most highly energized statement’ possible.<sup>86</sup> Kenner’s ‘gestalt’ theory is as applicable to Pound’s conception of Vorticism as it is to his ideas on Imagism. Indeed, he goes on in the *Blast* manifesto to declare that he and Lewis are interested in ‘the picture that means a hundred poems, the music that means a hundred pictures ... the ... statement that has not yet SPENT itself in expression, but which is the most capable of expression’.<sup>87</sup>

Throughout these early explorations, an intellectual anxiety about weak ‘second intensities’ or ‘secondary applications’ is evident, leading to repeated statements about the urgent need for artists to make ‘violent’ and ‘efficient’ use of the energy emanating from their subjects in order to produce work that is truly representative of

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<sup>85</sup> Ezra Pound, ‘Vortex. Pound’ in *Blast 1*, ed. by Wyndham Lewis (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008 [orig. ed.: 1914]), pp. 153-54, p. 154.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

life.<sup>88</sup> Art, Pound claims, must be continually and frenetically engaged with the essence of its subject, 'conceiving instead of merely observing or reflecting', in order to give a truthful account of experience.<sup>89</sup> Setting themselves up in opposition to the Italian Futurist movement – who were in fact an integral contemporary influence – the Vorticists posited themselves as prophets and protectors of a new fertile and revolutionary kind of art. In Kenner's words, 'as Futurism *receives* perception, says Lewis, Vorticism *conceives* it.'<sup>90</sup>

These 'primary intensities' are analysed by Mark Antliff, in his 2010 essay 'Sculptural Nominalism/Anarchist Vortex: Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Dora Marsden, and Ezra Pound', through Pound's interest in his sculptor friend and Vorticist ally Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. Antliff points out that Pound presents Gaudier-Brzeska, in his 1913 essay 'The New Sculpture', as the figurehead of a new movement seeking to abandon the 'classical' premise that beauty in art depends upon the accurate delineation of natural proportions. What Pound admired in Gaudier-Brzeska, Antliff claims, was the attempt not to *represent* reality but to *embody* the 'emotive 'forces'' detected by the artist in his or her subject:

The new sculpture eschews classical idealism and the analytic methods of the realist, finding its *raison d'être* in the unmediated expression of 'desire' and emotive 'forces'. A focus on forces, especially the emotional drive intrinsic to the creative process, is the subject of the new sculpture.<sup>91</sup>

This perception, Antliff goes on, echoes Gaudier-Brzeska's own statement on his aesthetic aims in the first volume of *Blast*: 'the demand that sculptors respond to the material's unique qualities was the central tenet of his manifesto 'Vortex. Gaudier-Brzeska' [Gaudier-Brzeska's prose poem in *Blast 1*].'<sup>92</sup> The desire to get away from traditional representational modes of artistic expression led visual Vorticists like

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>90</sup> Kenner, p. 338.

<sup>91</sup> Mark Antliff, 'Sculptural Nominalism/Anarchist Vortex: Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Dora Marsden, and Ezra Pound', in *The Vorticists: Rebel Artists in London and New York, 1914-18*, ed. by Mark Antliff and Vivien Greene (London: Tate Publishing, 2010), pp. 47-57, p. 51.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Gaudier-Brzeska to experiment with various non-Western forms, basing their revolution on the idea that ‘the “direct energy”, “feeling for form”, and “intensity” native to the sculpture of non-Western “primitives” was wholly absent in the sculpture of the Greeks’.<sup>93</sup> We shall see that a similar impetus lay behind Pound’s translations and recommendations of Confucius’ aphorisms, as well as his development of his own ideogrammic method. Indeed, the compactness and directness of pictorial language was a way for Pound to imbue his writing with the primary energy of direct experience rather than the secondary energy of indirect representation.

Whereas Pound and Gaudier-Brzeska had previously condemned classical sculpture as a pale and normative ideal, they now called time on all ‘representational’ art, celebrating only what Pound refers to as ‘the primary media’, art that transmits the energy of concentrated subjective experience. In ‘Vortex: Gaudier-Brzeska’, Gaudier-Brzeska explains this in terms of the group’s obsessive focus on subjective aesthetic and ethical taste and individual ‘will’:

We have been influenced by what we liked most, each according to his individuality, we have crystallized the sphere into the cube, we have made a combination of all the possible shaped masses – concentrating them to to express our abstract thoughts of conscious superiority. Will and consciousness are our VORTEX.<sup>94</sup>

This impulse to assert the force of focused subjective feeling over weak objectivity is summed up by Hugh Kenner via a letter Gaudier-Brzeska sent to Pound in 1913. As he was about to start work on *Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound* (1913), a marble bust of his friend, Gaudier-Brzeska warns Pound that he will not recognize himself in the final artwork: ‘You understand it will not look like you, it *will ... not ... look ...* like you. It will be the expression of certain emotions which I get from your character’ (Italics and ellipses are Gaudier-Brzeska’s).<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>94</sup> Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, ‘Vortex. Gaudier Brzeska.’, in *Blast 1*, ed. by Lewis, pp. 155-158, p. 158.

<sup>95</sup> Gaudier-Brzeska, quoted in Kenner, p. 256.



Walter Bennington. Henri Gaudier-Brzeska carving *Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound* c. 1914.

Courtesy Bennington Archive

It is important to note the gendered and sexualized nature of these statements about art and creativity, a characteristic in Pound that will be seen in Chapter Two – ‘Moral and Aesthetic Intersections between Pound and Miller’ - to relate to Miller’s own use of language to assert his masculinity. Indeed, Pound’s Vorticist understanding of the artist as a harnesser of unspent energies is connected to a wider anxiety about male sexual expenditure, itself linked to a curious metaphor of the brain as sexual organ. His notion in *Blast 1* of ‘the ... statement that has not yet SPENT itself in expression, but which is the most capable of expression’ very clearly aligns the pure, strong artistic expression of energies with male potency, a counterpoint to weak and impotent art.<sup>96</sup> Likewise, we will see that Miller relates the creative acts of thinking and writing to sex in various ways – from his declaration to Emil Schnellock that ‘I will explode in the Paris book’ to his claim in *Cancer’s* prequel, *Tropic of Capricorn* that he did ‘all [his] quiet thinking via the penis’.<sup>97</sup> However, as with so many of the apparent points of crossover, Pound’s desire for control and Miller’s for its loss will be seen to have constituted very different forms of sexual (and indeed economic) anxiety.

As various Pound scholars have pointed out, these statements about energy expenditure are part of a larger aggressive masculinism that pervades his reviews and manifesto essays. If Kenner implies forcefulness in his observation that ‘Vorticism *conceives*’ rather than ‘receives’ its images, and William Chace – in his study *The Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot* – calls Pound and Lewis’ project ‘intrinsically violent’ because it views ‘the artist ... as antagonistic to the material with which he worked’, more recent critics have shown this violence to be specifically gendered.<sup>98</sup> ‘Pound’s strategy’, writes Helen Carr in her essay ‘Imagism and Empire’ (2000), was to ‘create active, virile personae’ and to use the language of

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<sup>96</sup> ‘Vortex. Pound’, p. 154.

<sup>97</sup> *Letters to Emil*, p. 72, February 16<sup>th</sup> 1931; Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005 [orig. ed.: Paris: Obelisk, 1939]), p. 167. Referred to hereafter as *Capricorn*.

<sup>98</sup> William M. Chace, *The Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1973), p. 12

'brash machismo' to assert the importance of himself as an artist, and of artists to society.<sup>99</sup> 'From 1912', Carr goes on, 'he had been recommending poetry in increasingly masculinist terms, poetry that was "harder", "austere", "like granite", "nearer to the bone"'.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, as K.K. Ruthven puts it in *Ezra Pound As Literary Critic* (1991), Pound associated good literature with masculinity and bad literature with femininity:

The binary opposites 'hard and 'soft' are in Pound's criticism the organizing terms in a libidinal economy which pits the 'masculine' virtues of hardness and clarity of outline against such 'feminine' vices as 'softness', 'emotional slither', 'wobbles' and 'slush'.<sup>101</sup>

In Ruthven's opinion, Pound intended Imagism as a reassertion of masculine qualities in a literary world harmfully feminized by inauthentic and outmoded schools of writers. The Symbolists, Ruthven notes, come in for particularly strong gendered criticism: 'Symbolisme, which *Imagisme* set out to supercede, was coded feminine and its characteristics – nuance, metaphoricity and synaesthesia – were labeled 'soft'.<sup>102</sup>

By 'nuance', Ruthven says, Pound means the multiplicity of meaning, indicative of a 'softening' of intent. The Imagist drive towards direct 'concrete' expression thus

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<sup>99</sup> Helen Carr, 'Imagism and Empire', in *Modernism and Empire*, ed. by Howard J. Booth & Nigel Rigby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 64-92, p. 83. Carr develops these ideas about Pound's 'imperial masculinity' in her 2006 article 'T.E. Hulme and the 'Spiritual Dread of Space' (in *T.E. Hulme and the Question of Modernism*, ed. by Edward P. Commentale and Andrzej Gasiorek (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006)) and her book *Verse Revolutionaries: Ezra Pound, H.D. and the Imagists* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009).

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83

<sup>101</sup> K.K. Ruthven, *Ezra Pound as Literary Critic* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 118.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119. Pound's positing of imagism as the movement to replace French Symbolism is explored later in this chapter when we deal with his interest in the writer's ability to tap into and reflect mysterious, omnipresent patterns in nature. Pound desired a type of writing that was grounded in a sense of 'theos' [god] felt through earthly existence rather than the yearning for transcendence to another state. In her study *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001) Mary Ann Caws explains the difference Pound saw between the two movements: 'To Symbolist "evocation," Imagism as Pound conceives of it opposes precision, hardness, clarity of outline; to Symbolist transcendence, the natural world.' (350).



opposes what Pound dismissed as 'the opalescent word', the part of a sentence that, like an opal stone, could be viewed in different ways in different lights.<sup>103</sup> The 'mot juste', a term borrowed from Gustave Flaubert to describe the use of the correct word in order to achieve exactness of expression, thus represents virtue for Pound. For Ruthven this is a distinctly masculinist mode of thought, guided by Pound's desire for 'a new poetry of "power" and "men"'.<sup>104</sup> In this context, Pound also considered 'metaphoricity' and 'synaesthesia' feminine obstacles to a more desirable masculine project of linguistic modernisation.<sup>105</sup>

These categorizations and connections provide useful ways into the gender essentialism implied by Pound's perspective on Miller as a 'man-sized' writer, but they are also inherently problematic.<sup>106</sup> Ruthven's identification of masculinism is borne out by the evidence in much of Pound's actual writing, but the critic also relies on his own reductive gender codifications. Behind Ruthven's theory lies the belief that Pound's interest in experimental literature, in work that is created not simply for its reader's enjoyment but for the development of the form, is in itself 'masculine':

[Pound's] experimentalism offers poetry not for experience but for inspection, and aspires to durability by getting itself talked about. The pleasure of the text is subordinated to the cerebrations of scrutiny in a maneuver now recognizably masculinist.<sup>107</sup>

To simply equate 'cerebrations of scrutiny' with male and 'pleasure' with female reading and writing misinforms the discussion of gender in Pound's narrative mode. It suggests, incorrectly and reductively, not only that Pound is driven by self-conscious academicism and the desire to induce a cerebral rather than emotional reaction in its readers, but that self-consciously academic writing is an exclusively male domain. As such, the statement weakens Ruthven's argument on Pound's gendered position, serving as a warning against the oversimplification of these gender-related terms when they reappear in relation to Pound and Miller.

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<sup>103</sup> Ruthven, p. 118.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>106</sup> 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 88.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

Nevertheless, anxieties about the threat posed by 'female' modes of thought and literary method abound in Pound's critical prose. To Ruthven's list of the terms in Pound's lexicon that associate non-masculinity with literary malpractice we might also add 'decorative frill' 'red-plush', 'perfumed', 'sweetness and refinement'.<sup>108</sup> The list of terms that suggest masculinity as inherently positive is equally extensive – 'strength', 'clarity', 'directness', and 'rigor' being taken at different points to be explicitly male literary qualities.<sup>109</sup>

Pound's desire to de-feminize language was closely connected to his frustration at the inability or unwillingness of writers to match the professionalism of their counterparts in the world of science. As will be explained in Chapter Two, he put the circumspection of English critics about James Joyce's *Ulysses* down to a puerile and short-sighted squeamishness originating in a failure to appreciate that literature had as serious a social purpose as science, medicine and law. Joyce, Pound claimed in his review of *Ulysses*, had written an accurate and vital 'epochal report' for the early twentieth century, a text that meticulously delineated the thoughts and values of human beings at all levels of society, but his importance was being widely neglected 'for the sake of a few words every school boy has seen written on the walls of the privy'.<sup>110</sup> To Pound, this squeamishness about the human body – indeed, any moral ambiguity of thought and action - indicated an unacceptable amateurism and cowardice he defined as feminine. In the aforementioned essay on 'The Rev. G Crabbe, LLB', uses an essay on Alfred Tennyson by the prominent Victorian journalist Walter Bagehot to bolster this point:

'Is it credible that his (Tennyson's) whole mind would be made up of fine sentiments?' says Bagehot. Of course it wasn't. It was that lady-like attitude toward the printed page that did it – that something, that ineffable 'something' that kept Tennyson out of his works.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> 'Letter to Harriet Monroe', *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, ed. by D.D. Paige (New York: New Directions, 1971 [orig. ed.: 1950]), p. 49, January 1915; 'Wyndham Lewis', p. 429; 'Dr Williams' Position', p. 395.

<sup>109</sup> 'Wyndham Lewis', p. 430.

<sup>110</sup> 'Ulysses', p. 408.

<sup>111</sup> 'The Rev. G Crabbe, LLB', p. 276.

The term 'lady-like' here implies a refusal to admit and explore the complexity – the roughness along with the fineness - of emotional and sensory experience. Writers and critics alike are implicated in the culturally systemic crime of hiding - like fearful, prudish women - from the physical and psychological facts of life. If critics are at fault for desiring and encouraging this kind of hypocritical and unmanly refinement, writers are even more to blame for giving in to their prissy demands and failing to explore and express unrefined and truthful aspects.

The misogynist nature of Pound's writing at this time is complicated by two important contextual factors: in the first place, his concerns about the feminization of art closely echo the concerns of the establishment he purports to attack; secondly, his and Lewis' Vorticist project was publically supportive of the anti-establishment, anti-government principles and methods followed by Emmeline Pankhurst's suffragette movement.

The irony of Pound using words such as 'unmanly' and 'ladylike' to describe the popular writers and critics he sought to usurp is that this was exactly the kind of language those writers used to describe his generation. As William Wees points out in his study *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, there was widespread anxiety amongst the critical old guard of the early 1910s about the softness of the artists who were coming up through the ranks. For example, Roger Fry's radical 'post-impressionist' school of 1912 – who sought to do away with conventional, reverential attitudes towards Renaissance composition – was roundly pilloried by established reviewers like Sir William Richmond for its contaminative, emasculating influence on 'the youth':

For a moment there came a fierce feeling of terror lest the youth of England, young promising fellows, might be contaminated here. On reflection, I was assured that the youth of England, being healthy, mind and body, is far too virile to be moved, save in resentment against the providers of this unmanly show.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> William Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), p. 26.

Indeed, Professor Tonks at the influential Slade School of Art encouraged his students to stay away from Fry's exhibition at the Grafton Galleries because the paintings on show could be a source of 'contamination' for the minds of healthy young men. Despite dramatically contrasting ideas of what constituted masculinity, Pound and these older critics – traditionalists opposed to change – were equally invested in the retrograde quest to safeguard the purity of young, potentially corruptible, *male* minds. As Paul Edwards puts it in his introduction to a 2003 series of essays on the Vorticist manifestos, 'The Great London Vortex', 'the masculinist rhetoric of the Men of 1914 was deeply complicit with the patriarchal aspects of the 'public' culture that they were otherwise fighting.'<sup>113</sup>

This conflict between progressive ideas and patriarchal protectionist language is also mirrored in Pound and Lewis' use of *Blast 1* to 'bless Lillie Lenton', a major figurehead of the 1910s campaign for woman's suffrage.<sup>114</sup> It is also evident in Pound's regular contributions to *The New Freewoman* and *The Egoist*, periodicals that were edited at different times by Dora Marsden, a nominalist anarchist who applied German theorist Max Stirner's ideas of mental and spiritual self-liberation specifically to the problem of female subjugation. As we shall see in Chapter Two, Pound's essays for Marsden's periodicals are identified by Paul Edwards as a demonstration of his unique, anti-humanist and egoist take on the philosophy of Henri Bergson. Since Miller was also engaged in his own idiosyncratic readings of Bergson, this aspect of Pound's aesthetic sheds light on major correlations and divergences between his and Miller's approach to the problem of expressing subjective experience through art. In the context of Pound's approach to gender, his ideological association with Marsden and his Vorticist statements of solidarity with Lenton point to a version of masculinism concerned not with the threat of female autonomy but with femininity as a mark of soft, mannered and unambitious cultural attitudes.

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<sup>113</sup> Paul Edwards, 'Introduction', in *The Great London Vortex: Modernist Literature and Art* (Bath: Sulis Press, 2003), ed. by Paul Edwards, p. 11

<sup>114</sup> *Blast 1*, p. 28.

Thus, in Pound's manifestos of the 1910s, the 'feminine' represents both the combination of a genuine attempt to protect and assert essentially male qualities and a radical, anarchic desire to antagonize the comfortable literary status quo. The 'masculine' is used for simultaneously traditionalist and progressive purposes, a way of returning art to fixed, ahistorical values by praising and promoting radical, aesthetically veracious work. Importantly, Pound posits Henry Miller as a corrective to the 'lady-like' modes of discourse and aesthetic listed above, a 'man-sized' voice whose prose, he states in a 1936 letter to T.S. Eliot, is 'more part of permanent literature than [anything written by] such half master slime as the weakminded, Woolf female.'<sup>115</sup> Woolf, whose experimental prose style sought to redress many of the same literary conventions as Pound's, is cast as a poisonous false prophet; 'female' and therefore intellectually flaccid. Pound's faith in Miller relates directly to this – his countering of the corruptive methods employed by his mainstream contemporaries as well as the perceived femininity of other voices within the avant-garde.

Addressing the textual relationship between Pound and Virginia Woolf, Edwards suggests that Woolf was engaged in 'the cultivation of moments of beauty that apparently transcend the fret, stir and competitiveness of masculine culture'.<sup>116</sup> As with Ruthven, it is important to approach these labels of 'masculine' and 'feminine' literary features cautiously. Nonetheless, Edwards reaffirms the slippage between avant and rear garde impulses in Pound's literary discourse. This will be returned to in Chapter Two since it relates to a similar problem in Miller's work – namely, the tension between radically progressive ideas about aesthetic perspective and regressively essentialist conceptions of individual and group identity. The contradictions and subtle complexities of Miller's attitudes towards gender are thus partly evident in Pound's reading of him as correctively masculinist. A literary artists' healthy development, in other words, depends upon the transition from

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<sup>115</sup> 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 88; 'To T.S. Eliot', *Selected Letters*, ed. by Paige, p. 272, 28<sup>nd</sup> March 1935. Quoted in Ronald Gottesman, 'Introduction', in *Critical Essays on Henry Miller*, ed. by Gottesman, p. ix.

<sup>116</sup> Edwards., p. 11.

boyhood to manhood, from weak, mimetic feminine 'second intensities' to strong, innovative male 'primary' ones.

As will be shown in Chapter Two, Miller also aggrandizes and punishes himself according to a comparable standard of masculine virtue. Pound and Miller are both interested in the individual's capacity to maintain a sense of internal order, a quality they discuss in terms that ordinarily exclude women. For Pound, these ideas relate to his idolization of particular male figures – from Confucius to the radical American economist Major C.H Douglas and Italian fascist statesman, Benito Mussolini. For Miller, masculinity is explicitly associated with the ability to withstand failure, humiliation and rejection, to exist outside the secure parameters of family and society and yet retain one's 'moral health'. It resides in a particular kind of irreverence for responsibility that arises from the defeat of neurosis and the ability to know exactly what one needs and desires. 'I have lived out my melancholy youth,' Miller writes in *Cancer*, 'I don't give a fuck what's behind me or what's in front of me' (239). As Chapter Three, 'The Festival of Death' - Eschatology, Economics and Fascism', will demonstrate, Pound admires Miller for his resilience under the pressures of social and economic marginalisation, a quality that Miller consistently discusses as a major aspect of his philosophy on existence.

In keeping with the chauvinism of his discourse on feminine and masculine literary characteristics, Pound continually took up a position of zealous indignation in regard to his peers, categorizing them throughout his essay and review work according to a stark moral fissure. In fact, he repeatedly identified three of his most commercially successful English contemporaries - H.G Wells, Bernard Shaw and Arnold Bennett – as the principal 'tellers of half-truth in literature'.<sup>117</sup> Though very different in style and focus – Wells is best remembered as a Utopian Science Fictionist, Shaw was an Anglo-Irish socialist playwright, and Bennett produced popular novels about

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<sup>117</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Joyce' in *Literary Essays*, pp. 410-417, p. 415. Originally published in *The Future* (May, 1918).

domestic life in the English midlands - Pound objected to them all collectively on the grounds that they dealt in 'stock' fiction.<sup>118</sup>

Indeed, in the late 1910s and throughout the 1920s, Pound built what amounted to an antithetical system that pitted these writers – active carriers, he believed, of the 'abstraction' strain - against James Joyce and Wyndham Lewis, the two men he championed as emblematic of a stylistic and expressive literary mode concerned with the unembellished presentation of the individual's subjective reality. In his reviews of Joyce and Lewis and William Carlos Williams he is as concerned with condemning H.G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw as he is with praising his subjects, objecting as he does to Wells' and Shaw's misuse of literature towards 'confectionary' ends.<sup>119</sup> The implication here is of sweet-tasting short-term gratification and an inability to engage with the narrative beyond its insulated and narrowly structured imaginary world. Pound believes that Wells, Shaw and Bennett deliberately falsify character types and set-piece episodes to engender insidiously comfortable and pleasant emotions in their readers. In the William Carlos Williams essay he describes the 'narcotic' effect of Wells' prose, accusing the author of attempting to 'soothe the tired mind' of the reader, rather than challenge him or her with accurate reflections of the world.<sup>120</sup> This, he says, is the result of authors and readers having concerned themselves for too long with 'the desirability of sweetness and refinement', effects that are harmfully distracting and of 'a different order of existence ... from pity, terror, tragedy and those things which art [should be] concerned'.<sup>121</sup>

The 'perfumed writers' he criticizes in the same essay, the producers of 'confectionary' prose, are looked upon not only as technically deficient and irresponsible but symptomatic of the unprofessional literary climate discussed

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<sup>118</sup> 'Ulysses', p. 405. Wells, Shaw and Bennett are regularly cited by Pound's modernist contemporaries as the principal exemplars of the dwindling literary standards of the 1910s and 20s. Wyndham Lewis, Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf all wrote about these specific writers as enemies of worthwhile literary expression.

<sup>119</sup> 'Dr Williams' Position', p. 395.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 395.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 395.

earlier.<sup>122</sup> In a retrospective essay on Pound's early career, Wyndham Lewis summarizes the conditions that catalyzed his and Pound's corrective, revolutionary fervor:

A huge middle class rentier army of the intellectual or the artistic emerged, like a cloud of locusts, from the Victorian Age, and it covered the entire landscape, to the dismay of the authentic artist. They drifted dreamily out, paint-brush in hand, or with the novelist's notebook tucked away in their overcoat pocket, choking professional talent – drawing all the applause to themselves ... because they were such awfully nice people.<sup>123</sup>

Against this background of perceived dilettantism, Pound presents Lewis – in his aforementioned essay 'Wyndham Lewis' – as a writer who fulfills his proper duty because he 'hustles his reader, jolts him, snarls at him', forcing uncomfortable engagement with the material presented, but offering a truthful account of its narrator's existence.<sup>124</sup> Pound goes on to claim that *Tarr*, Lewis' critically unsuccessful debut novel of 1918 'differs from the general descriptiveness of cheap fiction in that [his] general statements are often a very profound reach for the expression of verity'.<sup>125</sup> Like Joyce, Lewis is described as countering the fraudulently polished 'red-plush Wellsion illusionism' of the period.<sup>126</sup> In response to 'awfully nice' poets and novelists, *Tarr* is a healthily antagonistic alternative that can be forgiven its multiple 'defective' techniques because it demonstrates the 'highly energized mind' of its author.<sup>127</sup>

This belief that a work of literature is truthful because it antagonizes its reader, and that such a work can have great value despite being technically flawed is pertinent in relation to Miller. Pound's identification of a similarly provocative narrative mode in *Cancer* is one of the reasons why he considers it a morally consistent and constructive text. Echoing his reading of *Tarr*, Pound judges Miller's debut novel to be virtuous because it aggressively exposes the reader to the full gamut – and

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 395.

<sup>123</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Ezra Pound', in *An Examination of Ezra Pound: A Collection of essays*, ed. by Peter Russell (New Directions, New York, 1950), pp. 257-266, p. 260.

<sup>124</sup> Pound, 'Wyndham Lewis', p. 428.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 426.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 429.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 426 & 429.



specifically the excessive force - of its protagonist's mental and emotional existence. According to this critical scheme, weaknesses and inconsistencies of form and technique are unavoidable byproducts of unrestrained truth-telling narratives, necessary sacrifices to the cause of producing honest confessional art.

Furthermore, the confessional atmosphere of *Cancer* arises from a form of consciously manic rage reminiscent of Lewis in *Tarr* and his non-fictional prose writing. Miller's text is built around his celebration of his narrative self as an abrasive and experimental artist, willing and eager to admit and express his 'murderous contempt' towards people who are, in effect, 1930s Parisian versions of the 'awfully nice' practitioners and patrons Lewis condemns.<sup>128</sup> These connections between Pound and Lewis' anti-humanist, anti-collectivist campaign in 1910s London, and Miller's attack on the pretensions of the bohemian expatriate community in Paris two decades later reveal the complexities and contradictions within Pound and Miller's projects. As we will see, both writers have surprisingly ideological agendas that belie their professed objections to art that promotes partisan ethical and political messages. If Pound wilfully contravenes the conventions of the critical essay, filling his reviews with excessively long or excessively short anecdotal passages, the connections between the different parts of Miller's narrative are often deliberately tenuous in similar ways.

Pound's criminalization of the mediocre artist has its roots in the social and political significance he attributes to the written word. He consistently states the primary influence of nomenclature on the development of civilization, and believed that writers had a social responsibility to avoid using words inaccurately or falsely. 'Once the application of word to thing becomes "slushy" and inexact, or excessive or bloated', he states in 'How to Read', 'the whole machinery of social and of individual thought and order goes to pot'.<sup>129</sup> Thus, a novel containing a dramatically embellished episode or a poem that uses a metaphor which does not form itself naturally in the reader's imagination presents a threat not only to the future of letters

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<sup>128</sup> Lewis, 'Ezra Pound', p. 260; *Cancer*, p. 142.

<sup>129</sup> 'How to Read', p. 21.

but to the future of individual thought and of society itself. In his essay on Joyce's *Ulysses*, he goes on to ascribe unprecedented political and judiciary importance to literature: 'We are governed by words, the laws are graven words, and literature is the sole means of keeping these words living and accurate.'<sup>130</sup> Following this logic, writers who do not understand literature's protective role in relation to language and to the adjunctive arenas in which language is utilized must be judged not only as inadequate practitioners but dangerously irresponsible human beings. With no hint of irony, in 'The Teacher's Mission' he returns to his extended metaphor of illness and disease, employing the idea of medical malpractice to illuminate his point:

If you saw a man selling defective thermometers to a hospital you would consider him a particularly vile kind of cheat. But for 50 years an analogous treatment of thought has gone on ... without throwing any discredit whatever on its practitioners.<sup>131</sup>

This hyperbole is echoed, to some extent, in Miller's own work on the writing process. In essays like 'The Universe of Death' (1945), his esoteric reading of James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence, and 'Un Être Étoilique' (1940), in which he discusses work by his literary ally and lover Anaïs Nin, Miller also takes up exaggeratedly authoritative and uncompromising positions. His fiction and non-fiction styles rely on the absence of caution and the tendency to overelaborate without apology. Indeed, in *Cancer* Miller discusses this characteristic as one he most admires in other writers - 'what is called "overelaboration" is my meat: it is the sign of struggle, it is struggle itself with the fibers clinging to it' (254). Like Pound, Miller makes a performance of viewing his literary subjects from extreme positions, eschewing balanced analysis or evidence in favour of sanctification and vilification. He has no interest, for example, in providing proof for his claim that Anaïs Nin is a writer of 'extraordinary genius' or for the following highly cryptic and elusive statement on Joyce's *Ulysses*:

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<sup>130</sup> 'Ulysses', p. 409.

<sup>131</sup> 'The Teacher's Mission', p. 58.

Joyce is the lost soul of this soulless world. His interest is not in life, in men and deeds, not in history, not in God, but in the dead dust of books. He is the high priest of the lifeless literature of today.<sup>132</sup>

This oracular approach to literary criticism will be looked at in Chapters Two and Three as part of the anti-logical, ostentatiously self-contradictory positions both writers take up in their prose narratives. Through his 1920s and 30s pronouncements on social and economic issues, Pound will be seen to have mirrored his earlier instructions to the artists of his age, trusting his own sense of 'the process now going on' over the 'chronological facts' that inform empirical analyses.<sup>133</sup> Likewise, Miller's narrative identity is constructed around the narrator/author's ecstatic, blind faith in his powers of perception and artistic creation, a faith that effaces the logical doubt accrued from his past failures to be published. As he puts it at the start of *Cancer*, 'A year ago, six months ago, I thought I was an artist. I no longer think about it, I am' (9-10). In this way, both writers sanctify their philosophical shortcomings and self-contradictions by presenting them as the foundations of their truthfulness and originality.

Focusing now on Pound's moral approach to literary expression, however, there are complex and deceptive overtones to his ostentatiously straightforward statements on truth and falsehood, purity and contamination. His theory is problematized by its conflation of two opposing positions – one implied by his model of the truth-telling artist who has no agenda and the other by his separate and strongly felt belief in the importance of a 'hierarchy of values'.<sup>134</sup> Pound's literary critical work is both undermined and empowered by the fact that his 'truth' is inextricably linked to a set of moral standards, which at times are as abstract as those of the writers he criticizes.

Crucially, his fight against overelaboration also implies an objection to proselytizing narratives that make sentimental demands on the reader; a critical position he inherited, Ruthven notes, from Confucius as well as the nineteenth century French

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<sup>132</sup> 'The Universe of Death', in *The Best of Henry Miller*, ed. by Lawrence Durrell (London: Heinemann, 1960), pp. p. 203-27, p. 210. Originally published in *The Cosmological Eye* (New York: New Directions, 1939).

<sup>133</sup> *Guide to Kulchur*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>134</sup> Pound, 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 88.

novelist Gustave Flaubert. In *Cathay*, his 1915 translation of selected classical Chinese poems, Pound states his intention to follow Confucius' example by promoting writers who 'set forth their matter without moralizing and without comment'.<sup>135</sup> In the same vein, Ruthven goes on, Pound praises 'the Flaubertian method' which 'does not comment on the materials but simply presents it, thus washing its hands of theories'.<sup>136</sup> Pound's promotion of the virtues of 'precision', 'clarity' and 'concrete' expression thus also attacks the use of the abstract words to transmit specific ideological messages.<sup>137</sup>

In this way, amateurish poets are criticized in 'A Retrospect' not only for their reliance on 'abstraction' but their 'rhetorical din' and 'emotional slither'.<sup>138</sup> He vilifies poetry that aims, by sly technical trickery and manipulation of feelings, to persuade the reader of the merits of a particular cause. Broadening his scope to include all artists in his essay 'The Serious Artist', Pound claims that the reading or viewing public should be treated not as a potential converts to a way of thinking but as objective recipients of a report on human behavior and human conditions:

If an artist falsifies his report as to the nature of man, as to his own nature, as to the nature of his ideal of the perfect, as to the nature of his ideal of this, that or the other, of god, if god exist, of the life force, of the nature of good and evil, if good

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<sup>135</sup> Ezra Pound, *Cathay*, quoted in Ruthven, p. 117.

<sup>136</sup> Pound, quoted in Ruthven, p. 117.

<sup>137</sup> It is also important to acknowledge the influence of Ford Madox Hueffer on Pound's aesthetic positions. Despite his use of Hueffer's poem as a case study for the problem of abstract expression, Pound developed his early literary aesthetic under the elder writer's tutelage. He met Hueffer (who later wrote under the name Ford Maddox Ford) soon after arriving in London in 1910, serving, as he put it in an interview towards the end of his life, 'an apprenticeship' under him. 'I used to spend my afternoons with [Hueffer] and the mornings with Yeats,' Pound told Donald Hall in his 1963 *Paris Review* interview. While Yeats offered specific technical advice on his poetry, Hueffer helped shape his wider literary aesthetic, guiding him towards an appreciation of 'clarity' and 'precision' and 'efficiency.' According to Pound: 'I find him significant and revolutionary because of his insistence upon clarity and precision, upon the prose tradition; in brief, upon efficient writing – even in verse' ('The Prose Tradition in Verse', in *Literary Essays*, ed. by Eliot, pp.371-377, p.377). For William Wees, Hueffer denounced 'moralizing, over-writing, and vagueness', providing Pound with the foundations for his own campaign against ideological distortions in literature (Wees, p.74).

<sup>138</sup> 'A Retrospect', p. 3.

and evil exist, of the force with which he believes or disbelieves this, that or the other, of the degree in which he suffers or is made glad ... That he may conform to the taste of his time, to the proprieties of a sovereign, to the conveniences of a preconceived code of ethics, then that artist lies.<sup>139</sup>

The idea of the reader as an independent observer holding the artist's 'report' to account is paramount for Miller as well. The diarist's format Miller uses in his trilogy of 1930s semi-autobiographical novels allows him to move between two contrasting positions: one in which he draws the reader in as a co-conspirator in his anarchical polemic, addressing him or her with the familiarity of friend or literary ally; the other in which he invites the reader's voyeuristic attention and disapproval through a graphic irreverence towards taboo material. Miller's continual vacillation from one to the other creates a dynamic between author and reader whereby the latter is perennially destabilized – at one moment participatory and the next, exteriorly observant. Equally, there are connections to be made between this kind of treatment of the reader and a more general distrust of ideology in literary texts. The complex implications of a reading of *Cancer's* narrative as anti-ideological or free of sentimental, moral or political bias, will be analysed in detail in Section 1.2, 'A Hierarchy of Values', through Pound's review of that text.

Pound's presentation of the reader as someone who requires protection from morally didactic authors is problematized by the fact that he himself often partakes in an equivalent mode of discourse. Thus, in his attempt to circumvent ideology his essays on literature themselves become paradoxically ideological, an irony that relates to a larger problem at the center of both Pound and Miller's projects: by searching for a mode of aesthetic expression that represents life in its 'natural colors', they are both engaged in an impossible, self-defeating mission.<sup>140</sup> In chapter 1.2, this desire for a true and natural aesthetic will be seen in sharper focus in the context of Pound's own ideological appropriations of Miller's writing and authorial persona.

The tension between Pound's denigration and protection of moral purpose in literature is well illustrated by his belief in a set of indisputable values that had been

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<sup>139</sup> 'The Serious Artist', p. 44.

<sup>140</sup> 'Dr Williams' Position', p. 390. See my p. 29.

upheld through the novels of Henry James, from the late nineteenth century up until the turn of the twentieth. In his review of Miller's *Cancer*, Pound posits James as an ethical gold standard against which mediocre writers of the 1920s and 30s should be judged:

Thirty years ago Henry James ... maintained a literature which took count of a fairly full gamut of values. The slump towards the impoverishment of values, towards the cheapening of every mental activity whatsoever can be best illustrated by Mr G.B Shaw's *Ersatz* (88).

In a 1918 essay written for a special 'Henry James' issue of *The Little Review*, Pound calls James the most accomplished 'recorder of people, of their atmospheres, society, personality, setting' to have written in English for over a century.<sup>141</sup> Indeed, he presents his fellow American expatriate as a guardian of specific moral values that have since become 'impoverished' under the neglectful supervision of morally suspect artists. However, the suggestion that he 'took count of a fairly full gamut of values' appears not to emphasize his values themselves but, rather, the expansiveness of his scope. Pound admires James' moral protectionism while at the same time praising his ability to absorb and reproduce a complex, diverse array of difficult-to-distinguish standards held to by different individuals and groups. Again, Pound vacillates between the celebration of artists who accept and express multiple values and the aggressive intolerance of artists that do not believe in Pound's own inflexible system.

Since some attention has already been paid to the latter position, it will be helpful to explore the democratic connotations of his approach to Henry James. In particular, what does Pound mean when he says that James 'took count of a full gamut of values'? He goes on in the obituary to explain it in terms of a furthering of 'communication' between people:

Henry James understood that the whole of great art is a struggle for communication ... and communication is not a leveling, it is not an

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<sup>141</sup> 'Henry James', in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, pp. 295-338, p. 307. Originally published in *Little Review* (August, 1918).

elimination of differences. It is a recognition of differences, of the right of differences to exist, of interest in finding things different.<sup>142</sup>

This is, Pound goes on, James' 'peacekeeping' quality, the kind of statement that has led many critics to read Pound as an inherently tolerant writer, one whose interest in the delineation of differences between people stems from a unifying rather than divisive impulse.<sup>143</sup> McLuhan, for example, ascribes the same characteristics Pound identifies in James to Pound himself, claiming that Pound's use of language demonstrated 'the utmost fidelity of sensuous and intellectual discrimination.'<sup>144</sup> Pound's attitude, McLuhan claims, is one of 'complete humility in the presence of the actual diversity of things'.<sup>145</sup> In other words, he demands the clear and correct words in literature because it is the only way to truly discern and understand the finite and complex differences between human beings and their perceptions. Likewise, Hugh Gordon, who in 1950 examines Pound in the light of his Chinese translations, identifies his principal purpose as the encouragement of communication between cultures – 'The value of Pound's lonely pioneer work', he writes 'in the higher orders of gap-bridging will one day receive the honors due to him.'<sup>146</sup>

Pound emphasizes a related quality in his essay 'Joyce'. Joyce's 'power', he claims, 'is in his scope', a quality he defines in the review of *Ulysses* as the ability to put down in writing a 'variegation of dialects' that 'allow him to get across his [characters'] tones of mind' with an accuracy missing from the vast majority of twentieth-century novels.<sup>147</sup> 'Values' then are equated both with the psychologically explorative quality of a writer's eye and ear - with his or her capacity to appreciate distinctions of 'tonality' – but also with the substance of those tonalities themselves. By understanding a wide range of principles or standards for different people, Pound asserts, a writer is empowered to accurately render the subtle tonal distinctions

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>144</sup> McLuhan, 'Pound's Critical Prose', p. 166.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>146</sup> Hugh Gordon, 'Ezra Pound and his Chinese Character: A Radical Examination', in *An Examination of Ezra Pound*, ed. by Russell, pp. 207-17, p. 217.

<sup>147</sup> 'Joyce', pp. 411; 'Ulysses', p. 404.

between their thoughts. In Joyce's work, the reader is presented with characters 'who not only speak their own language, but ... think their own language too.'<sup>148</sup>.

Writers, like musicians and painters, are successful or unsuccessful according to their understanding and intelligent manipulation of tonality. Discussing Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in 'Joyce', Pound again turns to Shaw, Wells and Bennett in order to assert Joyce and James' superiority: 'There are few people who can read [Shaw, Wells and Bennett] ... without feeling that there are values and tonalities to which [they are] wholly insensitive.'<sup>149</sup>

In his idiosyncratic translation of Confucius' 'Ta Hsio: The Great Digest' (1928) – more of a poetic interpretation than a direct translation - as well as his 1937 essay 'The Immediate Need of Confucius', Pound uses the importance of individual tonalities to explain the Imagist quest for clarity and sincerity. The creation of literature that has value, he writes in 'Ta Hsio-The Great Digest', relies on the process of "finding the precise word for the inarticulate heart's tone".<sup>150</sup> Describing 'the men of old', Pound translates Confucius in these words: 'desiring self-discipline, they rectified their own hearts; and wanting to rectify their own hearts, they sought precise verbal definitions of their inarticulate thoughts [the tones given off by the heart]' (Square brackets are Pound's).<sup>151</sup> Applying this notion of self-governance to the process of creating art, Pound declared that the instinctual desires, ideas and emotions that are felt interiorly must be apprehended and expressed by the artist. This, he goes on to say, 'means not lying to oneself, as in the case of hating a bad smell or loving a beautiful person, also called respecting one's nose'.<sup>152</sup>

In admiring James and Joyce for their tonal sensitivities, Pound posits them not just as artists who are able to accurately hear and translate the tonalities of the exterior world, but as rare explorers of their own instincts, tastes and desires. The artists

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<sup>148</sup> 'Ulysses', p. 404.

<sup>149</sup> 'Joyce', p. 412.

<sup>150</sup> Ezra Pound 'Ta Hsio: The Great Digest', in *Confucius* (New Directions: New York, 1950, [orig. ed.: 1928]), pp. 19-91, p. 47.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.



Pound celebrates are those able to address the disorder of their own emotional, intellectual and sensory realities and to fashion truthful, harmonious lines of prose from it.

It is a process that is usefully explained by Pound's translation of the Chinese ideogram 'Shen', a symbol he borrows from Confucius' *Ta Hsio* and applies to his overall literary approach. Comprising of an eye grafted onto a heart, 'Shen' is understood in most Chinese-English dictionaries to mean 'be watchful' or 'be cautious', but Pound appropriates it for his own purposes, taking its composite parts literally and arriving at the phrase, "the eye ... looking straight into the heart".<sup>153</sup>

In 'Ezra Pound: Some Notes on his Philosophy', Brian Soper identifies this maxim as a tenet of Pound's literary criticism and poetry. 'Pound' he writes 're-establishes "gout" rather than specific norms of judgment' making a clear distinction between 'taste' as a faculty that is felt instinctually and 'judgment' as an intellectual process. Soper interprets Pound's focus on the 'Shen' ideogram to mean that a work of literature can only truly have a positive impact on its readers if the author understands his or her own instinctual preferences.<sup>154</sup> Indeed, Soper points out Pound's belief that truthful expression of these preferences will result in a profound communion between writer and reader transcending the purely intellectual. In this way, as Pound puts it in *Guide to Kulchur*, the writer 'gets off the dead desensitized surface of the reader's mind, onto a part that will register'.<sup>155</sup> As Soper goes on to say of Pound's own writing method, the true artist 'enters into the minds of his readers perceptually and by example, rather than canonically and through dogma'.<sup>156</sup>

We shall see that Miller proffers similar ideas. In various essays and interviews that explore his own writing process he frequently states his opposition to notions of literature as a predominantly cerebral art-form, preferring to think of the author's role as that of detector and 'transmitter' of materials present in the world around him but inaccessible via the intellectual faculties. 'What is an artist?' he asks himself

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>154</sup> Soper, p. 231.

<sup>155</sup> *Guide to Kulchur*, p. 51.

<sup>156</sup> Soper, p. 231.

during the 1963 Paris Review interview mentioned earlier, answering: 'He's a man who has antennae, who knows how to hook up to the currents which are in the atmosphere, in the cosmos'.<sup>157</sup> In the Henry James essay and, later, in 'The Teacher's Mission', Pound uses the same metaphor but to slightly different ends, proclaiming that 'artists are the antennae of the race'<sup>158</sup>

As we will see in Chapter Three, Pound's decision to couch his theory of artistic perception in terms of 'the race' connects troublingly with his theories on national and racial difference as aligned with and informed by his attraction to cultural physiognomy and Mussolini's fascism. Nonetheless, there are similarities between Miller's and Pound's interpretation of metaphysical energies. As Miller puts it in the same interview, 'elements that go to make up a poem or a great novel ... are already in the air ... They need the man, the interpreter, to bring them forth.'<sup>159</sup> This notion of creativity bears resemblance to Pound's metaphysical philosophy as based on a chain of transmitted energy from nature to writer to reader. Indeed, in his 1921 essay 'Axiomata', this energy is defined as 'theos', the Ancient Greek word for God, an omnipresent life-force that, by its very nature is unknowable, except by its effects on the consciousness:

The theos may affect and may have affected the consciousness of individuals, but the consciousness is incapable of knowing why this occurs, or even in what manner it occurs, or whether it be the *theos*.<sup>160</sup>

The serious artist, to borrow Pound's proscriptive term, imbues his or her words with the patterns of reality he or she aims to reflect. As emanations of 'theos', these patterns are felt and tapped into by the artist but ultimately evade any attempt at intellectual apprehension. The reader responds positively to the text because he or she intuits what Hugh Kenner, in *The Pound Era*, describes as a 'patterned process' - a

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<sup>157</sup> 'Henry Miller', in *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, ed. by Brooks, p. 145.

<sup>158</sup> Pound, 'Henry James', p. 297; 'The Teacher's Mission', p. 58.

<sup>159</sup> 'Henry Miller', *Writers at Work*, p. 145.

<sup>160</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Axiomata', in *Manifesto - A Century of Isms*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), p. 361. Originally published in *The New Age* (January, 1921).

true expression of the universal 'patterned process' that exists in nature: 'words pattern process, and ... Nature, from which language comes, is patterned process'.<sup>161</sup>

The proof for this, according to Pound, is that, throughout history, 'honest' minds have always arrived at similar conclusions: 'It is of the permanence of nature that honest men ... come repeatedly to the same answers in ethics, without need of borrowing each other's ideas.'<sup>162</sup> In other words, there are latent, indisputable ethical truths that exist in nature and can be detected and expressed only by rare literary artists. The combination of words in a great line of poetry or passage of prose originates then, not in the mind of the individual writer, but in the energies in the world around him or her.<sup>163</sup> The idea is developed to its organic extreme when, in 1949's *The Pisan Cantos*, Pound proffers the possibility of "the stone knowing the form which the carver imparts."<sup>164</sup> According to Soper, Pound sees a kind of primordial relationship between the physical world and art that will be rendered from and into it because he believes that 'the god is in the stone' and that 'what conceals him is a mode of expression – whether it be language or music, sculpture or painting – lacking in virtue'.<sup>165</sup> If we take the sculptor's manipulation of stone as a metaphor for the literary artist's handling of language, we come to the understanding that Pound sees latent energy not only in the world around him but in the medium of language the artist uses to represent that world. As Kenner puts it, Pound is determined to 'let no man with an eye forget what energy it is that fills words: the energy of the process in nature.'<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Kenner, p. 159.

<sup>162</sup> Pound, 'Mang Tze or the Ethics of Mencius', p. 89. These ideas are developed in Chapter Three, "'The Festival of Death" - Eschatology, Economics and Fascism', in the light of Pound and Miller's common interest in epochal civilizations as embodying a 'vital spirit' that connects them with past and future civilizations. Pound and Miller were influenced – respectively - by anthropologist Leo Frobenius (1873-1938) and meta-historian Oswald Spengler (1880-1936), two figures whose work is also ideologically aligned.

<sup>163</sup> 'The Teacher's Mission', p. 59.

<sup>164</sup> Ezra Pound, *The Pisan Cantos* (London: Faber and Faber, 1949), p. 43.

<sup>165</sup> Soper, p. 242.

<sup>166</sup> Kenner, p. 160.

The term Soper picks up on - 'the god is in the stone' - is Pound's translation of *Vacuus exercet aera morsus*, a line from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. His application of this classical aphorism to his wider aesthetics is helpfully explained via *The Imp*, a sculpture by Henri Gaudier-Brzeska that Pound particularly admired. A phallic block of alabaster roughly moulded into humanesque form, *The Imp* gives off connotations both of the ethnographic and the futuristic, the figure suggesting either a tribal god or a science fictional imagining of an alien. Its eyes, nose, mouth and neckline are moulded in such a way as to appear faintly etched into the stone, implying an animate force trapped inside and merging with the inanimate material. Consequently, the viewer may witness a life brought to the surface of the stone by the artist's hand, the 'god', 'theos' otherwise concealed by a 'mode of expression ... lacking in virtue.'

To Pound's mind, the artist must prepare for the task of receiving these latent, natural forces by meditating on what it is he or she actually enjoys, loves, desires, abhors, detests, fears or is repelled by. As Soper recognizes, the writer should be engaged not in the active delineation of exterior patterns but in the contemplation of his or her interior self:

The reality which we usually call 'external' has already within it the force creative of its patterns ... either implicitly ... or explicitly, in the works of man. The cosmic harmony is not something given which we learn to "appreciate" as if it were some tangible object to be picked up and examined under a glass; rather is it a quality *responsive* to principles of order in human consciousness, both controlling it and being controlled by it in turn.<sup>167</sup>

Pound's understanding of reality and of a literary artist's capacity to reflect reality, Soper claims, depends upon 'the precept or moment of interpreted "onsight" - Anschauung' that arises from a process of patient contemplation, implying a passiveness on the part of the artist that seems to contradict Pound's Vorticist statements on the need for the violent use of material.<sup>168</sup> Even if we factor in the idea that the individual artist must contemplate his own intention and taste in order to align him or herself with the latent energies of nature, Pound appears to promote a

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<sup>167</sup> Soper, pp. 240-41.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

subversion of the Vorticist relationship between artist and subject, the artist no longer acting - in Kenner's words - as 'lord over fact', but rather as patient recipient of pre-existing energies. It is a dissonance exemplified by the difference between Pound's admiration for poets like William Carlos Williams who, we remember, 'paints the world in its natural colors' and his sabre rattling to the tune of Wyndham Lewis' *Tarr* who 'jolts, hustles the reader'.<sup>169</sup>

According to Soper, this contradiction is a sign of the inter-relationship between 'known' and 'felt', 'noumenal' and 'phenomenal' forces, dynamics in which the 'felt' and the 'phenomenal' must inevitably take precedence:

While the exceptional artist may be able to use his or her creative mind to capture the 'felt' and 'phenomenal', he or she cannot take credit for creating that force. As Pound puts it in his 1934 essay on the Italian poet Guido Cavalcanti: 'The force is arrested, but there is never any question about its latency, about the force being the essential, and the rest 'accidental'.<sup>170</sup>

This is yet another paradox mirrored in Miller's aesthetic. In various essays and interviews on the process of literary creation, Miller consistently advocates a passive approach to work: 'stop thinking and let 'it' come' he tells aspiring writers in his 1963 interview with *The Paris Review*.<sup>171</sup> This is contradicted, however, by his quest for a mode of literature that truly embodies day-to-day subjective experience, by the vitriol and bitterness that characterize the narrative tone in *Cancer* and, most crucially, by Miller's belief in the individual's subjective world as a product of the imagination.

Examining both areas of Pound's thinking on 'tonality' – in other words the individual's ability to produce art by detecting exterior and interior patterns - we are directed again towards the connection between Pound's approach to 'values' and his anxiety about standardized approaches. He is concerned throughout his criticism about a negative literary trend towards narrow artistic perspectives that ignore the

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<sup>169</sup> 'Dr Williams' Position', p. 390. See my p. 29. 'Wyndham Lewis', p. 428. See my p. 56.

<sup>170</sup> 'Cavalcanti', in *Literary Essays*, ed. by Eliot, pp. 149-200, p. 152. Originally published in Ezra Pound, *Make It New* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934).

<sup>171</sup> 'Henry Miller', in *Writers at Work*, p. 145.

subtle intricacies of subjective reality. He is worried that his contemporaries and successors are neglecting to report on the differences between the ways in which other people think, feel and express themselves. As we will see in the following section, Pound's opinions in his review of *Cancer* are as abstractly expressed and unsupported by evidence as in much of his literary criticism, but the review also contains some of his starkest statements about an acceptable 'hierarchy of values'. The many paradoxes within Pound's aesthetic and ethical worldview, and the detail of what Pound means when he talks about 'hierarchy', 'good and evil' and 'values' will be explored and delineated through a close reading of this review.

Pound's statements against 'poppycock', 'rhetorical din' and 'emotional slither', his belief that writers should listen carefully to the subtle tonalities inside themselves and the outside world are the early incongruous foundations for his belief that Miller represents a set of productive values at the mid-point of the 1930s.<sup>172</sup> In Chapters Two and Three we will see how these aesthetic tenets had metamorphosed into eccentric political and economic theories by the time he wrote his review of *Cancer*. I will delineate the different ways in which Pound found proof for those theories in Miller's prose. In preparation for that analysis the following section uses Pound's ideas about truth and untruth, good and evil in works of literature to decode his many references to scope, tonality and moral stability in the *Cancer* review.

Importantly, we will see that Pound's beliefs about the written word as a means of protecting healthy, non-partisan and masculine values is the starting point for a reading of Miller's work that defines the author himself as healthy, sane and strong. In this context, I will ask how Pound was able to arrive at such a conclusion when the 'overelaborate' Miller so clearly flouted the former's fundamental Flaubertian directive to carefully seek out 'le mot juste' for each thought, feeling or idea.

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<sup>172</sup> 'A Retrospect', p. 3. See my p. 29.



Henry Gaudier-Brzeska. *The Imp*, c. 1914. Courtesy Tate Britain

## 1.2 A 'hierarchy of values': Pound's 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*' (1935)

'For a hundred and fifty pages the reader not having started to think very hard, might suppose the book is amoral, its ethical discrimination seems about that of a healthy pup nosing succulent "poubelles", but that estimate can't really hold. Miller has and has very strongly a hierarchy of values. And in the present chaos, this question of hierarchy has become almost as important as having values at all.' Ezra Pound, 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*' (1935)<sup>173</sup>

'When a book like *Tropic of Cancer* appears, it is only natural that the thing people notice should be its obscenity. Given our current notions of literary decency, it is not at all easy to approach an unprintable book with detachment. Either one is shocked and disgusted, or one is morbidly thrilled, or one is determined above all else not to be impressed.' George Orwell, 'Inside the Whale' (1940)<sup>174</sup>

Pound was alone among early reviewers of *Cancer* in his belief that the novel was built around a clearly identifiable, consistent and sympathetic moral framework. Aside from Pound, the 1930s and 40s English and American critics who commented positively on Miller's banned book fell into two camps– the majority who believed that his writing was actively immoral, 'sordid' or 'obscene' and the few, referred to above by Pound, who adhered to the notion that 'the book [was] amoral' and lacking in 'ethical discrimination'.

Edmund Wilson, associate editor of the left-wing American literary periodical *The New Republic* in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, is representative of the former camp. In one of Miller's first reviews in English, Wilson wrote that 'from the point of view of both its happenings and of the language in which they are conveyed [it] is the lowest book of any real literary merit that I ever remember to have read'.<sup>175</sup> Wilson's gist is that Miller's writing is good despite rather than irrespective or because of the profane language and morally suspect subject matter. An essay by Anglo-French critic Montgomery Belgion, printed in T.S. Eliot's *The Criterion* in 1935, offers a similar appraisal. Whilst congratulating Miller for the 'dynamism' of his

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<sup>173</sup> 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 88.

<sup>174</sup> Orwell, p. 95.

<sup>175</sup> Wilson, 'Twilight of the Expatriates', p. 91.



prose, Belgion laments his 'wearisome iteration of certain words' and what he dismissively terms the 'sustained retching' of its narrative.<sup>176</sup>

The chief proponent of this 'amoral' position was George Orwell, who met Miller in 1934 while stopping over in Paris on his way to fight in the Spanish Civil War. Orwell's 1940 essay 'Inside the Whale' argues that Miller's quality resides in his opposition to moral and political positivism, claiming that the narrator of *Cancer* represents a 'voice from the crowd, the underling, from the third-class carriage, from the ordinary, non-political, non-moral, passive man.'<sup>177</sup> It was a position, we shall see, largely informed by Miller's incredulous reaction to Orwell's support for the Spanish republican cause. In his review of *Cancer*, Orwell prefaces his discussion of the novel by recounting their meeting and self-deprecatingly applauding Miller for mocking his idealism. By disengaging himself from the widespread partisanship of the pre-World War Two Anglo-American literary scene, Orwell claimed, and by demonstrating a narrative tone that was 'bold, not frightened', Miller was able to write exceptionally truthful prose.<sup>178</sup>

Orwell's reading is crucial to an analysis of Pound's moral and narrative relationship with Miller since it celebrates *Cancer* as an important 1930s text for reasons that are narrowly political and therefore antithetical to Pound's. Moreover, Orwell's essay has had a much more significant impact than Pound's on later studies of Miller, leading to reductive readings that tend to ignore the latter's moral position altogether and consequently misunderstand the complexities of his aesthetic approach. For this reason, the details of Orwell's review will be analysed in relation to Pound's later on in this chapter. For the moment, however, it is important to note that Orwell was the most prominent of a small group of reviewers - including Philip Rahv, a contributor to Wilson's *The New Republic* - who understood Miller as a figure of 'total negation'; symptomatic of a pre-war period in which politics and literature were increasingly thought of as redundant, and a reaction against the ineffectual

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<sup>176</sup> Montgomery Belgion, 'French Chronicle', October 1935, no. 58, in *The Criterion, 1922-1939, Vol. Oct 1935-July 1936* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), pp. 85-92, p. 86

<sup>177</sup> Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p. 128.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

political posturing of more fashionable and commercially successful novelists and poets.<sup>179</sup>

Pound's review of Miller is fiercely defensive against accusations both of immorality and amorality, permeated as it is by the fundamental belief that *Cancer* presents a fully formed and ordered world, neither immoral nor amoral in its content or style. He positions himself in direct opposition to the critics – whose reactions he regards as misguided and short-sighted – and the general reading public – who are dismissed as 'cow-towing' and 'submissive' in their susceptibility to shock and offense at Miller's choice of language (87).<sup>180</sup> In addition, Pound argues against the notion that Miller's interest in 'low-life' characters, his unabashed and deromanticized descriptions of sexual experience and his disregard for conventional moral judgment render *Cancer* simply a 'bawdy' text:

The bawdy will welcome this bawdy book with guffaws of appreciation, but the harassed and over-serious critic ... will be glad of deliverance from a difficult situation (87)

Pound paints a heroic picture of Miller as the possessor of ethical faculties that are rare and necessary amongst literary artists, welcoming *Cancer* as an antidotal addition to the Anglo-American landscape. Strikingly, his admiration for the semi-autobiographical novel extends to a favorable comparison with the works of his two principal literary champions:

At last we have a full-sized 300 page volume that can be set beside [James] Joyce and [Wyndham] Lewis [and] gives one a chance and right to mention their limitations (88)

The implication here is twofold: first, that the scope, the sensitivity to tonality, the 'standards' that Joyce and Lewis had until this point alone embodied, are now finally

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<sup>179</sup> Rahv, 'Henry Miller', p. 31

<sup>180</sup> The general public, referred to in Pound's essay 'Henry James' as 'the bullet-headed many', are roundly pilloried throughout his literary critical writings ('Henry James', p. 297). 'The mob', he writes in his review of *Ulysses*, are dangerous legitimizers of 'Wells, Shaw and Bennett', a parochial, undereducated constituency who allow themselves to be 'swaddled' by comforting but insidious ideas of equality and universalism. The subject of Poundian elitism in relation to Miller's narrative mode is dealt with in detail towards the end of this chapter.

recognizable in a new piece of writing; second, that Miller's prose meets Pound's criteria regarding literary method in a way that Joyce and Lewis do not.

As with so much of his writing, Pound is deliberately provocative in his defense of Miller. He premises his argument by self-conscious flouting apparently obvious readings of *Cancer*, asserting that where others are bound to see the absence of order, of a code of behavior that dictates thought and action in the text, what is actually present is the exact opposite. As with the Joyce, James and Lewis reviews, his eschewal of explanation and evidence creates the unsettling impression that Pound considers his assertions too obvious to require proof. Problematically, he works on the basis that the proponent of an idea proves its truth by his fundamental faith in it and by presenting it to the reader as indisputable fact.

Chapters Two and Three will elaborate on this discursive style. Mirrored in Miller's writings, it lays the groundwork for their deliberately self-contradictory narrative modes. For William Chace, Pound's consistent refusal to offer evidence gives him 'the manner of a man who confidently assumes his answer to the problems of the world will have a validity denied to the mere experts.'<sup>181</sup> T.S. Eliot, Pound's close friend and literary confidant, offers a similar appraisal of Pound's zealous prose style. According to Eliot, Pound 'presents the appearance of a man trying to convey to a very deaf person the fact that the house is on fire.'<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Chace, *The Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot*, p.73.

<sup>182</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Introduction', in *Literary Essays*, ed. by Eliot, p. xii. Intriguingly, Marshall McLuhan puts Pound's cocksureness about the validity of his arguments down to his small-town, evangelical American roots: 'With entire Yankee optimism, he has insisted on the universal import of his interests, where Mr. Eliot's skeptical wisdom has led him to soothe the literate and to seek understanding only from a few. Mr. Pound brought to letters the evangelical public spirit of the American town-meeting.' (Marshall McLuhan, 'Pound's Critical Prose' (1949), in *An Examination of Ezra Pound*, ed. by Russell, pp.165-171, p.166). This idea of Pound having catalyzed English letters by importing New World 'optimism' is echoed by the position Miller creates for himself in Paris. In fact Pound homes in on the 'incurable optimism' he finds in *Cancer*, an attribute that Miller half-jokingly puts down to his own 'retarded', atavistic American spirit (56). The anomaly of two tonally very American writers ending up expounding prophetic theories to European readerships will be addressed in Chapter Three, particularly in relation to their enthusiastic attempts to

Each writer Pound reviews is in some way appropriated for the purpose of promoting and developing his programmatic literary agenda. Indeed, in his 1961 essay 'Poet of Many Voices', George P. Elliott argues that this propagandist element in Pound's writing acts as an impediment to the reader's appreciation of it:

[Pound's] prose, which not infrequently deals with ideas, events, persons, phrases that appear in his poetry, can turn you against these by its very techniques. After the mid 1920's, he ... turned to the writing of prose propaganda.<sup>183</sup>

Miller's own rather less illustrious reviewing career contains evidence of a similar proselytizing tendency, his literary essays often serving as promotional platforms for the writers he admires. 'Un Être Étoilique', his 1939 essay on Anaïs Nin, for example, presents her as a writer of an entirely new form of confessional literature, one that surpasses anything written before it. He frequently makes bold, unsupported statements as if they are undisputable facts. Her diary represents, he claims, nothing short of 'a mythological voyage towards the source and fountainhead of life'.<sup>184</sup> Furthermore, despite Nin's relative obscurity at this stage in her career, 'the importance of such a work to our time hardly needs to be stressed'.<sup>185</sup> This tendency towards hyperbole, as we will see, supports the eschatological aspects of Miller and Pound's narrative modes. The certainty with which both writers promote their contemporaries is invariably connected to a sense of urgency about the epoch in which they are writing. It is a characteristic aligned with what Frank Kermode describes, in his lecture and essay 'The Modern Apocalypse' as the 'powerful eschatological element' common to experimentalist writers of the early twentieth century, a state of naïve self-absorption arrived at by literary artists seeking to invest their works with greater historical significance (1967):

The first phase of modernism, which so far as the English language goes we associate with Pound and Yeats, Wyndham Lewis and Joyce, was clerkly

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communicate complicated eschatology in an instinctual and de-intellectualized manner.

<sup>183</sup> George P. Elliott, 'Poet of Many Voices' in *Ezra Pound: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Walter Sutton (Spectrum: New Jersey, 1963), pp. 152-162, p. 152.

<sup>184</sup> 'Un Être Étoilique', in *The Best of Henry Miller*, ed. by Durrell, pp. 287-306, p. 288. Originally published in *The Cosmological Eye* (New York: New Directions, 1939).

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

enough, skeptical in many ways; and yet we can without difficulty convict most of these authors of dangerous lapses into mythical thinking.<sup>186</sup>

Kermode 'convicts' these writers of assuming:

[their] own crisis [is] pre-eminent, more worrying, more interesting, than other crises: the vain belief, in other words, that their particular epoch, represented by their particular art, was more integral to the past and future of civilization than any before it.<sup>187</sup>

More importantly, Kermode saw evidence of an even shorter sighted 'mythological' and 'eschatological' perspective in the modernisms that emerged after World War Two. Pound and Miller can – in their different ways – be located in the interzone between Kermode's models of the 'clerkly' apocalyptic mode of the early modernists and the unchecked counter-cultural mythologies of the 1950s and the 1960s, an issue that will further analysed in Chapter Three.

In Pound's review of *Cancer*, he employs proselytising language and tone to defend Miller from the lazy criticism he predicts will come his way. The average reader, tempted either to dismiss or applaud the book because of its negation of the concept of moral order, is reprimanded since, in Pound's view, 'If an obscene book is obscene because of any vileness in the author's mind this book is certainly not obscene' (88).

Underlying this defense is the premise that 'obscenity' and 'immorality' are terms that should be applied not to work which shocks by its subject matter but to writing that fails to abide by Pound's core tenets. In 'The Serious Artist' Pound complains that 'it takes a deal of talking to convince a layman that bad art is 'immoral', that good art however 'immoral' it is, is wholly a thing of virtue. Purely and simply ... good art can NOT be immoral'.<sup>188</sup> The morality of a work of fiction, in other words, should be measured according to artistic veracity - and therefore quality - rather than any set of objective standards. It is the writer who 'makes false reports ... either deliberately or through negligence' who should be judged as immoral not he who,

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<sup>186</sup> Frank Kermode, 'The Modern Apocalypse', *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: OUP, 1967), pp. 91-124, p. 104.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>188</sup> 'The Serious Artist', p. 44.

like Miller, handles material ordinarily categorized as 'obscene'.<sup>189</sup> Indeed, like Joyce - praised by Pound for dealing accurately with subjects that are 'obscure, even obscene' - Miller is regarded as having a sound moral grounding irrespective of his actual subject material.<sup>190</sup>

Pound discusses obscenity at length in his 1922 review of Joyce's *Ulysses*, addressing general objections to what he calls the 'faecal analysis' in the novel.<sup>191</sup> He admonishes the critics who have condemned *Ulysses* 'for the sake of two or three words which every small boy has seen written on the walls of the privy', making the case that it is infantile to judge a book as immoral according to its use of words, images or ideas that offend or embarrass the sensibilities of its readers.<sup>192</sup> Furthermore, he claims in 'The Serious Artist', readings that incorrectly identify a work as obscene for these reasons are unable to identify the depth of personal dishonesty at the root of most popular literature:

Bad art is false reports as to the nature of man, as to .... [the author's] nature, as to the nature of his ideal of the perfect, as to the nature of his idea of this, that or the other, of god, if god exist, of the life force with which he believes or disbelieves this, that or the other, of the degree in which he suffers or is made glad.<sup>193</sup>

In comparing Miller to Joyce and arguing against readings that categorize the former as 'bawdy' or morally corruptive, Pound counters what he believes to be unsatisfactory, standardized notions of obscenity and a writer's moral responsibility. As he states in the *Cancer* review, 'all question of verbal license can be left out of the estimate (for that ... has been an impediment to criticism)' (88).

Pound's reaction to Miller thus becomes another way to define a 'natural' rather than contrived literary method. A work of literature, he states in 'A Retrospect', is deemed virtuous by its ability to generate feelings of 'sudden liberation', 'of freedom from

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 43

<sup>190</sup> 'Joyce', p. 413.

<sup>191</sup> 'Ulysses', p. 409.

<sup>192</sup> 'Ulysses', p. 406.

<sup>193</sup> 'The Serious Artist', p. 43.

time limits and space limits, the sense of sudden growth'.<sup>194</sup>As mentioned earlier, in the same passage (originally published as 'A Few Don'ts for an Imagiste') he defines "an "Image"" as 'that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.'<sup>195</sup> For Pound, 'The presentation of such a "complex" instantaneously', through the successful combination and alignment of words, produces an emotional response in the reader akin to that experienced when observing beauty in the natural world. The reader of a beautiful line of literature and the perceiver of a beautiful moment in nature, he implies, are equally liberated from the temporal and spatial bounds of the present.

Thus the artist, whose words unlock the 'virtu' in the world around him, is envisioned as offering the reader a form of escape, or transcendence from restrictive and mundane reality. In the 'Cavalcanti' essay, this idea is developed through the comparison of the currents tapped into by artists and the currents detected with the discovery of electricity. What he nostalgically desires is an aesthetic based on the potential of untapped energies – a way of thinking about life and art that existed in medieval times but has since been lost:

A medieval 'natural philosopher' would find this modern world full of enchantments, not only the light in the electric bulb, but the thought of the current hidden in air and in wire would give him a mind full of forms.<sup>196</sup>

These kinds of connections, between the natural world, the artist's creation of an image and the reader's response to it, are crucial. In the 'The Serious Artist', for example, Pound uses an instance from nature to explain the difference between an honest and dishonest appreciation of beauty:

I mean beauty, not slither, not sentimentalizing about beauty, not telling people that beauty is the proper and respectable thing. ... You don't argue about an April wind, you feel bucked up when you meet it. [In the same way] You feel bucked up when you come on a swift moving thought in Plato or a fine line in a statue.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> 'A Retrospect', p. 4.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p.4. See my p. 41.

<sup>196</sup> 'Cavalcanti', p. 154.

<sup>197</sup> 'The Serious Artist', p.45.

By equating the effect of a 'swift moving thought in Plato' with the feeling of a spring breeze, Pound hints at artistic capabilities that facilitate communication beyond the cerebral and even the emotional, and into realms of the divine. Indeed, like a religious leader instructing his congregation, he encourages his readers not to question the pleasure, the sense of 'growth' or enlightenment felt when he or she reads beautiful literature or views a great work of sculpture since it comes from a place of unarguable, natural truth. In alliance with this, the art that Pound advocates is consistently described in terms of its magically illuminating quality, its ability to shed light on universal truths by inscrutable means. In the essay about Cavalcanti, for example, Pound is nostalgic for a time when art was produced alchemically:

We appear to have lost the radiant world where one thought cuts another with clean edge, a world of moving energies ... [of] magnetisms that take form, and that are seen, or that border the visible, the matter of Dante's *paradiso*, the glass under the water, the form that seems a form seen in a mirror, these realities perceptible to the sense, interacting, 'a lui si tiri' [from light to shade].<sup>198</sup>

Pound's notion - discussed in the previous section - of the artist as 'antennae of the race', thus becomes a way of thinking about a creative method of communion with unseen metaphysical forces.<sup>199</sup> This is the purpose of the 'analogical' method highlighted by McLuhan, the effect the writer is aiming for when he juxtaposes contrasting ideas and images.<sup>200</sup> The artist is not only 'antennae of the race', detector and expresser of the natural forces at play in the world, he or she is a being who perceives an alternate reality, unseen and unfelt by ordinary human beings.

Although, in his review of *Cancer* Pound does not talk about Miller in exactly these metaphysical terms, he identifies Miller's mode of expression as 'natural' and therefore conducive to the feelings of restoration and liberation mentioned above (89). Echoing his comment about William Carlos Williams' ability to 'understand something in its natural colors and shapes', Pound claims that Miller 'paints in honest colors' the life that he experiences, thus imbuing his narrative with 'an

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<sup>198</sup> 'Cavalcanti', p. 154.

<sup>199</sup> Pound, 'Henry James', p. 297; 'The Teacher's Mission', p. 58. See my p. 65.

<sup>200</sup> McLuhan, p. 169. See my p. 38.



undercurrent of comfort', which carries the reader along, affirming and improving his or her moral health in the midst of apparently chaotic conditions.<sup>201</sup>

Indeed, Pound describes Miller as "incurably healthy", a term he lifts directly from *Cancer's* narrator, who describes himself in the following way:

I've lived out my melancholy youth. I don't give a fuck anymore what's behind me, or what's ahead of me. I'm healthy. Incurably healthy. No sorrows, no regrets. No past, no future. The present is enough for me. Day by day. Today! (65).

Pound emphasizes Miller's unmitigated honesty, praising the resilience that arises from this. He believes that it is by 'human necessity' as 'an "incurably healthy" and genuinely poverty-stricken vagabond' that Miller finds himself begging on the streets of Paris, and – blessedly -not as an experimental 'searcher for low-life' (88). Despite the hardship of his position, it is impossible to 'cure' Miller's narrator's 'healthy' mind and, in turn, impossible not to share in his good health. Employing Miller's own deliberately paradoxical language Pound implies that Miller's moral being is robust to the point of indestructibility. If he cannot be cured of his own 'health' and optimism (despite existing within optimum conditions for a psychological breakdown), then there is no conceivable way he can be described either as obscene or corruptive.

Miller's belief in his own incurable optimism or 'health' is the cornerstone of his existential and literary theory. He refers repeatedly to it in *Cancer* and in his essays on writing and the private letters he wrote while he was finishing *Cancer*. When Anais Nin admonished him for his 'indifference' and 'callousness' in response to her recent bout of nervous exhaustion, he replied with a revealing analysis of his state of mind. It was 'Health!' he claimed 'not indifference, not callousness' that prevented him from sympathizing with her:

It's a very human condition which lifts you, temporarily at least, above so many useless problems and vexations. You just can't be made wretched, sorrowful, miserable. You live there for a while, at the apex of clarity, and

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<sup>201</sup> "Dr Williams' Position", p. 390. See my p. 29; 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 89.

you see things with the naked eye and everything looks good, *is* good. It's almost like getting religion – only so much better, so much more sane.<sup>202</sup>

Miller's tendency to take up apparently callous positions in response to other people's suffering will be further examined in Section 2.1 'Monstrosity and the Aesthetics of Destitution', as a significant aspect of his narrative approach. Miller's justification of his behavior towards Nin likewise has its origins in the notion of an improved approach to suffering that takes into account the 'multiplicity of things' and it is in this context that the standard categorization of Miller as an anti-humanist writer must be questioned. While he is characterized both by his detractors - including Kate Millet (*Sexual Politics*, 1969) and Salman Rushdie ('Outside the Whale', 1984) – and his supporters - like George Orwell and Philip Rahv – as disinterested in compassion, I argue that he comes at the human condition from a startling but nonetheless deeply empathetic angle.

Pound's decision to reference Miller's 'incurable health' and optimism assimilates Miller into his extended metaphor of aesthetic and ethical health and sickness, strength and weakness, purity and impurity. In contrast to the 'stock novelists', the 'G.B. Shaw ersatz' of the 1910s and 20s, imagined by Pound as the carriers of defective literary technique, he presents Miller's own infections, paradoxically, in terms of health and optimism.<sup>203</sup> Miller's 'sickness' is his existential resilience, thus marking him out against the mass of trivial, unhealthy writers that is tolerated by a tired and out-of-step Anglo-American literary establishment.

Importantly, there is also the suggestion here, that by his frequent, candid use of profanity and taboo subject matter, Miller attempts to inoculate himself against the moral squeamishness of his age. The metaphor of inoculation provides useful ways of thinking about his writing in relation to morality since he consistently answered the charge of 'obscenity' with the theory that his writing functions as a 'tonic' for the writer and reader alike; a means of attaining cleanliness through the acceptance of

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<sup>202</sup> Henry Miller, *A Literate Passion: Letters of Anaïs Nin and Henry Miller 1932-1953*, ed. with an intro. by Gunther Stuhlmann (London : Allison & Busby, 1988), p. 159, May 24<sup>th</sup> 1933.

<sup>203</sup> 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 88; 'Ulysses', p. 405.

dirt, of becoming healthy by acknowledging the inevitability of impurity and sickness. As will be seen in the following section – a close reading of *Cancer* as well as Miller's essays on writing in the context of Pound's ideas - this notion of immunity through excessive exposure permeates Miller's aesthetic, both in relation to obscenity and his vision of himself as a resiliently optimistic artist in a doomed epoch.

As with Pound's statements on writers' 'tonalities', Confucius provides the basis for this idea of 'healthy' literary expression. Indeed, Pound's interest in Miller is connected to Hugh Kenner's aforementioned interpretation of Pound's Confucian project – to 'let no man with an eye forget what energy it is that fills words: the energy of the process of nature.'<sup>204</sup> As we shall see, in his essay 'Immediate Need of Confucius', Pound promotes Confucius' *Ta Hsio* as an essential and timeless remedy for the moral vagaries of modern Western society. Again, dealing in binary concepts of purity and contamination, he implies that a true artist must understand the energy his or her words originate from, and must utilize those words in their purest form. If a word, phrase or sentence's power comes from its relation to a natural object, image, feeling or thought, then its incorrect usage tampers and harms that natural state.

Moreover, in Pound's translation of *Ta Hsio*., *The Great Digest*, he applies this idea about words and nature to the process of creative and intellectual thought.

According to Pound, Confucius advocates 'developing and restoring to its primitive clarity our reason'.<sup>205</sup> A person's rationale, Pound believes, is hindered rather than improved by the professed advancements of modern Anglo-American thought. In this sense, he uses Confucius to promote an alternative mode of reasoning, a way to see the world clearly through a natural paradigm rather than the contrived conditions created by particular historical, cultural codes or ideologies. That natural paradigm can arise, Pound contests, through careful and serious contemplation of

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<sup>204</sup> Kenner, p. 160. See my p. 67.

<sup>205</sup> 'Ta Hsio - The Great Digest', p. 56.

Confucius' *Ta Hsio*: 'the whole of Western idealism is a jungle ... to think through it, to reduce it to some semblance of order, there is no better axe than the *Ta H[s]io*.'<sup>206</sup>

As we shall see in Chapter Three, the idea that Confucius' philosophy and the ideogrammic method are tools for cutting through and clearing up the wild overgrowth of 'Western idealism' is connected to Pound's fundamental hatred of protestant utilitarianism and usury. Martin Luther's acceptance of the ancient 'Semitic' sin, his allowance and deregulation of monetary gain through disproportionate interest led, according to Pound's economic theory of the 1930's, to the complete breakdown of moral values in the western world. Indeed, as he puts it later on in 'Immediate Need of Confucius': 'the semitic is against ANY scale of values. The Church in the middle ages evolved a hierarchy of values. It is mere shouting for the home team to pretend that the so-called Christian virtues were invented A.D 1 to A.D 32 in Judea.'<sup>207</sup> The particularities of Pound's objection to usury – the links he makes between impure economics and the moral, political and social impurities of interwar Europe – form the basis of my analysis of Miller as a Poundian writer in Chapter Three. Indeed, the objection to usury – and the anti-Semitism that accompanied it - is integral to an understanding of Pound's belief in Miller's 'hierarchy of values' in the 1930s.

Setting aside the complex issue of Pound and economics for the moment, Pound's appropriation of Confucius to teach writers about 'primitive clarity' and 'the energy [that] fills words' and also situates the former in a direct lineage of American nineteenth-century transcendentalism. As Ira B. Nadel observes in his 2003 essay 'Constructing the Orient: Pound's American Vision', Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman – writers whom Pound acknowledged as his poetic predecessors but scorned for what he saw as their embarrassingly romantic archaisms (of Whitman, for example, he begrudgingly concedes that 'his message is my message' before describing him as 'an exceedingly nauseating pill') – appropriated ancient Chinese

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<sup>206</sup> 'Immediate Need of Confucius', in *Selected Prose, 1909-1965*, ed. by Cookson, pp. 69-80, pp. 77-78.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

ideas for similar reasons to him.<sup>208</sup> Crucially, Nadel contends, Pound's use of Confucius' ideograms to think about the natural, primal root of each word is distinctly Emersonian:

Chinese for Pound meant the recovery or reinvention of Adamic speech, "in which words contain the essence of the things they name," a return to the world Emerson had outlined. Chinese was for Pound the restitution of what Emerson saw as the special requirement of language: to "fasten words again to visible things".<sup>209</sup>

Pound, Whitman and Emerson understand, Nadel goes on, that 'nature precedes language', as summed up by Emerson in his essay "Nature" with the statement that "words are signs of natural facts".<sup>210</sup> In Nadel's opinion they share a belief in ideogrammic symbols as signifiers of the 'visible things' that words were originally intended to represent. By returning words to their nomenclatural origins, or 'fastening' them to 'visible things', the writer had the power to reinstate a connection between humanity and nature that had been dislocated over years of intellectual and artistic development.

Thus, in his quest to purify written language by assimilating Chinese ideas about words, Pound in fact activates a project started by a group of nineteenth-century writers he in many ways opposes. Moreover, Emerson and Whitman applied these non-Western formulations to their ultimate cause of originating an intrinsically American vernacular language. As Nadel puts it, Emerson and Whitman 'remained part of Pound's literary psyche, even as he rejected and criticized them'.<sup>211</sup> Despite declaring that he reads Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* 'with acute pain' and 'frustration', he is begrudgingly indebted to Whitman and Emerson for his aesthetic and ethical approach.<sup>212</sup> Beyond theories of language, Pound's Confucian revolt against 'western

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<sup>208</sup> Ezra Pound, 'What I feel about Walt Whitman', in *Selected Prose, 1909-1965*, ed. with an intro. by William Cookson (London: Faber, 1973), pp. 73-98, p. 73. Written February, 1909. Originally published in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* (1913).

<sup>209</sup> Ira Nadel, 'Constructing the Orient: Pound's American Vision', in *Ezra Pound and China*, ed. by Zhaoming Qian (The University of Michigan Press: Michigan, 2003), pp. 12-30, p. 17.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>212</sup> 'What I feel about Walt Whitman', p. 73.

idealism' is also steeped in the ethics propounded by these ostensibly idealistic men. Indeed Nadel goes on to make the direct link between Pound's reading of Emerson and Whitman and his interest in the 'practical ethics' of Confucius:

Representation of the practical ethics of Confucius, as seen in the work of Emerson and others, partially shaped Pound's admiration for the Confucian notion of the guiding leader who evolves into the patron and the political strongman ... Emerson's representation of Confucius ... as establishing a government that regulates society by philosophic principles was fundamental to Pound. The importance of morally founded regulations also appealed to Pound, who understood that for the American transcendentalists, "the Orient was the home of the oldest philosophic truths; [but] to the British Romantics it was a source of poetic glamour."<sup>213</sup>

Moreover, Emerson and Whitman applied these non-Western formulations to their ultimate cause of originating an intrinsically American vernacular language. Interestingly, Miller acknowledges the influence of these two writers on his own very American voice, taking an Emerson quote for his epigraph in *Cancer* ('These novels will give way, by and by, to diaries or autobiographies – captivating books, if only a man new how to choose among what he calls experiences and how to record truth truly' (8)) and describing Whitman late on in the novel as 'that one lone figure America has produced in the course of her brief life' (241). Pound's incongruous interest in the sprawling, inconsistent and street-level narrative in *Cancer* takes on new connotations in the light shed by Miller's admiration for these American transcendentalists, and – more importantly – his own simultaneous attraction and repulsion to them.

As part of this, Pound's interest in Confucius' ideas of self and social governance will be explored more in Chapter Three, particularly in relation to the anti-democracy and anti-usury ideas discussed earlier. The simplicity and finality of Confucian tenets about personal, familial and governmental order provided Pound with a sacred benchmark against which to test what he considered the corrupt and irresponsible democratic establishments of his day. As he puts it in 'Immediate Need of Confucius', 'we are oppressed by powerful persons who lie, who have no

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

curiosity, who smear the world and their high offices with Ersatz sincerity', even going so far as to claim that 'men suffer malnutrition by millions because their overlords dare not read the *Ta Hsio*'.<sup>214</sup>

Yet the fierceness of Pound's ethical and political application of *Ta Hsio* is also indicative of a major difference between his and Emerson's approaches to Confucius: Pound was enamored not with the potential for expansion or, indeed, transcendence in these representations of life but with the precise definitions of objects, thoughts and ideas he found in each ideogram. Indeed, taking his lead from the private notebooks of the American philosopher and historian of Far Eastern art Ernest Fenollosa – given to him by the latter's widow, whom he befriended in London in 1913 - Pound attempted to mark himself out as a true disciple of Confucius, arguing that the value of ideogrammic words lay in their overlaying of pictures representing precise objects and categories in nature:

Fenollosa accented the Western need of ideogrammic thinking. Get your 'red' down to rose, red, cherry, if you want to know what you are talking about. We have too much of this talk about vibrations and infinites.<sup>215</sup>

As Nadel puts it, in contrast to Emerson's declaration that 'if the East loved infinity, the West delighted in boundaries', Pound looked to Confucius to consolidate the borders between things rather than dissolve them.<sup>216</sup>

From his first reading of Confucius through Fenollosa, Pound came to view the pictorial ideograms of the Ancient Chinese language as powerfully reflective of the energies within nature and therefore of greater use aesthetically than the traditional units of language in European discourse. From Fenollosa, Pound took the notion that the patterns in European language were reflective of a restrictively static logic that was limited in its capacity to represent 'active' reality. Paraphrasing Fenollosa, Richard Sheppard writes:

European logic is like a brickyard and the European logician like a bricklayer who selects little hard units and sticks them together with "is" or "is not" in

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<sup>214</sup> 'Immediate Need of Confucius', p. 94.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>216</sup> Nadel, p. 24.

order to build linear linguistic units that are incapable of dealing with interactive, multi-dimensional “nature”.<sup>217</sup>

As Rebecca Beasley puts it in her 2007 study *Theorists of Modernist Poetry: T.S. Eliot, T.E. Hulme and Ezra Pound*, Pound was attracted to Fenollosa’s ‘argument that compound words in Chinese picture not only things, but the relationship between things’, reflecting ‘the activity of the natural and human worlds.’<sup>218</sup> In other words, ideograms not only captured clearly defined things as they exist in the world but also the energy generated in the juxtaposition between them; the energy, indeed, that was discussed earlier as the key premise of Pound’s Imagist and Vorticist aesthetics.

Pound’s appropriation of Fenollosa’s Confucian thesis is thus both evidence of his complicated relationship with his transcendentalist American forebears and another example of his and early English modernism’s wider campaign to cull ineffectual ‘units’ of language. As we will see, Pound’s part in this campaign has interesting implications for Miller’s theories about the incapability of words and fixed ideas to render the constant flux of subjective experience. As Sheppard points out, Fenollosa’s skepticism about linear logic coincides with the early twentieth century philosopher Henri Bergson’s notion of ‘*éidos*’ – or classical logic – as a false and damaging paradigm, exclusionary of the intuitive and felt basis of subjective experience.<sup>219</sup> Significantly, Miller frequently alludes to Bergson as an influence on his own conviction that ‘ideas’ and ‘ideals’ were sources of ‘debauch[ery]’ rather than virtue or enlightenment, pointing to an important area of crossover with Pound’s attraction to ideograms.<sup>220</sup>

These recommendations to move towards the organic and the natural in rejection of the inorganic, the unnatural and the modern are directly related to the value of intellect and instinct in Pound’s literary philosophy. They imply a preference for artistic expression that comes as the result of the artist’s instinctive rather than intellectual connection to his or her material. The sentiment is well illustrated by a

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<sup>217</sup> Sheppard, *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism*, pp. 112-13.

<sup>218</sup> Rebecca Beasley, *Theorists of Modernist Poetry: T.S. Eliot, T.E. Hulme and Ezra Pound* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 74.

<sup>219</sup> Sheppard, pp. 112-13.

<sup>220</sup> *Cancer*, p. 102.



promotional letter Pound sent in 1912 to Harriet Monroe, editor of the English periodical *Poetry*, extolling the merits of work by fellow Imagist Hilda Doolittle – to whom he gave the penname H.D. In her poetry, Pound argues, there is evidence of a writer who “has lived with [her subjects and ideas] since childhood. She knew them before she had any book-knowledge of them.”<sup>221</sup> The instinct is posited as the original source of an artist’s creativity, the vital starting point for a work of art before the intrusion of the cerebral faculties. Pound’s differentiation of ‘book-knowledge’ and instinct will also be seen in Chapter Three to emerge in his 1930s economic treatise *Guide to Kulchur*. There, he refocuses the concept of the individual’s contemplation of inner tonalities – of the Confucian notion of ‘Shen’ or ‘eye looking straight into the heart’ –to think about essential, personal ‘ideas, facts, notions ... which are in one’s stomach or liver’.<sup>222</sup> It is a curiously medieval image gleaned from archeologist and cultural anthropologist Leo Frobenius and it is remarkably similar to an image Miller uses to talk about creative thought and ethical judgment in *Cancer*: ‘live ideas, kidney ideas, intestinal ideas’ (243).

As we shall see in Chapter Two, these connected ideas point to the different ways in which each writer deals with the notion of pre-modern values as a remedy for the ethical instability of the modern Western world. Pound’s interest in Confucius leads him to the belief that there is a non-religious but timeless ethical standard that unites an elite number of intelligent, good people from epoch to epoch, a concept that Miller echoes through his reading of Oswald Spengler and his descriptions of his struggle to make it as a writer in *Capricorn* and *Cancer*. This shared touchstone also involves a shared belief in a ‘breakdown’ in gender and sexual ‘polarity’ and the disintegration of the individual’s sense of identity and purpose within the ‘collective’ life.<sup>223</sup> Nonetheless that focus on the individual artist’s position within the ‘collective’ life causes Miller to arrive at a set of ideas about what constitutes ‘radical’ writing that is inherently contradictory to Pound’s.

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<sup>221</sup> Ezra Pound, *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound*, p. 11, October 1912.

<sup>222</sup> ‘Ta Hsio: The Great Digest’, p. 21. See my p. 64; *Guide to Kulchur*, p. 57.

<sup>223</sup> Miller, ‘An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere’, p. 192.

Clearly, Pound's reading of Miller as a natural rather than cerebral writer is not the celebration of an instinctual disengagement from politics and morality that it first appears. Indeed, the idea of Pound's Miller as an artist who has successfully divorced himself from moral decision-making is strongly contradicted by the former's underlying conviction that Miller *does* have values beyond simply the representation of 'life as he has seen it'.<sup>224</sup> As quoted at the beginning of this section, Pound writes that:

for a hundred and fifty pages the reader not having started to think very hard, might suppose ... [the novel's] ethical discrimination seems about that of a healthy pup nosing succulent "poubelles", but that estimate can't really hold.<sup>225</sup>

For Pound, Miller's writing is permeated not by freedom from the constraints of moral choice but by a sense of 'eminent fairness', a clear and stable perspective on 'good and evil' (88). Throughout the review, Pound approaches *Cancer* as if he is the one man who truly understands it, since he is the one man for whom Miller's perspective on the world is not only apparent but makes absolute ethical sense. If the literary critical establishment will interpret Miller as 'a healthy pup nosing succulent "poubelles"', Pound believes that he alone is able to see past the surface of taboo subject matter and irreverence to a sturdy moral framework below. The extent of Pound's moral affinity with Miller is most clearly demonstrated by yet another statement of comparison with Joyce and Lewis - 'he [Miller] has a sense of good and evil [in *Cancer*] probably sounder than that of either Joyce or Lewis' (89). Since, up to this point, Pound had repeatedly championed these two as the only morally productive writers of period, it is significant that he not only assimilates Miller into their circle but asserts his superiority.

The fundamental basis for this comparison with Joyce is the idea of aesthetic and ethical 'scope' alluded to in Section 1.1. Pound admires Joyce's *Ulysses* for its irreverent reportage on a wide range of characters, their experiences, thoughts and situations and for its understanding of the dual and symbiotic existence of beauty and ugliness, sordidness and sublimity. 'There is nothing so beautiful' he writes,

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<sup>224</sup> Pound, 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 88.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

'that Joyce cannot touch it without profanation ... and there is nothing so sordid that he cannot treat it with metallic exactitude'.<sup>226</sup> Pound applauds Joyce for being able to turn his careful attention suddenly from such 'obscure' subjects as the 'figseeds in [Cranshawe - a minor character's] teeth' to the complex aesthetics of 'the art of St. Thomas of Aquinas'.<sup>227</sup> For Joyce, Pound claims, 'the sordid is there in all conscience. But Joyce's power is in his scope'.<sup>228</sup>

By scope, then, Pound means the willingness to write about a wide range of subjects - human beings, inanimate things or ideas - that are not easily married, and the ability to remain alert to the actuality of experience rather than judging it. The high and the low are tackled with equal seriousness, sometimes also simultaneously, in a manner that Pound describes as technically astute and harmonious. It is, he says 'the bass and treble of Joyce's method', an attempt by a supremely skilled artist to capture the 'swift alternation of subjective beauty and external shabbiness, squalor and sordidness'.<sup>229</sup>

It has to do with the clarity and vigor of 'any and every' thought and opinion. It has to do with maintaining the very cleanliness of the tools, the health of the very matter of thought itself.<sup>230</sup>

Pound treats Miller's range of subject matter in a similar fashion:

The book takes shape with an excursion to Havre, sailor's bordello, and by perfect contrast to [the] Lycee in Dijon, the grim greyness wherof balances both the jincrawl and the lights of Paris. (88)

As with his analysis of Joyce, a certain democratic impulse is detectable, since Pound's emphasis falls on the inclusiveness of Miller's perspective and his sensitivity to the nuanced aesthetic contrasts between visual and emotional experiences. Like Joyce with his 'bass and treble', Miller is presented as a writer who understands balance and the importance of tempering one tone with another, in line with Pound's ideas on interior and exterior tonality. Significantly, Pound also perceives Miller as

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<sup>226</sup> 'Joyce', p. 412.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., p. 411.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p. 410.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., p. 412.

<sup>230</sup> 'How to Read', p. 21.

Joycean in his willingness to take vice as seriously as virtue, to include in his novel his lusty experience of the 'sailor's bordello' and the sober 'grim greyness' of his time as a school teacher at the 'Lycee in Dijon'. As Pound says early on in the *Cancer* review 'nothing is too low to be left out' (87).

This aspect of Miller's writing is, of course, also the main reason for critical readings that define him as amoral. Orwell's essay 'Inside the Whale', for example, relies heavily on the totemic image of Miller as the 'unflinching, passive' recorder of every situation, the rare author who treats all possible events and scenarios without recourse to moral or political judgment.<sup>231</sup> 'Miller' Orwell writes, 'is simply a hard-boiled person talking about life', a fact that permits him to honestly and authentically represent the subjective experience of the 'the average sensual man.'<sup>232</sup> Like Pound, Orwell also makes the link to Joyce, highlighting the same 'willingness to mention the inane squalid facts of everyday life' but his reading discounts the possibility of any sort of moral or aesthetic system behind *Cancer*.<sup>233</sup> In his review, Philip Rahv also claims that Miller's 'stream of exhortation, narrative', his 'anarchic' approach to ideas and imagery render him 'above all morally passive'.<sup>234</sup> At the root of these interpretations lies the misplaced assumption – as we will see in the following chapter – that Miller's morally uninhibited representation of what Orwell calls the 'dirty handkerchief' side of life, connects him in some way to 'the common man'.<sup>235</sup> In turn, the oversimplified association between poverty and amorality, and the conflation of the terms 'morality' and 'moralism' in this context fail to realize the inherently elitist role Miller cast himself in as an experimental, serious artist.

Pound, then, uses the inclusiveness of Miller's aesthetic for opposite ends to these more conventional readings. For him, Miller's receptiveness to incongruous extremes of emotion, his ability to experience joy in an ostensibly unharmonious or distressing situation, and his refusal to exclude or disapprove of 'external shabbiness,

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<sup>231</sup> Orwell, p. 128.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., pp. 102, 128.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., p.128.

<sup>234</sup> Rahv, p. 31

<sup>235</sup> Orwell; p. 102.

sordidness, squalor' is part of his subtle but strictly ordered system of aesthetics and morals.<sup>236</sup> Rather than proving his passive, or quietist protest against the responsibility to engage with questions of morality, Miller's acceptance of a wide range of aesthetic shades in fact represent something closer to Joyce's schema.

Fundamental to Pound's reading is his belief that Miller and Joyce share the understanding that 'there is no perception of beauty without a corresponding disgust'.<sup>237</sup> Pound explains this statement in the following way:

I have yet to find in Joyce's published works a violent or malodorous phrase which does not justify itself not only by its verity, but by its heightening of some opposite effect, by the poignancy which it imparts to some emotion or to some thwarted desire for beauty. Disgust with the sordid is but another expression of a sensitiveness to the finer thing.<sup>238</sup>

In other words, the ugly elements in works like *Ulysses* and *Cancer* not only serve as truthful representations of the ugly elements that exist in life but remind us of the fact that beauty and ugliness are symbiotic states. Pound suggests that Joyce and Miller's representations of 'the sordid' are so complexly and truthfully rendered that the disgust these images induce also carries with it hints of a 'corresponding' beauty. Just as the power of narrative resides for Pound in the juxtaposition of images and ideas, the power of beauty arises out of the sordidness it suggests and vice versa.

This aspect of Pound's perspective on *Cancer* will be seen in Section 2.1 'Monstrosity and the Aesthetics of Destitution', to correlate with readings of Miller by French social and literary theorist Georges Bataille. Bataille, who discusses Miller in his essay 'La Morale de Miller' as both a "'monster of immorality'" and a 'saint' of 'uncouth intelligence', sheds important light on a set of productive paradoxes at the heart of Miller's writing.<sup>239</sup> Through a reading of Bataille's essays, Pound's idea of the beautiful and sordid in Joyce and Miller will be seen to connect to a wider idea of

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<sup>236</sup> 'Joyce', p. 412.

<sup>237</sup> 'Joyce', p. 417.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., p. 417.

<sup>239</sup> Georges Bataille, 'La Morale de Miller' (1946), in *Oeuvres complètes de Georges Bataille*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), vol. vii, p. 1. Originally published in *Critique* I (June, 1946). Translated by Caroline Blinder but unpublished. Page numbers refer to Blinder's unpublished translation.

a correspondence between the abject and the sublime, two states of existence Bataille posits as equally unbearable to the observer.

On the subject of Miller and Joyce's scope, Pound proffers two ostensibly contradictory ideas. On the one hand he claims that Miller displays a 'circle of reference considerably wider than that of Joyce's fetid Dublin, or the much more special inferno of [Wyndham Lewis'] *The Apes [of God]*' (88). On the other, he tempers his praise with the caveat that 'the lack of Dantescan top floors is ... apparent in certain chapters' (89). Both statements draw the reader's attention to Miller's preference for the lower end of the moral scale. Pound's comparison of Miller's 'circle of reference' to Lewis' 'inferno' implies that the former has a heightened sensitivity to notions of human sin and suffering, that he is able to explore the 'low life' with greater insight than Lewis (88). His reference to Joyce's 'fetid Dublin' corroborates this position. Miller, Pound claims, understands a wider 'fetid' world than Joyce and should be applauded for it. The regret at his 'lack of Dantescan top floors' however, appears to present Miller as incomplete in his scope, less willing than Joyce and Lewis to take the upper portion of the moral scale into account. Crucially, these descriptions of Lewis, Joyce and Miller's 'infernos' also have a particular political and economic significance for Pound.

Nevertheless, Pound's primary emphasis remains the inclusiveness of Miller's eye: Miller's 'gamut of values goes up at least to the finest burst of praise and appreciation of Matisse and a better evaluation of Matisse's particular gift than I have found anywhere else' (89). In other words, Miller's writing might occasionally become, as Montgomery Belgion put it, 'wearisome' by its fixation on the underbelly of life, but when it does approach high artistic material it achieves Joyce's veracious insight.<sup>240</sup>

Pound's celebration of Miller's inclusionary approach, however, sits uneasily beside a more obvious conservative aspect to the review. Soon after claiming that Miller has in some way restored 'the values upheld by Henry James', Pound praises the former because, in his writing, 'the sense of the sphericity of the planets resides'

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<sup>240</sup> Belgion, p. 86.

(88). An odd astrological phrase, it also appears in Pound's obituary to James. In both essays, what is implied by the word 'sphericity' is the author's representation and reaffirmation of some version of natural cosmological order. Though the phrase is initially employed vaguely, Pound later uses it to refer specifically to the ways in which individual human beings, and different groups of human beings behave. It is James's ability to render how 'people are fundamentally different', that restores the 'sphericity of the planets' in his writing.<sup>241</sup>

Pound elaborates on this idea, appropriating Henry James for the purpose of proving the permanence and potency of national differences:

National qualities are the great gods of the present and Henry James spent himself from the beginning in an analysis of these potent chemicals; trying to determine from the given microscopic slide the nature of the Frenchness, Englishness, Germanness, Americanness, which chemicals too little regarded, have in our time exploded for want of watching. They are the permanent and fundamental hostilities and incompatibilities.<sup>242</sup>

A good set of values, to Pound's mind, takes into account unchangeably oppositional emotions, impulses, tastes and perceptions between groups as well as individuals. As mentioned earlier, in Miller, like James, Pound sees a writer whose worldview corroborates his own essentialism: 'Miller's Americans are very American, his Orientals, very oriental and his Russians, oh quite so' (88).

In Pound's opinion then, Miller continues what he sees as Henry James' project to delineate the 'permanent' differences between people. As with so many of the artists he considers 'serious', Pound attributes a courageousness of perspective to Miller, the ability to express uncomfortable truths about the essentialities of cultures that are too often glossed over by his contemporaries. It will be seen in the next section of this study that there are various ways in which Miller does indeed corroborate these ideas. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, Miller's national, racial and gender prejudices have been flagged up by Kate Millet in her second-wave feminist study *Sexual Politics* (1969) and by Salman Rushdie in his 1984 essay 'Outside the Whale',

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<sup>241</sup> 'Henry James', p. 298.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

which offers a loose and unconvincing response to Orwell's positive appraisal of *Tropic of Cancer*. Millet's assessment of Miller as a 'counter-revolutionary' misogynist inadvertently highlights certain anxieties Miller exhibits about the de-polarization of gender relations and the de-sexualisation of human identity that results from this.<sup>243</sup> Commenting on Millet's reading of Miller as well as Rushdie's dismissal of him as a 'happy pornographer beneath whose scatological surface Orwell saw such improbable depths',<sup>244</sup> Elisabeth Ladenson correctly observes that:

Miller has not weathered post-1960s fashions well ... his evident misogyny and his tendency to call a spade a spade, for instance, have for some time made him ideologically suspect.<sup>245</sup>

Indeed, many of his pronouncements about female, Jewish, African American and Indian characters are shot through with misguided and misinformed prejudices about inherent gendered and racial qualities. However, Millet and Rushdie – to some extent responsible for the general mistrust identified by Ladenson here – are blinded to the complex layers of Miller's narrative voice and to his wider aesthetic and ethical project by embarrassment and outrage at these positions. It will also become apparent that both writers produce reductive readings because of their respective and equally totalising political agendas.

Unsurprisingly, like these later critics Pound misappropriates *Cancer* for his own specific ideological purposes. Miller himself was pleased that his promotional efforts had yielded a positive reaction from Pound, and yet he complained to his friend and literary ally Lawrence Durrell that Pound was using his position as an influential critic and literary fixer to coerce him into supporting esoteric economic theories: '[Pound] sent word ... that I could be "taken care of" – if I would sort of swing the bat for his crazy Social Credit ideas.'<sup>246</sup> As we will see, Pound's racial essentialism and economic theories are fundamentally connected, a fact that suggests Pound's

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<sup>243</sup> Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1969), p. 295.

<sup>244</sup> Salman Rushdie, 'Outside the Whale', in *Imaginary Homelands: essays and criticism 1981-1991* (London: Penguin Books/Granta, 1991), pp. 93-98, p 95. Originally published in *Granta* (Spring, 1984).

<sup>245</sup> Elisabeth Ladenson, *Dirt for Art's Sake: Books on Trial from 'Madame Bovary' to 'Lolita'* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), p.169.

<sup>246</sup> *The Durrell-Miller Letters 1935-80*, p. 69, April 5<sup>th</sup> 1937.



reading of Miller as 'moral' also relies on a deeper racial agenda. Miller's casual dismissal of Pound's 'Social Credit ideas' as 'crazy' is thus also applicable to Pound's increasingly intolerant statements about race in the 1930s. Nonetheless, an exploration of the issue of difference in Miller's aesthetic will demonstrate various troubling ways in which their racial and national rhetoric often inadvertently overlaps.

'The Serious Artist' sheds useful light on this aspect of Pound's thinking. In it, he connects the notion of abstraction in language to a wider societal point about what he calls 'the smearing of difference', extending his theory on the evils of neglectful and indistinct nomenclature to include cultural identity and character.<sup>247</sup> It is ill-founded and irresponsible, Pound asserts, for a literary artist to assume that 'all men are the same'.<sup>248</sup> Indeed, he claims it is a key purpose of literature to assert the fact that people experience and react to the world in utterly conflicting ways: 'From the arts ... we learn that all men do not desire the same things.'<sup>249</sup> The arts should protect the concept of individuality by rejecting an untenable and irresponsible ideology of universalism, a purpose very much in line with Miller's disgust with the masses who unquestioningly conform to standard ethical and aesthetical codes. Thus, Pound's fierce objection to universalism will be discussed in Chapter Two in relation to his interest in protecting and maintaining a particular form of elitism.

These concerns about 'the smearing of difference' are naturally related to Pound's anxieties, mentioned earlier, about the decline of professionalism in the arts. For Pound and Wyndham Lewis in London between the wars, the doctrine of 'clarity' in the use of words to define things and people includes the inability of critics and readers to discern serious art from amateur, confectionary distraction, and extends to a similar disdain for political systems that work according to an ideal of equality. Pound, as we will see, makes these connections throughout his work and is drawn to Mussolini precisely for his capacity to rectify the 'smearing of difference', to make definite judgments about the quality of things and people and to act upon them. In

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<sup>247</sup> *The Serious Artist*, p. 46

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, p.46.

the context of Pound's work before the 1930s, he saw the amateurish, archaic notion of 'fair play' as indicative of a similarly contaminated political system. On this issue Pound was in agreement with Wyndham Lewis, who - Rod Rosenquist points out - 'considered the result of the "dogma" of democracy as a loss of standards, with "one person being as good as another. *Life for life's sake* is the attitude arising from this - a worthy sister to the theory of *art for art's sake*''.<sup>250</sup>

Lewis follows up the statements quoted here with a bitterly sarcastic picture of post-war Britain as a 'painting, writing, acting, cultural paradise ... in which everyone is equal (that is, equally "a genius") and every one is free'.<sup>251</sup> As Vorticists - we shall see - Pound and Lewis captured and converted this unbridled, anti-rational violence in the form of antagonistically, irreverently self-contradictory manifesto statements, attacking the structures of democracy through content as well as in the jagged syntactical and rhythmical structures of the manifestos.

At the root of Pound's admiration for the national essentialism he reads into Miller's novel is thus a deeper symbolic appropriation of him as a figure of conviction in the face of an insubstantial universalism of taste and judgment. It is Miller's fixedness and his acceptance of an order, rather than any specific ideological allegiance, that qualifies him as a serious writer in Pound's eyes, an allegiance complicated by Miller's commitment to a 'hierarchy' of values: 'Miller has very strongly a hierarchy of values. And in the present chaos this question of hierarchy has become almost as important as having values at all' (88).

Again connoting the fascistic ideas he advocates in various other essays from the period, Pound welcomes the concept of order at any cost. Miller becomes a writer of value not because of the substance of his ideas but because of the consistency and rigidity with which he adheres to and applies them. A specifically historical-political reading of this, in the context of Pound's pre-Second World War economic and political affiliations, will be applied in Chapters Two and Three. Miller is

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<sup>250</sup> Rosenquist, *Modernism, the Market and the Institution of the New*, p. 48. Rosenquist quotes Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1926), p. 391.

<sup>251</sup> Rosenquist, p. 48; Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled*, p. 155.

interpreted by Pound as a writer fortified by self-knowledge in a literary climate that has undergone a 'slump towards the impoverishment of values, toward the cheapening of every mental activity whosoever' (88). In his considerations of Confucius, Pound proclaims his belief in the importance of the individual's sense of internal moral order and its close relation to beauty. Further to this, in the thirteenth of his 'Cantos' he claims internal order as the only condition by which an individual can positively affect the outside world. Translating and paraphrasing Confucius in one of what have become known as his 'China Cantos', Pound writes: 'If a man have not unity within him/He can not spread order about him.'<sup>252</sup>

Pound is interested in Miller's resolute submission to his deepest will and intention. He presents internal order, an awareness of the contours of his own moral system and an ability to transmit that sense of order, as Miller's principal achievement. Following this logic, the mind that narrates *Cancer* is described as 'incurably healthy' because it offers a worldview unequivocal and undivided in its representation of its subjective reality.<sup>253</sup> It does not, Pound believes, allow itself to be influenced by external moral settings and, for this reason, remains robust and uncontaminated in all situations. The idea is well illustrated by Pound's reference to a line from French Symbolist poet Mallarmé's work 'Brise Marine' in his review of Miller: 'La chair est triste? Perhaps, but not till it begins to give way or wear and tear' (88).

Mallarmé uses 'La chair est triste' – normally translated as 'the flesh is sad' – to describe the unsatisfactory nature of sex motivated by carnal desire. The expression is a lament at the false promise of transcendence from human suffering offered by sexual experience. By citing Mallarmé, whose narrator is weighed down with 'ennui' (most likely 'weariness' in this context rather than the English appropriation of that word) at the memory and prospect of meaningless sexual relations, Pound again seeks to present Miller as the antidotal figure, a writer and narrator liberated from the pressures and pains imposed by a conscience. Taken literally, Pound interprets

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<sup>252</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Canto XIII. 'Kung walked by the dynastic temple' (Confucius)', in *Selected Cantos* (London: New Directions, 1970), pp. 28-30, p. 29. Originally Published in *A Draft of XVI Cantos* (Paris: Three Mountains Press, 1924).

<sup>253</sup> 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 88. See my p. 81.

Miller as immune to the anxieties surrounding sexuality that affect socially responsible, morally cautious and self-examining human beings.

Miller, Pound is saying, understands good and evil better than Joyce and Lewis partly because he resists the temptation towards conventional and idealistic moral anxieties over his actions. The following section will test this theory - as part of the Pound's wider belief in Miller's 'eminent fairness' and 'hierarchy of values' - through a close reading of select episodes from *Cancer* and Miller's 1938 short story *Max and the White Phagocytes* (88). Indeed, Pound's unlikely and intriguing identification of a strong moral code in writing that abounds with apparently arbitrary hostility sheds light on Miller's complex rethinking of social responses to suffering and kindness. By analyzing this hostility alongside Pound's growing opposition to humanism and liberal democracy in the 1920s and 30s, it will be possible to better understand its origins and form a picture of its wider, subversive and ultimately humanistic purpose.

## 2. Moral and Aesthetic Intersections between Pound and Miller

### 2.1 Monstrosity and the Aesthetics of Destitution: The anti-humanist reversal in *Tropic of Cancer* (1934) and *Max and the White Phagocytes* (1938)

'It was from the despised and neglected ones that I learned about life, about God, and about the futility of "doing good"' Henry Miller, *Max and the White Phagocytes* (1938)<sup>254</sup>

'There are people to whom you feel immediately attracted, not because you like them, but because you detest them. You detest them so heartily that your curiosity is aroused; you come back to them again and again to study them, to arouse in yourself a feeling of compassion which is really absent. You do things for them, not because you feel any sympathy for them, but because their suffering is incomprehensible to you.' *Max and the White Phagocytes*<sup>255</sup>

'The more you reach out towards the world the more the world retreats. Nobody wants real love, real hatred.' Henry Miller, *Capricorn*<sup>256</sup>

Pound's assertions about Miller's 'eminent fairness' and 'hierarchy of values' run directly and provocatively in opposition to the immediate textual evidence.<sup>257</sup> The semi-autobiographical narrator of Miller's 1930s novels is consistently and explicitly antagonistic towards traditional definitions of 'fair' or virtuous behavior. Indeed, *Tropic of Cancer* - as well as the short story *Max and the White Phagocytes* and *Cancer's* New-York based prequel *Tropic of Capricorn* - are permeated by consciously unjust diatribes against the undeserving, from the comfortable expatriates who feed and shelter him while he is living rough in Paris to fellow down-and-outs who rely on him for advice and financial aid. These tactics of moral subversion also lead Miller's narrator not only to countenance but to sanctify petty cruelty and physical violence in fantastical digressions that externalize socially unacceptable prejudices and desires.

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<sup>254</sup> Henry Miller, 'Max and the White Phagocytes' in *The Best of Henry Miller*, ed. by Lawrence Durrell, pp. 134-67, p. 134. Originally published as *Max and the White Phagocytes* (Paris: Obelisk Press, 1938).

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid*, p. 134

<sup>256</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 59.

<sup>257</sup> 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 88.

The relationship between writer and reader in such episodes is multi-layered. As we shall see, Miller engages in a complex strategy of seduction and entrapment – signposting the narrator’s wrongdoing but imploring the reader to take pleasure from it. Violence and unpredictability of expression are the hallmarks of Miller’s search for narrative truthfulness in *Cancer*, an enlightenment of perspective designed to liberate the individual to perceive and experience ‘life’ (287). As such, these provide relief from the boredom, dishonesty and ‘living death’ (113) signified by traditionally ‘fair’ and virtuous ways of behaving. Paradoxically, by relinquishing control over thought and action and accepting the violent contradictions that arise from this, the narrator claims to free up his moral and creative faculties for the production of truthful and enlightening art.

This method relates to a paradox that is central to Miller’s rebellious project and provides the basis for much of the argument in this chapter – namely that he declares his independence from the restrictive expectations of others while simultaneously courting the attentions and complicity of his readers. As Sarah Garland puts it in her 2005 thesis, *Rhetoric and Excess: Style, Authority, and the Reader in Henry Miller’s ‘Tropic of Cancer’, Samuel Beckett’s ‘Murphy’, William Burroughs’ ‘Naked Lunch’, and Vladimir Nabokov’s ‘Ada or Ardor’*, ‘even un-cooperative texts like [Miller’s] still desire a witness to their refusals. Rhetorically, their address is split between seduction and repulsion.’<sup>258</sup> Following on from this, and related questions posed by Caroline Blinder in *A Self-Made Surrealist: Ideology and Aesthetics in the work of Henry Miller*, I will explore the conflict between Miller’s position as an anarchic moral transgressor and his eagerness to control proceedings – both as an entertainer and stable narrative authority. The conflict - Garland and Blinder point out – is usefully read via early twentieth-century modernist manifestos that embody a similar tension. Like the Dadaists, Garland writes, Miller’s ‘intention is to seek out like-minded souls as much as to affront the bourgeoisie ... The reader is invited to share in the energy of

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<sup>258</sup> Garland, *Rhetoric and Excess*, p. 5.

invective, but also to feel the satisfactions of defiance.<sup>259</sup> Underlying all of this – we shall see – is Miller’s playful awareness that his strategy to effect complete freedom from literary and moral convention, and to embody real life in art, is inevitably scuppered by its own reliance on artifice. As James Decker writes in *Henry Miller and Narrative Form: Constructing the Self, Rejecting Modernity* (2005), ‘he simultaneously strives for spiritual “Truth” and acknowledges the difficulty of such a venture.’<sup>260</sup>

Various episodes that induce Garland’s ‘split between seduction and repulsion’ will be explored in this chapter - alongside Miller’s more explicit comments on morality in his essays and fiction. The aim is to demonstrate two key elements within his writing style: first, the extreme disproportion between behavior and narrative moral judgment; secondly and more crucially, the expansive and progressive rethinking of binary moral positions through the exposition of their frailties and falsities. The apparently arbitrary and chaotic nature of Miller’s approach to human suffering will be shown, in fact, to be part of a wider theoretical project that sought to critique and improve on conventional notions of virtue and sin, sympathy and empathy. Miller’s implication of the reader in his crimes will be analysed in light of these ethical redefinitions. Significantly, his redefinitions will also be seen to lie at the root of Pound’s belief that he has ‘very strongly a hierarchy of values’, since they mark him out, for Pound, as a ‘moral’ writer, more truthful and substantive in his judgments than the bourgeois readers and critics who disapprove of *Cancer*.<sup>261</sup>

Moreover, Miller’s reconfiguration of moral standards will be analysed in the context of various politically and philosophically humanist ideas contested among literary avant-gardists between 1906, when Pound’s essays started to be published regularly in literary magazines, and 1935, when he wrote his review of *Cancer*. Henri Bergson - whose ‘pluralist’ philosophy, according to Henry Mead in his 2008 essay ‘T.E. Hulme, Bergson and the New Philosophy’, ‘appealed to readers on both the right

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>260</sup> James Decker, *Henry Miller and Narrative Form: Constructing the Self, Rejecting Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 4.

<sup>261</sup> ‘Review of *Tropic of Cancer*’, p. 88.

and the left, those seeking a return to religious certainties on one hand, and those seeking a more radical progressivism on the other' - is frequently identified by Miller as an integral influence on his own artistic and philosophical approach.<sup>262</sup> In a passage from *Tropic of Capricorn*, indeed, Miller describes the moment he discovered Bergson's *Creative Evolution* as one of perceptual and emotional epiphany:

Everything which before I thought I had understood crumbled, and I was left with a clean slate ... everything the brain has labored for a lifetime to assimilate, categorize and synthesize has to be taken apart and reordered. Moving day for the soul!<sup>263</sup>

Bergson provides a useful link between Miller and Pound since his 'vitalist' formulation - of a perpetually evolving subjective reality and the universal potential for psychological and emotional liberation via the acceptance of 'the intuitive nature of the human consciousness' - also inspired T.E. Hulme, Pound's great friend and philosophical mentor.<sup>264</sup> Hulme promotes Bergson's pluralistic theory about art and existence while simultaneously denouncing the 'humanism' that many 'Bergsonians' espoused - a philosophical and political worldview based, Hulme contends, on 'the belief that life is the source and measure of all values, and that man is fundamentally good'.<sup>265</sup> While Hulme was attracted to Bergson's attempt to liberate human consciousness from the constraints imposed by the intellect, he was - as Mead, Mary Ann Giles (*Henry Bergson and British Modernism*, 1996), Rebecca Beasley (*Theorists of Modernist Poetry: T.S. Eliot, T.E. Hulme and Ezra Pound*, 2007), and Jesse Matz ('T.E. Hulme, Henri Bergson and the Cultural Politics of Psychologism', 2004) have all noted - strongly opposed to the use of these ideas in support of politically pluralist, anti-classical and anti-religious arguments. As we shall see, Hulme's 1911 essay 'Mr Balfour, Bergson and Politics' records a meeting with Pierre Lasserre, the leading literary critic for the French far-right periodical *Action Française*, in which he outlines

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<sup>262</sup> Henry Mead, 'T.E. Hulme, Bergson, and the New Philosophy', *European Journal of English Studies*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 12 (2008), pp. 245-260 (p. 245).

<sup>263</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 199-200.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>265</sup> T.E. Hulme, 'A Notebook', in *The Collected Writings of T.E. Hulme*, ed. by Karen Csengeri (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 419-56, p. 444. Originally published in *The New Age* in seven installments (December 1915 - February 1916).



Lasserre's contention that Bergson was incompatible with conservatism and anti-romanticism. In that essay, Hulme also explains his own conservative interpretation of Bergson's tenets. Although he eventually followed Lasserre's lead in renouncing the French philosopher, this early accommodation of apparently oppositional ideas sheds crucial light on Miller's experiments with brutal, confessional language to achieve genuine compassion.

Hulme's reaction to Bergson's *Creative Evolution* helps explain Miller's position as a writer who had faith in the positive potential of the individual but was skeptical about idealistic and sentimental approaches to humanism in ways that echoed Pound's early modernist pronouncements. As we saw in Chapter One, Pound's identification of *Cancer* as a progressive text was enabled by certain reactionary literary trends, trends summarized by Wyndham Lewis in his 1919 cultural study, *The Caliph's Design*:

Against this [Victorian] sentimentality people of course reacted. So the brutal tap was turned on. For fifty years it will be the thing to be brutal, 'unemotional'.<sup>266</sup>

Significantly, Lewis goes on to call this 'fashion' "'inhuman'", a term that Miller regularly uses to define himself in *Cancer*, beginning with his epiphany halfway through the novel: 'Today I am proud to say that I am *inhuman*' (255). Lewis also predicts the 'absurdities that this ... fashion inevitably breeds', a supposition that is both borne out and signposted by Miller's knowingly ludicrous description of his own 'inhumanity'. Indeed, Miller will be seen to have made use of much of the extreme language of his age for simultaneously urgent and – in Garland's words – 'parodic' purposes, hyperbolically talking up his importance as an epoch-changing artist while at the same time denouncing that very idea as farcical.<sup>267</sup> As Indrek Manniste points out in his 2013 study *Henry Miller: The Inhuman Artist: A Philosophical Enquiry*, Miller's rejection of humanism involves the outlandish claim to have evolved emotionally, perceptually and morally beyond the narrow limits of ordinary human life. It is to this end – Manniste notes – that he boasts:

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<sup>266</sup> Lewis, *The Caliph's Design*, p. 268.

<sup>267</sup> Garland, 'The Dearest of Cemeteries', p. 209.

If I am inhuman it is because my world has slopped over its human bounds, because to be human seems like a poor, sorry, miserable affair, limited by senses, restricted by moralities and codes, defined by platitudes and isms.<sup>268</sup>

By reading these kinds of statements against a backdrop of Pound and Hulme's more prosaic anti-humanist theories, I will show that Miller's approach to human suffering was more complex than his braggadocio suggests. The fantasy Manniste identifies, of the narrator as 'first member of the inhuman artist race ... [possessing] the ecstatic, mixed qualities of a holy man, a criminal, a madman, a child, and a scholar', will be analysed in the context of certain political and philosophical arguments that preoccupied writers and philosophers in the 1910s, 20s and 30s.<sup>269</sup> Moreover, by thinking about the radical reactionary aspect of Miller's work in the context of these literary and cultural currents, it is possible to make better sense of his oppositional impulses towards organisation and anarchy. In comparison to writers like Hulme, who believed in order and absolute moral positions while admiring Bergson for his 'exploration of ... the opposition between immediate experience and organizing concepts', Miller both exemplifies and critiques a very particular high modernist political paradox.<sup>270</sup>

Miller's hostility to conventional codes of behavior in *Cancer* is most vividly evident in the attacks he makes on the comfortable friends and acquaintances who support him in his struggle to live as a writer. Destitute and occasionally homeless, the narrator frequently cadges a meal or a bed for the night from a network of local artists and expatriate Americans he meets in the cafes of Montmartre. Perhaps the most glaring examples of this come in the scenes he describes at the house of the playwright Sylvester, whose wife he is having an affair with. Against the backdrop of the couple's polite suppertime hospitality, we are given the following aggressively macho and reproachful interior monologue, a passage that merits quoting in full

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<sup>268</sup> Miller, *Cancer*, p. 257. Quoted in Indrek Manniste, *Henry Miller: The Inhuman Artist: A Philosophical Enquiry* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 82.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>270</sup> Beasley, *Theorists of Modernist Poetry: T.S. Eliot, T.E. Hulme and Ezra Pound*, p. 26.

since it encapsulates many of the complexities and contradictions within his attitude towards respectability and reasonableness:

To think that a poor withered bastard with those cheap Broadway plays up his sleeve should be pissing on the woman I love ... The cheek of him! To think that he can lie beside that furnace I stoked for him and do nothing but make water! My God, Man, you ought to get down on your knees and thank me. Don't you see that you have a *woman* in your house now? Can't you see she's bursting? You're telling me with those strangulated adenoids of yours – "well now, I'll tell you ... there's two ways of looking at that" ... Fuck your two ways of looking at things! Fuck your pluralistic universe ... Don't hand me your red wine or your Anjou ... hand *her* over ... she belongs to me! ... You smile at me so confidently, so calculatingly. I'm flattering the ass off you, can't you tell? While I listen to your crap she's got her hand on me – but you don't see that. You think I like to suffer – that's my role, you say. O.K. Ask her about it! She'll tell you how I suffer. "You're cancer and delirium", she said over the phone the other day. She's got it now, the cancer and delirium, and soon you'll have to pick the scabs. Her veins are bursting, I tell you, and your talk is all sawdust. No matter how much you piss away you'll never plug up the holes. (65)

Miller's tone betrays the embattlement of a desperate man attempting to assert himself against his own sense of financial and social failure. By affirming his sexual, and intellectual superiority to Sylvester, he redresses – in his own mind at least - the balance of power between them. More crucially, by refusing to acknowledge either the kindness of his hosts or the double betrayal of sitting down to dine with a man he is duping, he demonstrates his contempt for polite protocol, offering in its place a savage character assassination of the husband, decimating both his masculinity and artistic ability ('a poor withered bastard with those cheap Broadway plays up his sleeve'). The force of Miller's internal aggression works in inverse proportion to the tone and sentiment he knows the situation demands and, indeed, the way in which he is actually behaving. 'Flattering the ass off' his host while inwardly cursing him, he emphasizes the disjunction between these two states.

In this role of outrageous misanthrope, the narrator attempts to garner sympathy for himself, positing rage and indignation as honest reactions to the weakness and dishonesty of Sylvester's bourgeois behavior. Indeed, his outburst – directed conspiratorially as an aside to the reader – plays on the potential boredom of the dull

and stifling supper table atmosphere. Miller absolves himself of wrongdoing by depicting the functionality of the domestic sphere as offensive and unbearable to narrator and reader alike. In the midst of a sterile conversational set piece, in which opinions are measured and consequently diluted by protocol – ‘well now, there’s two ways of looking at things’ - Miller’s viscerally angry interior monologue offers relief. Thus he presents the rupture of bourgeois family codes as a necessary act on the side of what he later calls ‘life’ (287). Although repelled by the viciousness of the attack, we are also simultaneously compelled - by his juxtaposition of vigorous with lifeless voices - to see through ‘the crap’ and ‘the sawdust’ of Sylvester’s patter and discover an ethical truth based on desire rather than duty. Excruciatingly aware of the logical, moral responsibility to sympathize with a hapless, jilted husband, the reader is nevertheless manipulated to side with Miller’s rough and passionate declaration of his natural right over Tanya.

It is a complicated seduction that works on the premise of monstrosity – manifested in Miller’s morally unacceptable aggression – as a source of fascination but also shock and warning for the unenlightened reader. As James Decker notes, Miller uses:

vitriolic explosions not to indicate [the author’s] struggle, but to operate instead as warnings or wake-up calls to those who march like automatons to a rhythm alien to their true desire.<sup>271</sup>

Miller’s disdainful treatment of Sylvester’s apparent reasonableness can therefore be read as an attempt to jolt the reader into a state of greater consciousness. Autonomy over the self is paramount, and it can only be achieved by externalizing socially unacceptable and inexpressible desires. For the average, unenlightened individual, unwilling or incapable of living in accordance with his or her true instincts, the spectacle of someone who does, Miller says, is monstrous. In *The Time of the Assassins* his 1946 study of nineteenth-century French poet Arthur Rimbaud, Miller defines monstrosity through a comparison of exceptional artists with ordinary, unenlightened human beings. Psychological and spiritual monstrosity, he claims, is a

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<sup>271</sup> Decker, p. 178.

sign of enlightened individuality and a 'prodigious' rather than cautious and limited approach to life:

"The real problem," as Rimbaud pointed out, "is to make the soul monstrous." That is to say, not hideous but prodigious! What is the meaning of monstrous? ... "any organized form of life greatly malformed either by the lack, excess, misplacement or distortion of parts or organs; hence, anything hideous or abnormal, or made up of inconsistent parts or characters, whether repulsive or not." The root is from the Latin verb *moneo*, to warn ... Timid souls always see monsters in their path, whether these be called hippogriffs or Hitlerians. Man's greatest dread is the expansion of consciousness ... "Let us live in peace and harmony!" begs the little man. But the law of the universe dictates that peace and harmony can only be won by inner struggle. The little man does not want to pay the price for that kind of peace and harmony; he wants it ready-made, like a suit of manufactured clothes.<sup>272</sup>

Miller consistently employs such 'vitriolic explosions' in an attempt to communicate his own expansions of consciousness and to extoll their benefits to his readers. By positing his narrator as courageous because of his apparent monstrosity, the outbursts in *Cancer* can be read as Miller's attempt to 'make the soul monstrous' - a 'hideous', 'malformed' and 'inconsistent' embodiment of the conventional, bourgeois reader's fears. By presenting himself in this way, he tries to 'warn' the reader of the cowardice and futility in the desire for effortless 'peace and harmony', indeed for an immediate release from the tension created by the conflict between the narrator's aggression and his hosts' formal hospitality.

Miller also suggests something more complex and physical in his description of the 'monstrous' Rimbaud. By using terms of bodily normality and mutation to contrast the souls of the cowardly 'little man' and the brave, truth-telling artist, he points to a direct connection between the disgust, fear - even pity - experienced in the presence of deformity and the unenlightened or uninitiated reader's response to serious 'monstrous' literature. The fearful individual wants books - as he or she desires existential 'peace and harmony' - that fit 'like a suit of manufactured clothes', shunning serious work because it requires an 'inner struggle' to understand. Truly important writing, Miller suggests, is defined by its 'lack, excess, misplacement or

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<sup>272</sup> Miller, *The Time of the Assassins*, p. 31.

distortion of parts', constituting a flawed, disturbing but nonetheless pure truth, superior to the superficial representations of life that appear in most attempts at literature. Miller's attraction to deformity will be further explored in Section 2.4, 'The Attraction of the Blemish: Pound and Miller's sexual aesthetics'. By celebrating 'the jaded appetite of the male' in *Cancer*, both in an aesthetic and sexual sense, Miller focuses on 'whatever set the object apart, or made it unserviceable' (50) – and with deliberate provocation - his arousal at the 'added spice' of a 'missing tooth or a nose eaten away or a fallen womb' (166).

In the present context, however, deformity and monstrosity are ways of understanding intellectual and moral fears about artistic and ideological non-conformity and how these may be products of a limited and limiting conformist paradigm. Miller's curious equation of Rimbaud's spiritual and artistic monstrosity with the political and social monstrosity of the 'Hitlerian' is a deliberately provocative albeit clumsy means of exposing the individual's fear of excess as timid and psychically harmful. If it carries with it the dangerous implication that Hitler's political philosophy – like Rimbaud's poetry - has the potential to induce 'expansions of consciousness', Miller's primary focus remains the cowardly bourgeois tendency to repress the presence of political extremism rather than whether such ideologies carry any benefits. The fear of Hitler as a monster, he suggests, is as naïve and unproductive as the child's fear of mythological creatures like the 'hippogriff', since it reduces existence to the binary terms of good and evil, conformity and deformity. Clearly, in a post-Auschwitz world, Miller himself appears spectacularly naïve in his conflation of romantic, artistic excesses with the ideological and political excesses of the Nazis. This conflation of ideology and excess is nonetheless crucial for an understanding of Miller's rhetoric. Chapter Three further examines Miller's rhetoric in the light of Pound's fixation on the political and economic role literature should take in the 1930s, with all of its attendant fascistic overtones.

The use of individual monstrosity to attack the banal collective is also connected in Chapter Three to the ideas about 'excess' and 'prodigality' propounded by French

literary and social theorist Georges Bataille. Miller embodies what Bataille calls the 'heterogeneous' impulse towards excessive and wasteful expenditure of energy – in terms of un-reproductive sexual activity and the refusal to take up socially productive, gainful employment. His position at 'the edge of the infantile revolution', as Bataille puts it, meaning his rejection of the responsibilities of work and family, represents his alignment with the 'ceaseless prodigality' that drives all existence.<sup>273</sup> Moreover, Miller shares Bataille's interest in taboos – and particularly the taboo implied by abject poverty, vagabondage and destitution – as manifestations of heterogeneous energy that cannot be assimilated by the ordinary homogeneous collective. Bataille's ideas are paradoxically motivated, in turn, by some of the same anti-capitalist impulses as Pound's. It will be seen that these two writers, distinguishable from other Miller critics in their belief that he has strong moral convictions, are also united by their disdain for the rational, utilitarian basis of capitalist economics. Though they represent opposite ends of the political spectrum – Bataille positing the Marxian socialism Pound despised as an alternative to liberal democratic capitalism – they make similar points about Miller's readjustment of ethical 'relations', his 'search', as Bataille puts it, 'for moral values lost' as a consequence of capitalist production and utilitarianism.<sup>274</sup>

In the light shed by Miller's subversion of social etiquette, Pound's proclamation of *Cancer's* 'fairness' seems consciously perverse, derived in part from Miller's disdain for the bourgeoisie. Indeed, both writers occupy narrative positions in which they reserve a special vitriol for individuals who are socially respectable but intellectually and morally weak. The tone of Miller's diatribe against Sylvester is in fact curiously reminiscent of Pound's in his 1914 poem 'Salutation the Third', a scathing attack on the London literary old guard – personified as one imagined reviewer – who remain unconvinced by his, Wyndham Lewis, Gaudier-Brzeska and T.E. Hulme's modernising efforts:

HERE are the TOMB-STONES.

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<sup>273</sup> Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil* (London : Boyars, 1985), p. 137.

<sup>274</sup> Bataille, 'La Morale de Miller', p. 1.

They supported the gag and the ring:  
 A little black BOX contains them.  
     SO shall you be also,  
 You slut-bellied obstructionist,  
     You sworn foe to free speech and good letters,  
 You fungus, you continuous gangrene.  
 Come, let us on with the new deal,  
     Let us be done with Jews and Jobbery  
 Let us SPIT upon those who fawn on the  
     JEWS for their money,  
 Let us out to the pastures.  
 PERHAPS I will die at thirty,  
 Perhaps you will have the pleasure of defiling my pauper's grave  
 I wish you JOY, I proffer you ALL my assistance  
 It has been your HABIT for long to do away with true poets,  
 You either drive them mad, or else you blink at their suicides,  
 Or else you condone their drugs, and talk of insanity and genius,  
 BUT I will not go mad to please you.  
     I will not FLATTER you with an early death.  
 OH NO! I will stick it out,  
     I will feel your hates wriggling about my feet,  
 And I will laugh at you and mock you,  
 And I will offer you consolations in irony,  
     O fools, detesters of Beauty.  
 I have seen many who go about with supplications,  
     Afraid to say how they hate you.  
 HERE is the taste of my BOOT,  
     CARESS it, lick off the BLACKING.<sup>275</sup>

The virulent anti-Semitism of lines 9-11, Pound's first undisguised public statement of this kind, is dealt with in Chapter Three as a precursor to the conspiratorial links he would later identify between governments, banks, the media and arms manufacturers in the run-up to World War Two. At this early stage in his career, however, Pound triumphantly scapegoats Judaism from the self-appointed position of spokesman for the young and embattled avant-garde. To write freely and well, without fear of poverty or censorship, he suggests, a new writer must be brave enough to resist the pressure towards 'jobbery' and reject a system in thrall to sinister Semitic, economic forces. Moreover, as Pound demonstrates by his vituperative tone, the serious writer is obliged to use brutal language to demolish the barriers erected by establishment forces with a vested interest in censoring obscenity.

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<sup>275</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Salutation the Third', in *Blast 1*, ed. by Lewis, p. 45.



As we shall see, Pound's definition of Miller as a writer of the future originates in his theory that the narrator of *Cancer* represents a sane, virtuous figure at the mercy of those forces. For Pound, Miller's daring use of obscenity and his professedly 'incurable optimism' in defiance of dire economic circumstances, symbolize a protest against capitalism and usury that begins with the vague, conjectural equation of Judaism, business and censorship.

This intimation that Miller is virtuous in the face of a racially originated economic evil begs some vital questions: principally, how can a writer who consistently denies the usefulness of political action be interpreted in such politically active terms? As pertinently and more troublingly, are there clues to this racist affinity in Miller's attitudes towards Jews and Judaism? At this juncture, however, it is important to note the rhetorical similarities between Pound's 'Salutation the Third' and Miller's diatribe against Sylvester. In the first place, both writers startle their readers by the disproportionate and sadistic violence of their reactions to mild-mannered men. Where Miller revels in the idea of sexually infecting his rival with 'Cancer and delirium', Pound viciously predicts the death of the critic who has dared question his experimentalism. Where Miller rounds on Sylvester the 'poor withered bastard', Pound calls the critic a 'slut-bellied obstructionist'. Pound's rhetoric is as deliberately extreme as Miller's. Both defend the emotionally honest artist, who understands 'BEAUTY', against attacks from cerebral, cynical 'detesters of beauty' who obstruct rather than encourage 'true poets'. In this way, their narrative voices share a consciously manic desperation to assert and protect the elite status of the experimental avant-garde in a world of proscriptive aesthetic mediocrity.

Indeed, notwithstanding the differences implied by the fact that Miller is vying for sexual dominance in a love triangle, Sylvester occupies a comparable position in *Cancer* to Wells, Shaw and Bennett in the Pound reviews. Like these 'third rate' stock novelists,<sup>276</sup> he is a paid, professional and commercially successful writer – a writer of 'cheap Broadway plays' – who fails to understand the seriousness of the artist's

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<sup>276</sup> 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 87.

mission. Where Pound accuses Wells, Shaw and Bennett of producing 'confectionary' prose for the 'tired minds' of the mass market, Miller depicts Sylvester as a writer who latches on to fashionable labels and ideas for the suspect purpose of selling tickets and filling suppertime silences.<sup>277</sup> 'My next play', Sylvester says, immediately before Miller's rant, will be 'on the pluralistic universe' (65). This is followed by a superficial and patronizing attempt at writerly camaraderie with Miller: 'Let's see, you're a surrealist aren't you?' (65).

Crucially, Sylvester's manners and rhythm of speech are impeccably English, calling to mind Lewis' disdainful dismissal of the 'awfully nice' poets and painters who dominated the London scene.<sup>278</sup> Almost two decades on from their attack on the post-Victorian 'impressionistic fuss', Miller is thus engaged in a comparable battle against shallow, amateurish writers.<sup>279</sup> Like Pound, his antagonism works on the basis of the artist's entitlement to deference from inferior practitioners. Moreover; Pound creates a dynamic between the narrator, the target of his aggression and the reader that is similar to Miller's. As in the latter's Sylvester-Tanya episode, the reader of 'Salutation the Third' derives pleasure and discomfort from the same source - the feeling of complicity in the narrator's violent subjugation of his enemy. The aggressive, unreasonable, even unhinged artist is set up as a victim of oppression and the reader is invited to partake in his relish as he loses control, lashing out at his literary gatekeepers. In a sense, Pound makes a more legitimate demand on the reader's sympathies than Miller, since his contempt is based on a grievance about artistic and professional close-mindedness rather than the apparent desire to shirk responsibility for his own dishonorable act.

And yet a crucial difference between Pound and Miller's narrative tones is exemplified by their most violent taunts to their enemies. While Miller writes that Sylvester 'ought to get down on [his] knees and thank' him for having sex with his wife, Pound offers the critic 'the taste of my BOOT. CARESS it, lick off the

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<sup>277</sup> 'Dr Williams' Position', p. 395.

<sup>278</sup> Lewis, 'Ezra Pound', p. 260. See my p. 55.

<sup>279</sup> Lewis, 'Our Vortex', in *Blast 1*, pp. 147-49, p. 149.

BLACKING'. If Miller uses sadistic language to boast of his sexual prowess, Pound's reference to boots and blacking foreshadows the militaristic violence of his 1930s fascist writings. It will become clear that Miller's vision of enlightened sexual relations was often mired in a troublingly totalising desire to punish the unenlightened, but his internal raving at Sylvester is also comical in a way that Pound's categorically is not. Where both writers create exaggerated and ridiculous narrative personae, Miller seems to be aware of that ridiculousness and its comedic potential, hamming up his narcissism, latching on to unjustifiable feelings of self-righteousness and indignation and working himself into a state of apoplectic rage. While Pound's vitriol is also performative it is presented in a way that makes it appear to be deep-seated and genuine – a precursor to his vicious political and racial attacks in the 1930s.

Nevertheless, humour cannot mask the fact that Miller's appealing battle on behalf of the experimental artist also includes the reader in an unprovoked assault. Later on in *Cancer* Miller raises the stakes of this strategy, mercilessly lampooning Nanantatee, an Indian acquaintance in Paris whom he nicknames 'Nonentity' and scorns for 'playing the good Samaritan' when he has him to stay in his apartment on the wealthy Rue Lafayette (86). Miller couches his outrage in unpleasant terms of imperial rather than artistic or masculinist entitlement, compensating for his feelings of humiliation at having to help an Indian with his housework by means of scatological caricature:

He wouldn't think of using toilet paper, Nanantatee. Must be against his religion. No, he calls for a pitcher and a rag. He's *delicate*, the little fat duck. Sometimes, when I'm drinking a cup of pale tea in which he has dropped a rose leaf he comes alongside me and lets out a loud fart, right in my face. He never says "Excuse me!" the word must be missing from his Gujarati dictionary. (87)

This is one of the moments in *Cancer* that most clearly corroborates Ladenson's claim, mentioned in the previous chapter, that 'Miller has not weathered post-1960s fashions well.'<sup>280</sup> 'His evident misogyny,' we remember Ladenson saying, 'as well as his tendency to call a spade a spade ... have for some time made him ideologically

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<sup>280</sup> Ladenson, *Dirt for Art's Sake*, p. 169. See my p. 96.

suspect.<sup>281</sup> If it is important to mark a distinction between twenty first century and 1930s responses to Miller's casually offensive treatment of another race and religion, it is also important to note that the passage clearly functions as a form of deliberate provocation. While modern readers are naturally more sensitive to the offensiveness of his flip cultural stereotyping, the sense of discomfort to most of Miller's 1930s readers would have been less about cultural habits and more about the discrepancy between Nananatee's act of generosity and Miller's aggressive ingratitude. In this later age, Miller's racist slurs intensify the 'split between seduction and repulsion' Sarah Garland identifies in Miller's narrative style, probably an unintentional addition to the feelings of rapprochement Miller encourages in the reader. By identifying with Miller as an independent, long-suffering underdog, he or she becomes complicit in his behavior, a feeling that is at best awkward and at worst wholly objectionable.

Pound in his poem and Miller in his diatribes embody elements of what Mary Ann Caws describes as the 'demesure' of the manifesto form. Introducing her survey: *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, Caws writes 'the manifesto is an act of *demesure*, going past what is thought of as proper, sane, and literary. Its outreach demands an extravagant self-assurance.'<sup>282</sup> Indeed, appropriately – since 'Salutation the Third' appeared in Pound and Lewis' first Vorticist manifesto, *Blast 1*, and Miller produced his own partly parodic version of a manifesto in 1937 - the *demesure* in both passages arises out of the authors' impulse towards impropriety, insanity as well as a form of outrageous arrogance. It is an arrogance that is alluded to by Marjorie Perloff in her study *The Futurist Moment* (1986) as 'an appeal ... to an audience ready to applaud that poet or artist who can *épater le bourgeois*, and, beyond the bourgeois, who can *épater* the artists of the ruling culture'<sup>283</sup> In these terms, the writer of artistic

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>282</sup> Mary Ann Caws, 'The Poetics of the Manifesto: Nowness and Newness', *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), p. xx.

<sup>283</sup> Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment* (University of Chicago Press: London, 1986), p. 91.

manifestos is in the business of skillfully manipulating the reader's desire for violence against the status quo, drawing him or her in to a fight that ends up having little to do with genuine defensible objections and everything to do with prejudice.

If the Sylvester-Tanya episode demonstrates Miller's concerted irreverence and antagonism for bourgeois codes of fidelity and loyalty, he is similarly irreverent and antagonistic towards hypocritical responses to tragedy and pain. Later in *Cancer*, when Miller has secured a job at a newspaper, the announcement that his colleague Peckover has fallen down the office elevator shaft and died is met with brazen indifference. The incident, we are told, 'was pathetic and ludicrous at the same time' since Peckover – whose name conspicuously implies 'pecker', the American slang for penis - 'was a zero, and even the fact that he was dead wouldn't add a cipher to his name' (143). Again, Miller puts the reader in a compromising position, rounding cruelly on an apparently blameless victim while extending the tempting invitation to share in his crass and unreasonable joke. As with the Sylvester-Tanya episode, he posits collective, bourgeois modes of behavior as absurdly inadequate means for expressing emotion, the real focus of his disdain being the collective reaction he imagines the other newspapermen will have. Miller and his friend Carl 'laughed all night about it' he writes 'and in between times we vented our scorn and disgust for the guys upstairs, the fatheads who were trying to persuade themselves, no doubt, that Peckover was a fine fellow and his death was a catastrophe' (142).

What Miller highlights is the futility in conforming to exteriorly imposed standards, both regarding what constitutes a 'tragedy' and how people should respond to one. By extension, he also attacks the emerging corporate culture he has entered into at the newspaper, a culture in which 'there was an invisible wall between the guys upstairs and the guys down below' and in which a lowly proof-reader like Peckover must die before he is shown a modicum of respect (142). Miller and Van Norden call Peckover a 'zero', 'a cipher' even after he is dead to prove that point (143). Indeed, by laughing about it, Miller laughs in the face of the demand for sensitivity, a demand he views as ridiculous and offensive, since it induces reactions dictated by a

dishonest sense of social responsibility rather than genuine concern for the victim. Marlowe, their journalist colleague who solemnly relays the news, is labeled vain, self-serving, and hypocritical: 'he wanted to weep, if possible, to show that he was a regular guy' (142). He will, Miller goes on, be 'carrying his delicate little obituary around with him for months, praising the shit out of himself for the way he handled the situation. We felt all that, Joe and I. without saying a word to each other. We just stood there and listened with a murderous silent contempt' (142).

This unforgiving, sardonic critique of the people who uphold a corporate power structure relates in interesting ways to Miller's wider theories about dishonest societal reactions to failure and material poverty. In his short story *Max and the White Phagocytes*, published four years after *Cancer* in 1938, Miller tests the social pressure to display compassion towards destitute and marginalized people against the actual feelings induced by direct contact with them. 'It was from the despised and neglected ones' he writes in his opening paragraph, 'that I learned about life, about God, and about the futility of "doing good"'.<sup>284</sup> As with Peckover, he takes an unapologetically sadistic approach to Max, his homeless and 'morally defeated' protagonist, reveling in his use of him for experimental artistic purposes.<sup>285</sup> 'Today I'm going to listen to you, you bugger' he writes, again in an aside to the reader rather than to his subject's face, 'listen to every nuance. I'll extract the last drop of juice – and then, *overboard you go!*'<sup>286</sup> As with Sylvester in *Cancer*, he shows a great deal more outward respect (and indeed kindness) to Max than this statement would suggest, giving him a bed for the night and introducing him to his friend Boris (Michael Fraenkel), whom he thinks might be able to help him find a permanent place. By confessing to such cold and contemptuous motives, Miller establishes a schism between action and thought, narrator and action, thus instigating another instance where the schism between the narrator's sentiments and the events taking place constitute part of the narrative charge.

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<sup>284</sup> 'Max', p. 134.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, p.136.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

The unsettling disjunction between outward compassion and an internal sadistic impulse is therefore connected to Miller's general preoccupation with the performative aspect of apparently virtuous behavior as well as to the performative aspect of writing itself. However altruistic an act of charity might appear to the observer and – indeed - the donor, it is inevitably motivated by a desire to be seen in a certain light. In order to purge him or herself of this hypocrisy, the individual must confess his or her innermost unacceptable thoughts even, or perhaps especially, in the process of helping someone in distress. Max proclaims Miller to be his 'dear friend' for good reason: Miller offers him companionship as well as 'courage' when he is at his lowest ebb, his kindness even eliciting 'tears of happiness' from him.<sup>287</sup> Yet by deliberately and harshly quashing any potential sympathy the reader might be developing for the author-narrator, Miller warns him or her against delusions about his apparently altruistic, compassionate acts. At the same time, he warns the reader against reading the narrator as a 'truthful' oracle in moral terms.

In line with this, the prodigious monstrosity Miller refers to in the Rimbaud essay constitutes a major element of his own confessional style. Describing in *Capricorn* how he eventually arrived at his unique narrative voice, he writes:

the book commenced to write itself, screaming the things which I never breathed, the thoughts I never uttered, the conversations I never held, the hopes, the dream, the delusions I never admitted. (47)

Indeed, as Norman Mailer puts it in his 1983 study of Miller, *Genius and Lust*, 'Henry Miller contains the unadvertised mystery of how much of a monster a great writer must be.'<sup>288</sup> Miller's courage and value, Mailer suggests, lies in his determination to transcribe the kind of private thoughts that appear ugly and malformed when converted to written words on the page. In doing so, he attempts to garner both shock and a corresponding confession from his readers. Likewise, Jane Nelson, whose study *Form and Image in the Fiction of Henry Miller* (1970) interprets Miller as a

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., p. 166, p. 142.

<sup>288</sup> Mailer, *Genius and Lust*, p. 10.

Jungian confessional writer, sheds light on these ideas via Rousseau's theory of confession:

In Rousseau ... the confession form is merged with the novel form, producing eventually the fictional autobiography and the *Künstlerroman*. In Miller, the fictional autobiography moves clearly into the archetypal world of projections. Granted a freedom from mimesis, the illusions of past and present can be ignored; characters can appear or disappear as they are symbolically appropriate, and the reader's interest in their eventual "history" is not stimulated.<sup>289</sup>

By 'projections' Nelson means images produced by the unconscious. Miller's narrative form represents an evolution of the 'fictional autobiography', she believes, because it rests on the eschewal of realistic, chronological narrative in favor of these emotionally connected symbols rather than logically arranged events and ideas. In this way, 'the autobiographical produces the confession'.<sup>290</sup> Although her application of Jungian theory to Miller is overly proscriptive, Nelson's approach nonetheless illuminates Miller and Anaïs Nin's use of emotional and psychological 'chaos' to produce art, an area that will be explored later in this chapter. The resultant excessive, professedly uncensored truthfulness of Miller's confessions, Nelson suggests, induce 'aversion rather than pleasure' in the reader.<sup>291</sup> Citing Simon O'Lesser, she argues that Miller 'fails to "disguise and control" his revelations', and in this way 'brings us too close to the real.'<sup>292</sup> The feeling of aversion – cut with rather than in place of pleasure, I argue – comes from the fact that Miller forces the reader to confront and confess his or her own comparable hypocrisies. His writing embodies what Nelson calls the 'zeal to do justice to our repressed tendencies ... with a minimum of disguise and control.'<sup>293</sup> It is, as Anaïs Nin puts it in her diary, an aggressive reaction against the kind of illusory art that mirrors and encourages the

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<sup>289</sup> Jane Nelson, *Form and Image in the Fiction of Henry Miller* (Wayne State University Press, Detroit 1970), pp. 77-78.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.



moral dishonesties of its readers: 'He hates poetry and he hates illusion. His own savage self-confessions demand the same of others.'<sup>294</sup>

To Miller's mind, the catchall principle of "doing good" is hypocritical and 'futile' since it denies the visceral repulsion that materially comfortable people inevitably feel in the presence of those who are materially and psychologically destitute. Miller is fascinated by the disjunction between what he regards as an irrepressible physical rejection of the sight and smell of the poor and the respectable face of pity ordinarily presented to the world. Indeed, passing a group of sleeping homeless people outside a metro station in *Cancer*, he concludes brutally that 'even the dead horses and the cows and sheep hanging from the greasy hooks look more inviting' (243). 'But these filthy beggars lying in the rain, what purpose do they serve? What good can they do us?' he asks himself - answering that 'they make us bleed for five minutes, that's all' (243). Thus, pity is satirically posited as superficial and self-serving, a temporary distraction from the feelings of disgust and anxiety that overwhelm the observer, rather than a genuine attempt to commune with or aid the poor.

More importantly, Miller goes on to describe these conclusions as 'night thoughts produced by walking in the rain after two thousand years of Christianity', an observation that connects to his wider revulsion at the Protestant utilitarian origins of bourgeois morality and capitalist economics (243). In Chapter Three it will become apparent that Pound's own economic and social criticism is also constructed on specifically anti-Protestant grounds. Indeed, their shared animosity towards the impact of Lutheran doctrine on European and American attitudes towards work and sex goes some way towards explaining Pound's admiration for Miller. Unlike Miller, however, whose antagonism towards the church is expressed through erratic invectives against a hypocritical clerical establishment, Pound builds a sustained argument in his essays of the 1920s and 30s that posits Christian approaches to industry and financial gain as generally poisoned.

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<sup>294</sup> Anaïs Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin: 1931-1934*, ed. with an intro. by Gunthar Stuhlmann, 3 vols (New York : Swallow Press/Harcourt), vol I, p. 15.

In *Max and the White Phagocytes* Miller develops the conscious cruelty of these 'night thoughts' to their extreme, taking as his protagonist and case study Max, a near-suicidal, middle-aged beggar who latches onto him for support and using him to explore the aesthetic effects of destitution and failure. 'There are some people' Miller writes about Max:

to whom you feel immediately attracted, not because you like them, but because you detest them. You detest them so heartily that your curiosity is aroused; you come back to them again and again to study them, to arouse in yourself a feeling of compassion which is really absent.<sup>295</sup>

Bataille, who celebrates Miller as a 'moral' writer in his 1946 essay 'La Morale de Miller', sheds interesting light on this position. 'Charitable pity', Bataille says in an earlier essay 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism' (1938), is in fact a 'shameless ... evasion' of the true repulsion felt in the presence of absolute dejection.<sup>296</sup> 'The nauseating forms of dejection provoke a feeling of disgust so *unbearable*', he writes 'that it is improper to express or even to make allusion to it.'<sup>297</sup> Miller's approach can be read as an exposition of a similar truth. Both writers understand 'material poverty' and 'abjection' as states that somehow supersede moral judgment.<sup>298</sup> As mentioned earlier, these aspects of human experience belong, in Bataille's view, to 'the heterogeneous world', a sphere of existence separate from and unclassifiable within conventional societal definitions of virtue and vice, good and evil. 'The impoverished classes', he writes in 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism', are one of 'numerous elements or social forms that *homogeneous* society is powerless to assimilate'.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>296</sup> George Bataille, 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism', in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-39*, ed. with an intro. by Allan Stoekl, transl. by Allan Stoekl, Carl R. Lovit and Donald M. Leslie, Jr. (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1985), pp. 137-60, p. 144.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144; Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure', in *Visions*, ed. by Stoekl, pp. 116-129, p. 125.

<sup>299</sup> 'Psychological Structure', p. 142.

Heterogeneity implies the excessive and wasteful expenditure of energy. It is used by Bataille to discuss all areas of existence – from class relations to sexuality, from the production of art to the excretion of bodily waste. It means, he says, ‘everything rejected by *homogeneous* society as waste or as superior transcendent value’.<sup>300</sup> Thus, he envisions society as a body that deems itself healthy as long as it can exclude the heterogeneous, and material poverty as foreign matter it cannot physically accept or incorporate. Conditions of destitution are rejected by homogeneous society, Bataille suggests, because they carry with them the prospect of ‘*excessive* consequences’; namely the terrifying prospect that established structures of thought, morality and government might be overthrown. Indeed, because of the ‘abjection’ experienced and represented by the poor and socially destitute, contact with them is as overpowering as contact with symbols of the divine:

The theme of sacred poverty – impure and untouchable – constitutes precisely the negative pole of a region characterized by the opposition of two extreme forms ... an identity of opposites between glory and dejection, between exalted and imperative (higher) forms and impoverished (lower) forms.<sup>301</sup>

For Bataille, the observer’s nausea in the presence of the physical manifestations of extreme poverty is akin to the transcendent experience of encountering ‘(higher) forms’. By this he implies that the ordinary, materially and socially functional human being is as distanced from the materially and socially defunct human being as he is from the heroic and ‘exalted’ figures represented in myth and religion. Both ‘exalted’ and ‘impoverished’ forms of life impose what Bataille calls an ‘insuperable gap’ between themselves and the rest of humanity. This gap, he says, inevitably terrifies the non-object, non-divine ordinary human being.

Miller shares this belief in the ‘excessive consequences’ of material poverty as something that generates very particular feelings of disgust as well as desire. To him, the feeling of ‘disgust’ comes from the destitute figure’s externalization of everything we fear, but chiefly our own mortality. In his or her totemic representation of truths

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., p. 144-45.

that exist beyond the realms of conventional moral judgment, the viewer is forced to encounter his own limitations and fears. About Max he writes:

Everything he said was true, horribly true ... People don't want to hear these truths. They *can't* hear them, for the reason that they're all talking to themselves in the same way. The only difference is that Max said them aloud, and saying them aloud he made them seem objective.<sup>302</sup>

In this instance, Miller refers to Max's compulsive vocalization of his neuroses – a mode of involuntary expression that, in many ways, reflects Miller's own creative method. Indeed, in place of – or rather to replace - his fears and anxieties, Miller vocalizes repressed anger, obscenity and prejudice. 'I believe in saying the truth', he said in his 1963 interview with *The Paris Review*, 'coming out with it cold, shocking if necessary, not disguising it.'<sup>303</sup> The same principle applies to Max's decrepit physical appearance - his prematurely aged face and ill-fitting suit are active symbols, Miller says, for all the 'woes ... miseries ... disease ... unemployment' in the world.<sup>304</sup> Physically and psychologically dysfunctional characters are terrifying, Miller suggests, because they express and symbolize our frightened, unhinged private selves.

'Untouchables' like Max represent a perpetual potential; a potential that operates both within an economic sphere, the loss of all financial control, as well as symbolically in terms of the paradoxical aesthetic liberation that comes in foregoing all artistic control.<sup>305</sup> By accepting and expressing his feelings of fear and disgust when faced with Max's failure - indeed harnessing them for aesthetic purposes – Miller posits himself as liberated from the lie of his own respectability and altruism. Crucially, Miller uses this apparently brutal approach to other peoples' suffering – alongside an exploration of his own suffering – the two collapsing into one another. As Lawrence Durrell put it when asked in a 1985 interview about Miller's use of

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<sup>302</sup> 'Max', p. 136.

<sup>303</sup> 'An Interview with Henry Miller', *Writers at Work*, p. 153-54.

<sup>304</sup> 'Max', p. 136.

<sup>305</sup> Bataille, 'Psychological Structures', p. 144

obscenity, 'what he's trying to do down is the dreadful sentimentality which disguises brutality.'<sup>306</sup>

Thus, a curious reversal takes place in which Miller's apparent sneering rejection of humanist ideals in fact masks a deeply empathetic approach. It is a complex aspect of his work that has been reductively overlooked by critics intent on seeing him as, on the one extreme, disinterested in compassion and, on the other, spiritually and mystically enlightened on matters of the body and the heart. As Caroline Blinder puts it in her Ph.D thesis *Henry Miller's Sexual Aesthetics: A Comparative Analysis of Selected Twentieth-Century Influences on Henry Miller's Writing*, there is an 'all-too-common polarization between those who admire him as a prophet of sexual liberation, and those who see him chiefly as representative of a violently patriarchal sensibility.'<sup>307</sup> In place of 'sexual', I argue, we could as easily substitute 'spiritual'.

Kate Millet's 1969 study, the inaugural second-wave feminist attack on Miller, reads him as a 'counterrevolutionary sexual politician' whose misogynistic anecdotes demonstrate the insensitivity and brutality of his age – principally as manifested in male chauvinistic attitudes towards women but also by the chauvinism that exists between all human beings in a patriarchal society.<sup>308</sup> Likewise, George Orwell, Phillip Rahv and Edmund Wilson – all of whom, we have seen, admired Miller's work - took his antagonism towards sentimentality at face value. In this sense, Orwell ultimately misinterpreted Miller's theories on perceptual awakening and the autonomy of subjective experience to mean simply a quietist retreat from the complications and politics of the outside world.

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<sup>306</sup> 'An Interview with Lawrence Durrell', 1<sup>st</sup> October 1985. Quoted in Michael Woolf, 'Beyond Ideology: Kate Millet and the Case for Henry Miller', in *Critical Essays*, ed. by Gottesman, pp. 165-177, p. 176.

<sup>307</sup> Caroline Blinder, *Henry Miller's Sexual Aesthetics: A Comparative Analysis of Selected Twentieth-Century Influences on Henry Miller's Writing* (unpublished doctoral thesis, King's College London, 1995) p. 102.

<sup>308</sup> Millet, p. 295.

If Millet, Orwell, Rahv and Wilson failed to look beyond the surface of the callous behavior described in *Cancer* or Miller's crass and blasé statements on suffering, many critics since the 1960s have correctly interpreted him as a profoundly compassionate writer. As such, most critics have ignored the fact that Miller's violent rhetoric is integral to his explorations into empathy and compassion. Karl Shapiro and Kenneth Rexroth praised Miller in the 1960s for his radically progressive approach to sexuality and human relations but they chose to gloss over, rather than examine, his expressions of cruelty in order to argue the case for his humanism. As Rexroth puts it, 'absolute freedom from ... the sense of guilt, implication and compromise, makes Miller humane, maybe even humanistic.'<sup>309</sup> Because they are concerned with appropriating Miller as a messenger of libertarian, anti-puritanical ideals, readings like Rexroth's and Shapiro's make little use of the complex resonances that arise from his experiments into the human reaction to suffering. As we shall see later in this chapter, more recent work by Bertrand Mathieu (*Orpheus in Brooklyn: Orphism, Rimbaud and Miller*, 1976), Gilles Mayne (*Eroticism in Georges Bataille and Henry Miller*, 2001) and James Decker (*Henry Miller and Narrative Form: Constructing the Self, Rejecting Modernity*, 2006) does engage with Miller's approach to suffering. However, Mathieu, Mayne and Decker – as examples – nonetheless fail to understand Miller's use of cruelty as a deliberate ploy; a ploy designed to expose the discrepancy between the ways in which people react to misery in themselves and other people.

Thus, rather than proving Miller's amorality, the rants against Sylvester, Max and Peckover in fact demonstrate his reconfiguration of morality along new and radical lines. There is an unlikely sense of order beneath the apparent arbitrariness of Miller's enmity that serves as one of the main reasons for Pound's belief in his strong 'hierarchy of values'. As mentioned earlier, this order is rooted in the paradox surrounding Miller's simultaneous rejection of Sylvester's 'pluralist universe' and his fascination with the philosophically pluralist ideas of Henri Bergson. Bergson's 1907

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<sup>309</sup> Kenneth Rexroth, 'The Reality of Henry Miller', in *Critical Essays on Henry Miller*, ed. by Gottesman, pp. 95-102, pp. 96-100, p. 99. Originally published in Rexroth, *Bird in a Bush* (New York, New Directions, 1959).

text *Creative Evolution*, which defines subjective experience in terms of a continual evolution involving 'the multiplicity of elements and the interpenetration of all by all', is echoed and cited throughout *Cancer* and *Capricorn* as well as in various of Miller's essays after the 1930s.<sup>310</sup> In *Capricorn*, he devotes three pages to describing his discovery of *Creative Evolution* as a young man in New York, a 'new Bible', which 'gave [him] the courage to stand alone'<sup>311</sup> When we come to analyse Miller's vision for an evolved form of sympathy, Bergson's theories will be seen as pivotal to the former's understanding of contradictory values (aesthetic and ethical) as simultaneously existent and incommensurable. Indeed, through Bergson Miller comes to the zealously tolerant conclusion in *Cancer* 'that everything [is] justified, supremely justified' (102).

Yet Miller's aim to expose the collective illusion of socially acceptable modes of compassion also carries with it an aggressive rejection of exactly this idea. The narcissism of his infantile, explosive invectives – summed up when he tells Sylvester to 'Fuck your two way of looking at things!' (65) – are apparently anathematic to his Bergsonian faith in 'the multiplicity of things'.<sup>312</sup> In other words, Miller's absolute tolerance of all thoughts and values exists side-by-side with a pronounced refusal to tolerate any contradictory point of view.

The paradox is helpfully explained through an analysis of work on pluralism by Pound's radically conservative literary collaborator, the previously mentioned T.E. Hulme. Crucially, Hulme embodies a Bergsonian skepticism about the capacity of intellectual logic to apprehend subjective experience and uses Bergson's philosophy to predict of 'the break up' of 'the Renaissance humanistic attitude'<sup>313</sup> and its

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<sup>310</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (New York: Dover Publications, 1998 [orig. ed.: New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1911]), p. 162.

<sup>311</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 200.

<sup>312</sup> Henry Miller, "Un Être Étoilique", p. 298.

<sup>313</sup> T.E. Hulme, 'Modern Art and its Philosophy', in *The Collected Writings of T.E. Hulme*, ed. by Csengeri, pp. 268-285, p. 269. Originally delivered as a lecture to the Quest Society of London (22<sup>nd</sup> January, 1914).

replacement by a set of 'absolute values'.<sup>314</sup> Like Miller, Hulme agrees with Bergson's premise about the complex multiplicity of the impressions the individual perceives and experiences – writing in his essay 'Intensive Manifolds' that 'every emotion is composed of a thousand different elements which dissolve into and permeate each other without any precise outline'<sup>315</sup> - but he challenges the related political assumption that this must lead to a universalist and democratic approach to people and ideas.<sup>316</sup> As he puts it in his 1915-16 essay 'A Notebook', those who use philosophical pluralism to support pluralistic, liberal democratic politics are guilty of 'applying order to chaotic experience, and then confusing the artifice for reality'.<sup>317</sup> For Hulme, the use of Bergson to posit the unification and progressive evolution of humanity through the acceptance of difference constitutes a dangerous reduction of the actual complexities philosophical pluralism reveals.

Allying himself with Pierre Lasserre's far-right French group, Action Française – which advocated a return from republicanism to the traditional institutions of monarchy and church - Hulme believed Bergson's value lay in his effort to grasp the constant flux and renewal of subjective reality through intuition but he also warned against applying the same theory to history and politics. In his 1911 essay 'Mr Bergson, Balfour and Politics', Hulme describes meeting Lasserre and being impressed by the Frenchman's conclusion that 'Bergsonism was nothing but the last disguise of romanticism.'<sup>318</sup> He recalls Lasserre telling him:

To our judgements on politics in the name of reason interpreting experience the Bergsonians oppose to us what they call "Life: - life which is always creation and always incalculable .... It is useless, they say, to search in the past for general truths which shall be applicable to the present, because there is no common measure between the political and social situations offered us

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<sup>314</sup> Hulme, 'A Notebook', in *The Collected Writings of T.E. Hulme*, ed. by Csengeri, p. 444.

<sup>315</sup> Hulme, 'The Philosophy of Intensive Manifolds,' in *The Collected Writings of T.E. Hulme*, ed. by Csengeri, pp. 170-90, p. 176.

<sup>316</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 162.

<sup>317</sup> Hulme, quoted in Mead, 'T.E. Hulme, Bergson, and the New Philosophy', p. 250.

<sup>318</sup> Hulme, 'Mr. Balfour, Bergson, and Politics', *The Collected Writings of T.E. Hulme*, ed. by Csengeri, pp.160-165, p. 165. Originally published in *The New Age* (November, 1911).



by the past and those of the present. If we ask why, we are told that Bergson has now proved that Time is real – that is, that the present moment is a unique moment and can be paralleled by nothing in the past – “Time is real”, so that there is no repetition.<sup>319</sup>

Using Lasserre’s criticism, Hulme asserts that Bergson’s careful analysis of chaotic subjective experience has become an intellectually suspect tool for ignoring the lessons of history. Hulme accommodates Bergson’s philosophical understanding of the constant change that occurs in the individual’s experience of reality with a desire to regulate change in the political and social spheres, asserting and protecting strong, essential political and social values that maintain order. Again referring to Lasserre’s loss of faith in Bergson, Hulme claims ‘I can find a compromise for myself ... which I roughly indicate by saying that I think time is real for the individual, but not for the race’.<sup>320</sup>

The irony in Hulme’s appropriation of a philosopher whose ‘creative evolution’ theory was widely used to support not only pluralist but humanist approaches, elucidates the regressive and progressive paradox in Miller and Pound as well as the simultaneous acceptance of disorder and admiration for hierarchy that lie at the heart of their aesthetics. Hulme is exemplary of the incongruous and tense marriage between Bergsonian pluralism and politically radical conservatism during that decade and, as such, highlights some of the conservative aspects of Miller’s radical project that are conventionally overlooked. As Henry Mead puts it in his essay ‘T.E. Hulme, Bergson, and the New Philosophy’ - mentioned at the start of this chapter - Hulme ‘was attracted to Bergson by his anti-liberal implications’.<sup>321</sup> ‘Hulme’s articles’, Mead goes on, ‘use Bergson to critique ... idealism, showing how ... liberalism ... relied on intellectual fictions, constructed over intuitive reality.’<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., p. 165

<sup>321</sup> Mead, p. 352.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., p. 352. Henry Mead also points out that Bergson occupied a uniquely versatile position in artistic, political and religious circles during the 1920s: If he’ appealed to radicals by substituting gradual meliorism with more dynamic forms of progression. Like Nietzsche, Bergson appealed to socialists, including many at the

Crucially, this appropriation of Bergson to expound the flaws in liberal progressive politics, and his role as an inspiration for much in Pound and Lewis' ideas on art, provides a means through which to understand Miller's straddling of brutal *and* humanist positions. Indeed, Hulme's negative definition of 'the humanist attitude' provides a useful philosophical reference point for that paradox in Miller:

The Humanist attitude: When a sense of the reality of these absolute [religious ethical] values is lacking, you get a refusal to believe any longer in the radical imperfection of either Man or Nature. This develops logically into the belief that life is the source and measure of all values, and that man is fundamentally good. Instead, then, of/ Man (radically imperfect) ... apprehending .... Perfection, -/ you get the second term (now entirely misunderstood) illegitimately introduced inside the first [elipses and brackets Hulme's own]. This leads to a complete change in all values. The problem of evil disappears, the conception of sin loses all meaning.<sup>323</sup>

As we will come to see over the course of this chapter, Miller's moral approach incorporates a strong faith in the individual's potential for emotional, spiritual and sensual evolution alongside a strong belief in imperfection as the defining condition of humanity. His vision of a future in which - as he puts it in his 1944 essay 'Of Art and Future' - there is 'no feeling of class, caste, color or country ... no need of possessions, no use for money, no archaic prejudices about the sanctity of the home or marriage' in many ways encapsulates the idealism Hulme despises.<sup>324</sup> Indeed, in one sense, Miller corroborates the humanist notion of the human condition as abundantly perfectible, a fanciful belief, according to Hulme, based on the fallacy that 'our political ideal should be the removal of everything that checks the "spontaneous growth of personality."<sup>325</sup>

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*New Age*, who desired to break way from the past, and establish a new 'year zero.' (Mead, p. 246), he also 'appealed to Catholics in so far as he spelt out the limits of rational cognition, as he did in his early books' (Mead, p. 253).

<sup>323</sup> 'A Notebook,' p. 444.

<sup>324</sup> Henry Miller, "Of Art and the Future," in *The Best of Henry Miller*, ed. by Durrell, pp. 228-41, p. 232. Originally published in *Sunday After the War* (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1944).

<sup>325</sup> Hulme, 'A Notebook', p. 444.

And yet, in another sense, Miller's aesthetic and moral project is driven – like Hulme's – by a profound objection to any notion of progress that ignores the chaotic and often unpleasant reality of social and subjective human experience. Both characterize standard humanist responses as squeamishly fearful, motivated – in Hulme's words – by 'the same kind of sensation as one gets from turning up a stone and seeing the creeping things revealed.'<sup>326</sup> Although Pound himself was outwardly dismissive of Bergson – in fact concluding that Hulme's weekly philosophical salons had been 'diluted with crap like Bergson' – we shall see later in this chapter that his own work incorporates the same tension between a philosophically pluralist understanding of subjective experience and a politically absolutist approach to morality.<sup>327</sup>

Returning to the Sylvester-Tanya episode, Miller's provocative taunt to Sylvester to 'fuck your pluralistic universe' corroborates Pound's belief that he writes against universalist notions of taste and judgment, at the same time situating him incongruously within the particular mode of anti-humanist discourse defined by Hulme (65). Despite his passionate belief that 'everything is justified', by sneering at the idea that Sylvester's 'next play will involve a pluralist conception of the universe', Miller takes up arms against the naïve and lazy appropriators of Bergson that Hulme refers to (65). Indeed the term 'pluralist universe' appears to come directly from the title of a 1909 lecture given by Bergson's 'pluralist' admirer William James, which contributed to the popularization of these ideas and, crucially, ended in the categorization of all values as 'incommensurable' (equally valid).<sup>328</sup> This lecture will play an important role in my later analysis of Bergson and his influence on Miller's theories regarding an evolved form of sympathy.

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<sup>326</sup> Hulme, quoted in Mead, p. 250.

<sup>327</sup> Ezra Pound, 'This Hulme Business', in *Townsmen 2* (January, 1939), quoted in Jewel Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape: T.S. Eliot and the Dialectic of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), p. 59.

<sup>328</sup> William James, 'A Pluralistic Universe', in *A Pluralistic Universe* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 113.

Pound, we remember, is enamored with Joyce's 'variegation of dialect' and Miller's 'scope' but also impressed by these writers' abilities to delineate 'permanent and fundamental hostilities and incompatibilities' between people.<sup>329</sup> He admires Miller, as he admires Henry James, for resisting what he regards as the populist temptation to depict human life in a manner that suggests 'all men are the same' and 'desire the same thing'.<sup>330</sup>

Thus, in his own way, Miller exhibits something of the combination of inclusionary aesthetic and exclusionary moral tendencies that push against each other in Pound's review work. Both writers are incensed by what they see as the oversimplification of human existence in the service of false and shallow attempts to promote tolerance and cooperation. According to Pound in his review of Henry James: 'to want all men to think and feel the same way and to desire the same things is plain stupidity.'<sup>331</sup> For Miller in the Sylvester-Tanya passage, his subjective viewpoint is not the correct viewpoint for everyone but it has greater worth than Sylvester's because it is his alone.

Miller shares Pound's faith in the unquestionable authority of the individual's singular perspective, however inconsistent or chaotic that may be. By exclaiming 'Fuck your two ways of looking at things', he implies a form of anti-intellectualism that rejects reasoned and objective responses to the world as empty and unproductive. Moreover, Miller's artistic snobbery, his apparent rejection of universalism, and his refusal to accept the equal value of contradictory opinions, imply a degree of allegiance to the kind of elitism championed by Pound and Lewis. As will be seen in Chapter Three, there are important and troubling connections to be delineated between this aggressively subjective and anarchical style of writing and the socially and racially essentialist theories Pound came to advocate in the 1930s.

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<sup>329</sup> 'Joyce', pp. 411; 'Ulysses', p. 404. See my p. 63.

<sup>330</sup> Pound, 'The Serious Artist', p. 46.

<sup>331</sup> 'Henry James', p. 297.

Like Pound, Miller attempts not only to justify and privilege but apply order to instinctual and visceral emotional states. 'Chaos', he writes at the start of *Cancer*, 'is the score on which reality is written', implying living and writing as dual creative processes equally involved in a form of anarchical expression (10). As we will see, this forms much of the motivational basis for the self-contradictory and formally aggressive narrative modes in Miller and Pound's manifesto writings.

Indeed, both writers work on the basis that the greatest 'truths' exist beyond rational analysis, an idea that was prevalent among avant-gardists in the 1920s and 30s, particularly – as Caroline Blinder points out – within Breton's school of Surrealism. From the Surrealists, Blinder writes, Miller inherited the 'premise that an uncensored flow of words without any conscious elaboration could in fact signal deeper metaphysical and universal truths.'<sup>332</sup> Miller and Breton share the aim of using writing to liberate unconscious thought and desire, a crossover that is comprehensively explained in Blinder's 2000 study, *A Selfmade Surrealist: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Work of Henry Miller*, and in Paul Jahshan's *Henry Miller and the Surrealist Discourse of Excess* (2001). As we shall see, Miller's statements on his 'uncensored, formless' method and his reasons for writing *Cancer* echo Breton's in his first 'Surrealist Manifesto' (1924).<sup>333</sup> More importantly, however, Blinder identifies Miller as having doubted fundamental aspects of Breton's approach and adapted his own aesthetic accordingly. These doubts and the suggestions for improvement that they inspired relate directly to the elements of his aesthetic that coincide with Pound's.

Though their own aims and conclusions will be seen to have differed dramatically, Pound and Miller both make aggressive use of self-contradiction to arrive at new and important truths, a similarity that is evident in Pound's Vorticist and Ideogrammic writings and Miller's semi-autobiographical fiction, the 'Booster/Delta' manifesto he composed with his friend Alfred Perles (1935) and his literary essay work of the

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<sup>332</sup> Blinder, *Henry Miller's Sexual Aesthetics*, p. 36

<sup>333</sup> Miller, *Letters to Emil*, p. 80, August 24<sup>th</sup> 1931.

1940s and 50s. This interest in deliberately creating paradoxical rhetorical pronouncements is exemplified by Pound and Wyndham Lewis' Vorticist Manifesto *Blast 1* – looked at in the previous chapter in relation to Pound and Gaudier-Brzeska's 'Vortex' pieces – a treatise in which they announce the movement's right to 'fight first on one side, then on the other, but always for the SAME cause, which is neither side or both sides and ours.'<sup>334</sup>

Thus, the authorial control inherent in Miller's centralizing of the narrative voice is inevitably at odds with his claim to abstain from moral judgment. He is caught up in an irresolvable conundrum – while his subjectivity lies at the center of the story and we rely entirely on him for its narration, Miller's narrator also attempts to remain subversive, *Cancer's* moral universe is attacked but simultaneously created and preserved by Miller the author, he is never quite the marginal figure he imagines himself to be. If he purports to cede control, his readers are always aware that this is, ultimately, a pose. As will become clearer later in this section, the amoral, iconoclastic rebel is deprived of legitimacy because the central power he claims to be fighting, ultimately, resides in his own iconic person.

Bataille, once again, offers useful insight into the paradox: 'Miller calls God the Father " the wormeaten son of a bitch" [and] "old goat"! he writes, 'However, if there does exist a God it is Henry Miller.'<sup>335</sup> The notion that Miller takes up the voice both of prophet and deity in his narratives will be explored further in Chapter Three in relation to a marked tendency among 1930s modernist writers to secularize apocalyptic rhetorical modes. Pound and Miller both display what Sarah Garland calls 'the repercussions to the self' caused by the occupation of Jeremiad positions in a post-religious age.<sup>336</sup> In this context, however, Bataille highlights the fundamental impossibility of Miller's anti-authoritarian stance. Miller might rail against the

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<sup>334</sup> Richard Aldington, Arbuthnot, L. Atkinson, Henri Gaudier Brzeska, J. Dismorr, C. Hamilton, Ezra Pound, W. Roberts, H. Sanders, E. Wadsworth, Wyndham Lewis, 'Manifesto II', in *Blast 1*, pp. 30-44, p. 30.

<sup>335</sup> Bataille, 'La Morale de Miller', p. 5.

<sup>336</sup> Sarah Garland, 'The Dearest of Cemeteries', p. 207.

authority and sanctity of 'God the Father', but he does so in order to claim the same authority and sanctity for himself as author, both of his text and the world he perceives. Thus his irreverence towards established power and collective moral standards becomes, in effect, an aggressive instatement of his own moral dominance in his world.

Miller's subversive pronouncements are compromised by an incongruous but inescapable conservatism at the root of his project, an idea that is addressed by Blinder and Jahshan as well as Gilles Mayne in his 1993 study, *Eroticism in Georges Bataille and Henry Miller*. Mayne identifies Miller's attempt to subvert morality as a perversely proscriptive rather than liberating insurrection:

Under the guise of liberalism, Miller's universe hides the most cynical, dangerous realities. His transforming evil into a good does not make evil a "lesser" entity but, on the contrary, what Heimonet calls the "worst" evil: evil not felt as an evil and just performed without the awareness of it (although with a certain pleasure); the icy evil of brutal force; evil legitimated, legalized and institutionalized – made a totalitarian system.<sup>337</sup>

Miller overthrows the tyranny of bourgeois taboo and 'fearful' conceptions of right and wrong, Mayne suggests, but inadvertently replaces them with a totalitarian system equally tyrannical and fundamentally less stable. Echoing Bataille's description of Miller as omnipotent and unaccountable in his own text, Mayne explains that his transgression is predicated on destructive, reactionary motives rather than a desire to improve the world. Consequently, he suggests, Miller is incapable of offering a positive means of going forward. Although this correctly highlights something of the anti-humanist/humanist reversal in Miller's aesthetic, over the course of this chapter and – more definitively in Chapter Three – it will be seen that Miller's connections with the radical conservatism of Pound and Hulme in fact imply something more complex, linguistic and humane than Mayne allows for. Mayne correctly identifies Miller's 'revolt against society as a necessary revolt against the language of that society', pointing to a crucial slippage between

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<sup>337</sup> Gilles Mayne, *Eroticism in Georges Bataille and Henry Miller* (Alabama: Summa Publications, 1993), p. 167.

progressive ideas and violent, totalising language in his work. Going on to describe Miller's 'obscenity' as a method 'to disclose a greater realism', however, he underestimates the possibility of a humanist purpose behind the use of shocking language in *Cancer*.<sup>338</sup>

Despite his oversights, Mayne sets an important precedent in Miller studies by exploring the possibility that the latter's subversive pronouncements might in fact be disingenuous. Blinder takes up a similar line of enquiry, claiming that Miller's work embodies 'the issue of whether true complicity can exist between literature and transgression'.<sup>339</sup> How can a writer of confessional prose, that garners the reader's attention through shocking revelations, claim to be genuinely subversive? His purpose, surely, is to perpetuate the narrative rather than disrupt it, to titillate rather than uproot existing structures and values? Sarah Garland takes this further still, questioning whether someone like Miller, who claims to refuse the writer's standard communicational tricks, announcing *Cancer* as his 'gob of spit in the face of art' (10), is perhaps even more desirous of a sympathetic audience than the conventional writers he despises: 'even gestures of renunciation imply an audience—*especially* those antagonistic gestures that maintain their purpose is to alienate and turn away from the perceived dictates of an implied readership.'<sup>340</sup>

These suggestions of inauthenticity or unreliability in Miller's rebellious persona are helpfully developed by Jahshan, who uses Roland Barthes' term 'the wrestler' to talk about *Cancer*'s narrative voice. Miller's readers, Jahshan says, are 'offended in [their] logic' because the narrator vacillates between positions of revolt and obedience. Directly applying Barthes' description of the inconsistently subversive writer, Jahshan argues: "Sometimes he rejects the formal boundaries of the ring and goes on hitting an adversary legally protected by the ropes, sometimes he re-establishes these boundaries and claims the protection of what he did not respect a few minutes

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid., p.167.

<sup>339</sup> Blinder, *Henry Miller's Sexual Aesthetics*, p. 28.

<sup>340</sup> Garland, *Rhetoric and Excess*, p. 8.



earlier.<sup>341</sup> Jahshan refers specifically to Miller's literary technique and form – an area that will be addressed later in this chapter - but the principle is equally applicable to Miller's moral stance. It is the wrestler's 'inconsistency, far more than treachery or cruelty', Barthes says, that 'sends the audience beside itself with rage'.<sup>342</sup>

I would argue that the narrator's straddling of contradictory moral positions in *Cancer* and *Max and the White Phagocytes* is not so much infuriating as perplexing but fascinating. Appearing to both 'detest' and 'revere' Max for his weakness and failure, to take pleasure in his vitriol for Sylvester while remaining aware of the fact that this vitriol is unreasonable and irregular, he intrigues rather than enrages the reader.

According to Jahshan:

[Miller's] text is excessive and unpredictable and seemingly "inconsistent" in the jumps it makes between the marked and unmarked passages; he is a transgressor of linguistic and literary laws, yet he can as quickly revert to normality'.<sup>343</sup>

This relationship with the reader implies something close to Pound's analysis of Lewis as a writer who 'hustles his reader, jolts him, snarls at him'.<sup>344</sup> In the same vein, the delirium that permeates Müller's outrageous monologues is acknowledged by the narrator himself as a ploy; a trick of sorts. His defiant declaration during the Sylvester-Tanya episode that he is 'cancer and delirium' – interpretable as illnesses he either personifies or carries – is crucial (65). Throughout his essays and fiction, Miller returns to the image of a corruptive (cancerous) and delirious mode of thinking. As he puts it towards the end of *Cancer*, his aim has been to 'depict the conduct of a human being ... in the grip of delirium' (244).

By delirium, Miller means a state of mind that induces ecstasy through a sense of disorder. It is helpfully explained by the term "divine jumble", coined in a letter from another friend, Michael Fraenkel, to criticize the unevenness of his work, and then appropriated by Miller to positive ends. 'As for the "divine jumble", he writes in

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<sup>341</sup> Paul Jahshan, *Henry Miller and the Surrealist Discourse of Excess: A Post Structuralist Reading* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), p. 17.

<sup>342</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The World of Wrestling' (1957), quoted in Paul Jahshan, p. 17.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17-18

<sup>344</sup> 'Wyndham Lewis', p. 428. See my p. 56.

reply to Fraenkel, 'I adore it. I see nothing to be gained by straightening it out.'<sup>345</sup> What he implies is a route to existential and artistic transcendence through the acceptance of intermingled and contradictory thoughts and feelings. As he puts it in *Capricorn*, 'my idea has been to present a resurrection of the emotions, to depict a human being in the stratosphere of ideas' (244). It is only by experiencing and expressing the true frenzy of his inner emotional life without attempting to organize or rationalize it, that the artist may achieve insight. To highlight the apparent madness in this method, Miller goes on to describe it as a way of 'collaborating with myself', thus being able 'to get off the gold standard of literature' (244).

And yet for Miller, like Pound in his appropriation of Confucian ideas, creating art is also a way to fashion *order* out of the chaotic materials of subjective experience. 'The task which the artist implicitly sets for himself' Miller continues in *Cancer*, 'is to overthrow existing values, to make of the chaos about him an order which is his own' (189). The result is a mode of expression fraught with 'confusion' and 'stuttering' that is also paradoxically 'nourishing' because it enables him to express the imperfection and imperfectability of subjective experience (189).

Crucially, delirium also implies the absolute loss of moral bearings, a state of mind that is simultaneously frightening and liberating, a reflection of what, in *Max and the White Phagocytes*, Miller describes as his 'first [and lasting] impression of the world – that it was good, *but terrifying*.'<sup>346</sup> As we shall see, Pound's approval of Miller's 'hierarchy of values' coincided with his development of an economic theory that connected the loss of social, political and literary values to the breakdown in the relationship between money, and the goods it is supposed to afford. When Miller offers to buy Max a meal in a restaurant of his choice, the latter is incapable of making a decision:

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<sup>345</sup> *The Michael Fraenkel: Henry Miller Correspondence Called Hamlet* (London: Carrefour, 1939), p. 171, June 19th, 1936.

<sup>346</sup> 'Max', p.157.

He wants to eat in a *prix fixe* at five and a half francs. When I make a face he points to a de luxe restaurant at eighteen francs the meal. Clearly he's bewildered. He's lost all sense of values (161).

Like Miller's narrator in *Cancer*, Max's delirium indicates an inability to abide by fixed systems of logic or value. In their loss of these restrictive and futile bearings, Miller's narrator and Max reflect the chaos and thus become valuable 'instrument[s] to reveal the naked truth'<sup>347</sup>

A crucial difference between them, however, is that Max struggles against his inability to differentiate between good and bad, helpful and damaging, even down to the apparently elementary difference between five and a half francs and eighteen francs. There is a harrowing contrast between *Cancer's* outpourings of ostensibly delirious, contradictory and unrelated images and the supplicatory letter the terror-stricken Max writes to Miller at the end of *Max and the White Phagocytes*. Miller marvels at the 'ecstasy' that comes over him as:

so much crowds into my head ... images, gay ones, terrible ones, maddening ones, the wolf and the goat, the spider the crab, syphilis with her wings outstretched and the door of the womb always on the latch, always open, ready like the tomb (253).

Max's rambling stream of neuroses, on the other hand, represents a mind collapsing under the pressure of unrelated, contradictory thoughts and emotions it cannot process:

I am crying and cant stop, I hear music playing in my ears, but in reality I hear screaming in the street, I suppose a pimp must have beated up his hur – it is a terrible noise, I cant stand it, the water tape is running in the sink, I cant do a wink of sleep I am reading your bok Miller in order to quieten me, its amusing me but I have no patience I am waiting for the morning I'll get out in the street as soon as daylight breaks.<sup>348</sup>

Max's abject helplessness, the contrast between his and Miller's 'jumbled' thought processes are accentuated by the spelling errors. Out of his depth psychologically

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>348</sup> 'Max', p. 166.

and morally, Max lacks even the basic grammatical tools to express his terror correctly. Miller on the other hand is caught compellingly between his twin desire to cede and retain control of the thought process, the narrative and his sense of morality. Crucially, Max serves as a warning to Miller of the risks inherent in his own degeneration into poverty and 'delirium'. To experiment with suffering for artistic purposes, Miller suggests, is to play with the dangerous possibility of genuine physical and mental implosion. To maintain control of the 'jumble' inside his own mind and heart, Miller must accept its divine ordination rather than impose exterior logical rules. By positing Max as the genuine sufferer gone mad he reminds himself of this terrifying potential, currently dormant but easily activated under the wrong conditions. As he puts it in 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere', 'madness is tonic and invigorating. It makes the sane more sane. The only ones who are unable to profit by it are the insane.'<sup>349</sup>

As Blinder and Jahshan have pointed out, this interest in the creative and philosophical possibilities within non-rational states was a way to continue where the avant-garde poetics of André Breton's Surrealist movement had left off. 'Scarcely anything', Miller goes on to write in the same essay, 'has been as stimulating to me as the theories and the products of the Surrealists'.<sup>350</sup> Explaining his reading of the Surrealist Manifesto, he writes that 'Breton's madness is a sort of "ice-box madness" ... not real madness', a state of mind Miller claims he inherited unconsciously – via the Surrealists' predecessors, the Dadaists - as a young aspiring author in New York: 'I was perhaps the unique Dadaist in America, and I didn't know it ... I was so lucid they said I was daffy'.<sup>351</sup>

In these pronouncements, Miller seems to acknowledge, rather than conceal, the contrivance at the heart of the Surrealists' and his own project, a paradox that mirrors his self-defeating impulse to abnegate moral responsibility. To cultivate and prepare madness like cubes of ice in a box, to stimulate the conditions necessary to

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<sup>349</sup> 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere,' p. 159.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., p. 180-81; *Capricorn*, p. 260.

produce the violence and self-contradiction of the delirious monologue, is to negate Miller's fundamental purpose, namely to embody his actual existence in his art. Throughout *Cancer* and his literary essays, he makes it clear that his project is motivated by a desire to move away from the 'dead forms' of representation in literature, and towards the kind of book that serves as a 'human document', that is 'exclusively biographical'.<sup>352</sup> Indeed, he states early on in *Cancer* that he 'will record all that has been omitted from books' (11). Intriguingly then, his deliberate development of a delirious mode of writing appears to jeopardize an overriding quest to produce a pure confessional form; a form that escapes the boundaries imposed on 'Literature' in favour of actual lived life.

As Blinder points out, however, Miller discusses his own attempts to explore delirious modes of thinking as an improved and *less contrived* version of the Surrealists'. Miller dismisses as self-defeating Breton's 'Automatism' – a method of artistic creation defined in the First Surrealist Manifesto as 'voluntary hallucination'. Indeed, in 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere' he claims that 'when we look at the Surrealist products ... we notice two elements which are lacking ... guts and significance. Without vital guts there can be no true madness'.<sup>353</sup> What he is getting at is a falsity that comes from what he goes on to call the attempt 'to establish an Absolute ... to usher in the glory of the unconscious'.<sup>354</sup> As Blinder puts it, for Miller 'it is the voluntary aspect which makes the process of Automatism suspect in itself'<sup>355</sup> since:

on the one hand, Breton stresses the fact that a personal resolution must necessarily motivate the Automatic process, but on the other hand it must nevertheless present itself without any rationalizing intervention.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> 'Un Être Étoilique', p. 288.

<sup>353</sup> 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere', p. 181.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>355</sup> Blinder, *A Self-Made Surrealist: Ideology and Aesthetics in the Work of Henry Miller* (New York: Camden House, 2000) p. 43.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

It is disingenuous, Miller claims, to 'try with all powers of consciousness' to produce insanity, indeed to offer up the mind as part of an ideological and aesthetic experiment, since the aim and result will always be a constructed rather than 'genuine' madness.<sup>357</sup> The correlations between 'Miller's fascination with creativity as a progressive force' and 'the Surrealist effort to capture the forces of the imaginary' are jeopardized, Blinder says, by the former's fierce individualism, gleaned in part from his reading of Bergson.<sup>358</sup> This area of Miller's aesthetics will be explored in detail in the next section. Although Miller's attempts at expressing the chaos of thought and feeling had some of their roots in Breton's quest to 'transcribe the unconscious', his interest in Bergson's *Creative Evolution* links him paradoxically to Pound's own anti-humanist existential philosophy. Through a reading of Miller's theories about the creative nature of artistic and existential perspective, my aim is to illustrate that Bergson, in fact, provides a central point of crossover and departure between Miller and Pound.

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<sup>357</sup> 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere', p. 181.

<sup>358</sup> Blinder, *A Self-Made Surrealist*, p. 14.

## 2.2 'Inside the Whale': 'A world dominated by vision'

'If I am inhuman it is because my world has slopped over its human bounds, because to be human seems like a poor, sorry miserable affair, limited by the senses, restricted by moralities and codes defined by platitudes and isms. I am pouring the juice of the grape down my gullet and I find wisdom in it, but my wisdom is not born of the grape, my intoxication owes nothing to wine ...' *Henry Miller, Cancer* (257)

The paradoxical intentions to achieve mental and moral order by accepting their opposite, and to accept delirium while simultaneously delineating it through writing, are addressed by Miller in his literary essays, letters and interviews. Amongst other things, this section will rethink Miller's intentions via Aldous Huxley's metaphor of living 'in the belly of the whale'.<sup>359</sup> The expression is taken from Huxley's 1929 article, 'Meditations on El Greco' an analysis of the sixteenth century renaissance painter's aesthetics. Huxley uses it to refer to the infernal atmosphere in El Greco's painting *The Dream of Philip II*. The left of the piece shows a court scene in which royal astrologers are depicted interpreting the Spanish king's dream. On the right-hand-side, where this interpretation is represented, an enormous whale looms, mouth ajar apparently swallowing the contents of the world – people, cities, mountains and the sky.

Huxley coins the term 'inside the belly of the whale' to express what he sees as El Greco's vision of a 'visceral prison' in which 'clouds, rocks, drapery have all been mysteriously transformed into mucus and skinned muscle and peritoneum.'<sup>360</sup> For Huxley, the painting's atmosphere is terrifyingly constrictive, an expression of the limits imposed on the individual by 'the physiological root of ecstasy', and a sign of El Greco's more sensually honest Baroque age in which 'even the loftiest experiences were admitted to be primarily physiological'.<sup>361</sup> He is troubled, but also exhilarated by the feeling the painting triggers in him – that sexual and spiritual 'ecstasy ... annihilates the personal soul, not by dissolving it out into universal infinity, but by

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<sup>359</sup> Aldous Huxley, 'Meditations on El Greco' in *Music at Night and Other Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970 [orig. ed.: 1931]), p. 57.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63 & 66.

drawing it down and drowning it in the warm, pulsating, tremulous darkness of the body'.<sup>362</sup> In contrast to Huxley's sense of terror, Miller revels in the constriction implied by this 'belly of the whale atmosphere'.<sup>363</sup> Writing about Anaïs Nin's diaries in his 1938 essay 'Un Être Étoilique', Miller takes Huxley's symbol to denote the human potential for existential self-sufficiency, for the creation of a fulfilling and contented state of being through the meditation on and appreciation of one's own unique 'vision', however grim and oppressive:

Standing before [El Greco's] paintings one realizes that *this is a world!* A world dominated by vision. It is no longer a man looking at the world, but a man inside his own world ceaselessly reconstructing it in terms of the light within.<sup>364</sup>

There is more to say later in this chapter about Huxley's identification of 'visceral' imprisonment in El Greco, particularly since he applied related ideas to the sexual aesthetics in Miller's *Cancer*, but Miller's interpretation of 'the whale' shifts the focus away – on the surface at least – from instinct towards a notion of spiritual and artistic regeneration. He uses the 'belly of the whale' as a way to positively reimagine the apparent limits imposed by the individual's field of vision. These limits become the means for *limitless* joy and invigoration, for the ceaseless reconstruction of the perceived world through a singular and inimitable vision. This, Miller suggests, is a source of hope rather than despair:

We who imagined we were sitting in the belly of the whale and doomed to nothingness suddenly discover that the whale was a projection of our own insufficiency. The whale remains, but the whale becomes the whole wide world, with stars and seasons, with banquets and festivals, with everything that is wonderful to see and touch.<sup>365</sup>

A fundamental tenet of Miller's philosophy, it relies on the individual's ability to defend him or herself against exterior influences, particularly if they prevent the

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>364</sup> 'Un Être Étoilique', p. 297.

<sup>365</sup> 'Un Être Étoilique', p. 302.



realization of his or her capacity for self-knowledge and aesthetical fulfillment. The whale, for Miller, represents the individual's field of visual, sensory and imaginative perspective. By constructing this in a way that is entirely true to the self, a person is liberated from the 'insufficiency' and 'doom' otherwise imposed by exterior values and expectations. It is only by privileging one's personal perspective over all exterior perspectives, and by accepting and appreciating its ultimate sufficiency, that a person is afforded access to limitless joy, to the 'stars and seasons, and banquets and festivals [and] everything that is wonderful to see and touch'. Miller is invested, then, in a paradoxical model that suggests perceptual liberation through the acceptance of apparently constrictive limitations. As he puts it, again in 'Un Être Étoilique':

Every one who has made a world of his own realizes that it is precisely the fact that his world has definite limits which is what is good about it ... because it is rigidly limited [it] permits the only true condition of freedom.<sup>366</sup>

The following chapter will extend this analysis of a profound contradiction in Miller's work, a schism between the importance of rigid confines and what the critic Frank Kermode called the 'torrent' of his prose style.<sup>367</sup> If he advocated the productiveness of limits when it came to the artist and the individual's 'vision', he was simultaneously engaged in a rejection of structural and narrative restraint through an emotional and instinctual process of writing. Indeed, as Miller explains to Emil Schnellock in his August 1931 letter about *Cancer*: 'I start tomorrow on the Paris book: first-person, uncensored, formless—fuck everything!'<sup>368</sup> In a later essay entitled 'Reflections on Writing', he expands on this method:

I scrap at will. I invent, distort, deform, lie, inflate, exaggerate, confound, confuse as the mood seizes me. I obey only my own instincts and intuitions ... often I put down things which I do not understand myself, secure in the knowledge that later they will become clear and meaningful to me.<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid., p. 296

<sup>367</sup> Frank Kermode, 'Henry Miller and John Betjeman,' in *Puzzles and Epiphanies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 95.

<sup>368</sup> *Letters to Emil*, p. 80, August 24<sup>th</sup> 1931.

<sup>369</sup> 'Henry Miller on Writing' (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 87. Originally published in *Black Spring* (Paris: Obelisk Press, 1936).



El Greco. *Adoration of the Name of Jesus (Dream of Philip II)* c.1570. Courtesy El Greco Foundation

The 'inside the whale' metaphor is useful to Miller for two connected reasons: first, as a way of understanding the role of the imagination in the individual's perception of reality; second, as a way of thinking about the literary artist's creation of textual worlds. When he refers to 'every one who has made a world of his own', he means both the individual human being's imaginative creation of the world he or she sees and the artist's creation of a work of art. The artist, in Miller's view, must recreate his or her own unique perceptual world, to be able to produce a truthful and important world in his or her art. As James Decker, J.D. Brown (1986) and Leon Lewis (1986) have noted, this is derived from Miller's fundamental conviction that art is above all else an expression of the artist's personality. As Brown puts it "the inseparability of the artist and his art is clearly at the heart of Miller's aesthetic vision", a statement that is supported throughout Miller's writing but particularly in his 1936 novel *Black Spring* where he proclaims that 'the book is the man that I am, the confused man, the negligent man, the reckless man, the lusty, obscene, boisterous, thoughtful, scrupulous, lying, diabolically truthful man that I am'.<sup>370</sup>

Again, the paradox lies in a form of anarchy as the starting point for the creation of beautiful, virtuous art. 'Chaos', Anaïs Nin quotes Miller as telling her, 'is rich ... is fecund', a site that embodies dissolution and birth, despair and hope.<sup>371</sup> Indeed, early on in *Cancer* Miller makes this point by reference to the origins of the universe, presenting chaos as the condition from which all life, experience and art originates – 'when into the womb of time everything is withdrawn chaos will be restored and chaos is the score upon which reality is written. You Tania are my chaos. This is why I sing.' (10). El Greco, Miller believes, communicates a vision that comes honestly and entirely from the disorder within. He has gone beyond the standard artistic process of simply 'looking at the world' and recording what he sees and instead *constructs the world* according to his personal instinctive vision. According to Michael Woolf in his 1992 essay 'Beyond Ideology: Kate Millet and the Case for Henry Miller'

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<sup>370</sup> J.D. Brown, *Henry Miller* (New York: Ungar, 1986), p. 38; *Henry Miller, Black Spring* (One World Classics, 2010 [orig. ed.: Paris: Obelisk Press, 1936]), p. 14.

<sup>371</sup> Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin*, p. 49.

'Miller's "delirium" or "divine jumble" are expressions of the fertile fields from which the narratives emerge'.<sup>372</sup>

This correlates with Pound's interest in Confucius and particularly with his focus on the ideogram 'Shen' – discussed in Chapter One. Although we shall see Miller's focus on the formulation of an existential and artistic vision from the chaotic mess of experience relies on an acceptance of disorder that is anathema to Pound, they are united by a common faith in the importance of the artist's ability to transcribe that personal disorder. Indeed, both want art that excludes exterior influence and comes, as Pound puts it in 'Ta Hsio: The Great Digest', from the artist 'looking straight into one's own heart and acting on the results'.<sup>373</sup> Both are interested in the notion that, the individual and artist must implement order in him or herself before attempting to represent order in the world. As Pound says of the Ancient Chinese philosophers in 'Ta Hsio',: 'Desiring self-discipline in the world they rectified their own hearts'.<sup>374</sup> With these shared anxiety about outside influences comes a concomitant antipathy towards the attempt to effect external change – in and through the aesthetics of art or socially and politically through ideology - without taking the self into consideration. In 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere', Miller writes:

The artist is the opposite of the politically-minded individual, the opposite of the reformer, the opposite of the idealist. He does not tinker with the universe: he recreates it out of his own experience and understanding of life. He knows that the transformation must proceed from within outward, not vice versa.<sup>375</sup>

Pound and Miller's mutual distrust of ideologues – and particularly Christian ideologues - stems from such concerns; an antipathy towards what Pound called 'meddling in the moral lives of others' and Miller 'saving the soul'. As Miller goes on to say in 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere':

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<sup>372</sup> Michael Woolf, 'Beyond Ideology: Kate Millet and the Case for Henry Miller, p. 167.

<sup>373</sup> Pound, 'Ta Hsio: The Great Digest', p. 21. See my pp. 64, 89.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>375</sup> Henry Miller, 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere', p. 193.

Let each one turn his gaze inward and regard himself with awe and wonder, with mystery and reverence; let each one promulgate his own laws, his own theories; let each one work his own influence, his own havoc his own miracles.<sup>376</sup>

In line with this, both Miller and Pound are involved in aesthetic explorations that embody vital questions around pure art as distinct forms of expression and communication. Miller's belief that the artist must 'gaze inward' and Pound's that he or she must 'look straight into one's own heart', indeed their shared sanctification of the artist as a rare individual who represents truth by harnessing his or her inner intuition, suggests a creative process capable of adding nothing – as Pound puts it in the *Cancer* review - 'to life as he has seen it' (88). The conflict lies in their shared desire for literature that, on the one hand, is precise, accurate and anti-aesthetic and, on the other, unique, imaginative and visionary. Echoing Pound on Miller, William Carlos Williams and Joyce, Anaïs Nin writes that Miller 'is suspicious of poetry and beauty. Beauty, he seems to say, is artifice. Truth only lies in people and things stripped of aesthetics.'<sup>377</sup> Peter Nicholls, in his study: *Ezra Pound, Politics, Economics and Writing: A Study of the Cantos* comments on the aesthetic/documentary axis in Pound's writing:

Almost all his work reveals a major tension between the visionary Platonism which coloured much of his thought about poetic language, and his strong desire to seize the concrete, to confront directly the material problems of his time.<sup>378</sup>

These issues of subjectivity and objectivity are also at the root of a major discrepancy between Miller and Pound's aesthetics. While Miller's 'Inside the Whale' metaphor highlights the crossover with Pound's Confucian ideas, it also demonstrates that their motives for producing art differed dramatically. As we will see in Chapter Three, Miller was primarily interested in exploring his own perceptual world, in

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>377</sup> Nin, p. 14.

<sup>378</sup> Peter Nicholls, *Ezra Pound, Politics, Economics and Writing: A Study of The Cantos* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1984), pp. 1-2.

effecting and representing his own very personal perceptual revolution. As part of this process, he playfully appropriated the language and ideas of social and cultural change. Pound, on the other hand, was always interested in detecting the larger forces and patterns at play in the world for the purpose of proving the intrinsic connections between literature, society, economics and politics. He believed – we shall see – in the power of words to effect real social, economic and political change, not through the dissemination of particular political messages but the realignment of language with reality. We shall also see that these differences derived from a fundamental philosophical point of departure: while Miller understood each subjective experience to be the individual's own creation, Pound believed there were indisputable 'truths' in the external world.

Pound's belief in an 'an interactive force', a universal 'theos' or 'virtu' that is the source of meaningful literature (dealt with in Chapter One), is integral to the distinction between his and Miller's approach to artistic perception.<sup>379</sup> While Pound understood the artist to be a detector of the 'energy that fills the world', subordinate to what Kenner called the 'patterned process' of nature, Miller credited the individual with greater creative control.<sup>380</sup> The 'inside the whale' metaphor has a to do with 'making life a poem ... the adoption of a creative attitude towards life' as preparation for the production of a work of art.<sup>381</sup> As Anaïs Nin puts it in her diary, 'as an artist he held the proud notion that every image came out of his own spontaneous chemistry, not from any synthetic formula.'<sup>382</sup> If Pound advocates finding 'precise verbal definitions of [the] inarticulate thoughts' of the heart,<sup>383</sup> a method of organizing the inner 'chaos', Miller's writing about art, on the other hand, imagines the individual luxuriating in the 'divine jumble' of his thoughts and feelings.

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<sup>379</sup> Pound, 'Axiomata', p. 361. See my p. 66-67.

<sup>380</sup> Kenner, p. 189.

<sup>381</sup> 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere', p. 152. .

<sup>382</sup> Nin, p. 17.

<sup>383</sup> Pound, 'Ta Hsio: The Great Digest', p. 47.

As we also saw in chapter One, Pound and Miller share a belief in the idea of the artist as 'antennae', capable of detecting and transmitting these natural forces, but Miller differs from Pound in his conviction that the rare individual who is capable of picking up on those forces must accept and express rather than sort through and organize them. This point of departure between them is connected to Pound's concomitant idea that the artist's antenna works in the service of 'the race'. As we will see, Pound's attempt to assert a political, economic and aesthetic alliance with Miller based on an idea of cultural, social and indeed racial responsibility rests uneasily with Miller's focus on the individual as primarily responsible to him or her self.

This distinction is complicated, however, by the fact that Miller vacillates between two conflicting positions: first, the self-fixated individual uninterested in the 'process' of nature, time, and the history of human development; second, the passive, metaphysical explorer meditatively waiting to find connections with the cosmos. In *Cancer*, the second position is represented by the trope of fluidity, of sewer water, semen and urine as conductive elements for latent universal energies to connect people and things. 'I ... love everything that flows', he writes in *Cancer*, 'rivers, sewers, lava, semen, blood, bile, words, sentences' (258). Indeed, he closes the novel with an ode to the 'process' of nature, gazing out onto the Seine and declaring that 'I feel this river flowing through me – its past, its ancient soil, the changing climate. The hills gently girdle it about: its course is fixed' (318). If Miller's aim is to in some way receive and reveal that 'flow', then Pound's idea of energy alignment has a more active and controlling purpose. This aspect of Miller's work will be looked at in detail in Section 2.4 'The Attraction of the Blemish: Pound and Miler's sexual aesthetics' as part of both writers' wider interest in sex as a means of establishing fluid metaphysical connections.

In 'Inside the Whale', his 1940 essay on *Cancer*, George Orwell homes in on Miller's use of Huxley's metaphor. For Orwell, Miller's theory implies a quietist retreat from political and moral responsibility, rather than the appreciation of the world in which

he or she exists as self-created and self-defined and therefore free from the circumscription imposed by objective reality. 'The whale's belly is simply a womb big enough for an adult' Orwell writes, 'there you are, in the dark, cushioned space that exactly fits you, with yards of blubber between yourself and reality, able to keep up an attitude of the completest indifference, no matter *what* happens.'<sup>384</sup> While he correctly identifies Miller's impulse towards the comforting constraints of a womblike condition, towards what Miller calls 'the luxurious, effortless sense of security which [all people] knew in the womb,' Orwell reads Miller as a simple and unflappable common man and consequently overlooks both the philosophical and artistic impetus behind the idea.<sup>385</sup> To Miller's mind, the fantasy of returning to the womb is universal, but it is only realized by a minority of people who are able to move beyond 'blind, unconscious yearning' and 'transform the world in which they live' to produce the desired conditions.<sup>386</sup> Rather than a metaphor for the ordinary, frightened individual's sanctuary from the outside world, Miller's 'belly of the whale' is a way to think about the especial artist's use of suffering and the imagination to effect existential and creative rebirth. Where Orwell sees a fantasy of prenatal security, in reality it represents an active route towards a new mode of aesthetics based on his realization that he alone controls his emotional and perceptual experience of the world.

Orwell's description of Miller's attitude in *Cancer* as 'passive, *accepting*' seems to be supported by the latter's many anti-positivist and anti-ideological statements.<sup>387</sup> However, this position of passiveness is arrived at, paradoxically, through serious ideological struggle and through a bitter engagement with many of the same notions of struggle, suffering and ideology undergone by Pound. Orwell is too willing to take *Cancer*'s laissez-faire declarations at face value - to reduce Miller to the symbolic status of a man who has *effortlessly* relinquished all moral and political responsibility. What Orwell fails to see is that Miller's apparent 'indifference' arises out of a

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<sup>384</sup> Orwell, p. 131.

<sup>385</sup> 'Un Être Étoilique', p. 295.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.

<sup>387</sup> Orwell, p. 128.



philosophical position that rejects ideas of collectivity as outmoded and in need of debunking. The existential transformations Miller discusses are part of his wider campaign to defend the freedom of the individual against the false and tyrannical ideal of a united, fraternal collective. As he puts it in the essay 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere':

The brotherhood of man is a permanent delusion common to idealists everywhere in all epochs: it is the reduction of the principle of individuation to the least common denominator of intelligibility. It is what leads the masses to identify themselves with moviestars and megalomaniacs like Hitler and Mussolini. (152)

Not only does Miller doubt the idealism of a so-called 'brotherhood of man', he locates real fellowship and 'brotherhood' in the human propensity towards 'criminality' and 'sin'.<sup>388</sup> His comments regarding 'the reduction of the principal of individuation' demonstrate a strong anxiety about collective enthusiasm and dangerously oversimplified ideas of boundless fraternity that distract people from individual self-determination. His promotion of the freedom of the individual in opposition to the hysteria arising in response to 'moviestars and megalomaniacs like Hitler and Mussolini' will, as further outlined in Chapter Three, mark Miller as fundamentally resistant to the fascistic aesthetics of Pound.

In fact, Miller's writing is permeated by a sense of the individual in perpetual conflict with the collective, a concern he dramatizes via the humanistic emphasis on spiritual evolution as the principal indication of societal progress. To this end, in *The Time of the Assassins* – his study of Rimbaud analysed in Chapter One - he promotes the 'abnormal' artistic individual as a heroic, truly 'human' figure who presages a necessary and inevitable evolution of consciousness by opposing the collective:

Until the old world dies out utterly, the "abnormal" individual will tend more and more to become the norm. The new man will find himself only

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<sup>388</sup> The writings of Georges Bataille and the Marquis de Sade will be seen to have influenced this subversion of the standard moral binary.

when the warfare between the collectivity and the individual ceases. Then we shall see the *human* type in its fullness and splendor.<sup>389</sup>

Miller uses his version of Rimbaud as a marginalized, 'monstrous soul' to advocate the individual's deliberate alienation of himself from society. He promotes the 'split' between the individual and society as both inevitable and positive since, far from implying a loss of humanity, it in fact makes the individual more '*human*'. Crucially, Orwell's notion of Miller as disinterested in the fate of the individual within society is contradicted by this conviction that the individual changes society by his or her deviation from collective moral and aesthetic standards. Moreover, Rimbaud represents for Miller the individual's full acceptance of his or her strangeness, delirium, and mania. Rather than reject the notion of human progress, Miller shifts its possibility from the political organization of groups to the individual. Thus, perceptual rebirth and regeneration become revolutionary acts on the side of individual freedom, and of humanity against oppressive collectivity. As Miller puts it in 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere', 'there is no feasible scheme for universal liberation.' The search for freedom, he goes on, 'is fundamentally personal and religious. It has nothing to do with liberty and justice, which are idle words signifying nobody knows precisely what.'<sup>390</sup>

The 'personal and religious' transformation Miller is advocating is helpfully explained by his description of himself as 'incurably optimistic' and 'incurably healthy' in *Cancer*. As we saw in Chapter One, these terms were also picked up on by Pound in his review of the novel. 'As against Joyce's kinks and Lewis' ill-humour', Pound writes in his review of Miller's novel, 'we have a last a book of low life "incurably healthy"' (88). As we will see, the idea of health corresponds to Pound's admiration for 'hierarchy' and order in *Cancer*. First and foremost, it suggests the location of psychological robustness in the body rather than the mind. Indeed, Miller first talks about his 'incurable optimism' and 'health' as a triumphant means of explaining his mental resilience against the daily humiliations of life on the streets:

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<sup>389</sup> *The Time of the Assassins*, p. 6

<sup>390</sup> 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere', p. 153.

Walking along the Champs-Elysees I keep thinking of my really superb health. When I say "health" I mean optimism, to be truthful. Incurably optimistic! Still have one foot in the nineteenth century. I'm a bit retarded, like most Americans. Carl finds it disgusting, this optimism. "I only have to talk about a meal," he says, " and you're radiant!" It's a fact. The mere thought of a meal – *another* meal – rejuvenates me. A meal! That means something to go on – a few solid hours of work, an erection possibly. I don't deny it. I have health, good solid, animal health. The only thing that stands between me and a future is a meal, *another* meal. (56)

By perceiving 'optimism' - interchangeable with psychological 'health' - as an indication of abnormality, corruption and arrested mental development, Miller posits pessimism and psychological and spiritual weakness as normal, uncorrupted states of mind. He displays awareness - astonishment, in fact - at his ability to retain 'superb health'. Though the appearance he gives is, as Orwell puts it, one of the 'completest indifference', it is in fact generated from a conscious engagement with the dysfunctional nature of his situation, and a defiant, unrepentant and unashamed admission of the socially, materially marginalized reality he endures.<sup>391</sup> Miller's assumption of an exterior position in his observation adds to the sense of it having been arrived at through a mysterious and untraceable process. A similar effect is produced when he expresses his state of mind on the opening page of *Cancer*, proclaiming 'I have no money, no resources, no future, but I am the happiest man alive' (9). By some miraculous transformative event, he has been rendered immune to ordinary human suffering.

This condition is clearly connected to his theory of suffering as a perverse source of 'nourishment' or sustenance (184). From its title to its final page, *Cancer* is built on the extended metaphor of inoculation against pain, suffering and failure, via a process of excessive exposure to these states, of spiritual regeneration within an environment more conducive to the degeneration of the spirit. Indeed, Miller constructs his landscape in *Cancer* out of a meticulous fixation on suffering, specifically his own suffering as an outcast in a foreign city. For example, he

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<sup>391</sup> Orwell, p. 131.

describes his first year in Paris, when he had 'not a single friend' as 'the golden period' (23). 'One can live in Paris' he continues 'on just grief and anguish. A bitter nourishment – perhaps the best there is for certain people' (184). As such, the city of Paris does not exist for him, outside the bounds of his intense suffering. Indeed, in response to a request by his wife, visiting from America, to 'show me that Paris ... you have written about', Miller states:

I suddenly realized the impossibility of ever revealing to her that Paris which I had gotten to know, the Paris whose arrondissement are undefined, a Paris that has never existed except by virtue of my loneliness ... This Paris, to which I alone held the key, hardly lends itself to a tour ... It is a Paris to be lived, that has to be experienced each day in a thousand different forms of torture (184)

Suffering is therefore connected to sincerity and existential autonomy. It is a necessary means, in Miller's system of thought, by which the individual attains complete authority over the world he or she perceives and inhabits. Fundamentally, he posits the grief and anguish he endures in Paris as nourishing because it is proof of his unique, self-created and self-maintained existence. Asked in 1959 interview why he continued to struggle as a poor artist in Paris rather than take a paid job, he says:

It's your own life, it's your own misery ... you're all of a piece. Whatever happens whether it's good or bad, you are taking it and not some double, not some divided self ... when you're ... naked, exposed and vulnerable you feel that you're carrying your own self as it were.<sup>392</sup>

By the same token, when comparing Max's suffering in *Max and the White Phagocytes* to his own, he writes:

That was something to go through – and come out *singing*. Luck! Well, call it that if you like. Call it luck if it makes you feel any better. Only I happen to know differently. Happens it happened to me – *and I know*.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Henry Miller, 'Henry Miller Recalls and Reflects: an interview with Ben Grauer, 1956', <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7Yx8Jz7ics> [accessed 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2014]

<sup>393</sup> 157 *Max and the White Phagocytes*.

The robustness and resilience Pound admires in Miller's narrative outlook is derived from this positive utilization of the emotions induced by failure and, indeed, a shared tendency to think about suffering in terms of virtue and sincerity. As mentioned in Chapter One, to tell the truth about 'the degree to which he suffers or is made glad' is one of Pound's fundamental commandments in his essay 'The Serious Artist'.<sup>394</sup> In this context, Pound is enamored in his review of *Cancer* with the idea of Miller as an honest sufferer 'from human necessity, not a searcher for the low life', thus presenting him as the antithesis of the pretentious bohemian artist who dabbles in poverty for the purpose of producing meaningful work (88). 'A searcher of the low life' could also be a reference to George Orwell's semi-autobiographical novel 'Down and Out in London and Paris', published just two years before *Cancer* (1933) and famous for its author's documentation of his partly voluntary descent into poverty and homelessness. Indeed, Pound goes on to talk about Miller as a victim of 'the destiny of our epoch, namely the monetary system', a claim that pits him against introspective artists 'fussin around with their innards' and socially conscious writers like Orwell who aim to report factually on the problems of their age but fail because their suffering is self-imposed.<sup>395</sup> Rather than contriving to experience poverty and degradation for artistic or ideological reasons, Pound believes that Miller records his experience of misfortune with honesty and integrity.

It is not difficult to see why Pound arrives at this conclusion about Miller. Miller presents himself in *Cancer* as someone who came to Paris an older, more seasoned sufferer than most of the contemporaries he encounters there. When his younger friend Carl (the fictional alias for his friend and literary collaborator Alfred Perles) sinks into a state of depression and threatens to 'blow his [own] brains out', Miller claims:

I've been all over that ground – years and years ago. I've lived out my melancholy youth. I don't give a fuck any more what's behind me, or what's ahead of me. I'm incurably healthy. No sorrows, no regrets. No past, no

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<sup>394</sup> Pound, 'The Serious Artist', p. 43.

<sup>395</sup> 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 88; Ezra Pound, 'Letter to Robert McAlmon', *Pound/Joyce: The Letters of Ezra Pound to James Joyce with Pound's essays on Joyce*, ed. with commentary by Forrest Read (London: Faber, 1968), p. 255.

future. The present is enough for me. Day by day. Today! *Le bel aujourd'hui!*  
(57)

Like Pound, Miller has no time for the idea of romanticizing poverty, dismissively saying of his wife that 'she wants to be poor in a romantic way' (155). Indeed, he describes himself as an evolved figure, a man who has used his suffering to propel himself beyond the neuroses, the bohemian vanities and the idealisms of his less experienced friends and peers. According to James Decker, Miller's narrator is able to 'move among' his expatriate friends 'grotesques' 'but avoids their existential emptiness, for his actions indicate not the decadent, ossified spirit of his compatriots, but a purity of intention.'<sup>396</sup>

While Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* might be read as an artificial experiment compared to Miller's Paris days, it is worth remembering that in *Cancer*, Miller is also explicitly involved in his own autobiographical 'experiment'. As he claims in 1963's *Plexus*, his writing in the 1930s arose out of a yearning to record the pain of his experience as a rejected lover and social, professional failure. Having found a semblance of emotional and financial stability by the time he came to write *Cancer* – through his artistic and relationship with Anaïs Nin, the friendships of other like-minded writers like Alfred Perles and Michael Fraenkel and his temporary position as a newspaper proofreader – he made a concerted effort to re-remember the worst of his troubles, to, 'suffer deliberately, in order to understand the nature of suffering'.<sup>397</sup> As he goes on to say, it was a task that involved the deliberate revisiting of a pain he no longer felt:

Once I thought that I had been wounded as no man ever had. Because I felt thus I vowed to write this book. But long before I began the book the wound had healed. Since I had sworn to fulfill my task I reopened the horrible wound.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> Decker, p. 68.

<sup>397</sup> Henry Miller, *Plexus* (London: Granada, 1981 [orig. ed.: Paris: Obelisk Press, 1953]), p. 460.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 460

This acknowledgment, that his suffering is manipulated for creative purposes, partially undermines Miller's claim to 'autobiographical' authenticity. In fact, his masochistic search for negative feelings to induce the creative process taints the notion of the 'human document' in various ways.<sup>399</sup> In her diaries, Anaïs Nin describes Miller's approach to his second wife June in these terms: 'She may destroy Henry the human being, but she fascinates Henry the writer, and he is more enriched by the ordeals she imposes on him than by happiness.'<sup>400</sup> Miller wants to show suffering as it really is – and as no one has succeeded in showing it before – but in order to do so he must contrive, first to experience and then recall it.

Nonetheless, this process is tempered by Miller's ability to acknowledge the inherent impossibility of his task. In most of his writings on literature, art is posited as a necessary but infuriatingly limited vehicle for self-discovery. In fact, he frequently presents the artist as a heroic figure struggling to embody life despite the obstacle of his or her medium. *Cancer*, he claims in the novel itself, is 'a gob of spit in the face of art', his attempt at 'the triumph of the individual over art' (19). Likewise, in *The Wisdom of the Heart* Miller argues that 'unconsciously ... every great artist is trying with might and main to destroy art ... to break down this wall between himself and the rest of humanity.'<sup>401</sup> As Blinder observes, 'With a life-long interest in writing which emphasized ... self-creation, Miller can perhaps be seen as one of the last great optimists when it came to believing in the actual capabilities of literature.'<sup>402</sup>

Again echoing the Surrealists, he recognizes an aspect of his writing that some of his more laudatory critics tend to overlook. In their 1925 'Declaration', Breton, Louis Aragon, Paul Éluard and Max Ernst claimed 'We have nothing to do with literature; But we are quite capable, when necessary, of making use of it like anyone else.' 'We are specialists', they go on, 'in Revolt/ There is no means of action which we are not

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<sup>399</sup> 'Un Être Étoilique', p. 288.

<sup>400</sup> Nin, p. 42.

<sup>401</sup> 'The Wisdom of the Heart', in *The Cosmological Eye*, p. 167.

<sup>402</sup> Blinder, *Sexual Aesthetics*, p. 26.

capable, when necessary, of employing.<sup>403</sup> Miller is not quite as candid or confrontational in his statements on the individual and art but he espouses a similar kind of attack. Like the Surrealists, he is aware that his insurgence must be mounted using the language and form of his declared enemy; like them, he also takes pleasure in the audacious inconsistency of his position, performing the role of the 'wrestler' – as Jahshan suggests – who revels in the offence he causes to the audience's 'sense of logic'.

With these thoughts in mind it is necessary to revise standard ideas about Miller's radical stance on literary convention. James Decker, in his study *Henry Miller and Narrative Form*, claims that *Cancer* 'disregards virtually all previous fictive conventions and forges a bond between form and individual virtually unprecedented', thus 'drilling to the core of literary hypocrisy'.<sup>404</sup> While we have seen - and will see more clearly in Chapter Three - that Miller is often successful in his attempts to express frenzied patterns of thought and emotion unfettered from a constrictive idea of morality, Decker misses the fact that Miller himself understood 'drilling to the core of literary hypocrisy' to be an impossible and ridiculous task. In his 1961 essay 'Henry Miller and John Betjeman', Frank Kermode is excessive and naïve in his criticism of Miller as a writer whose 'central muddle .... is that he makes his nihilistic gestures from a pulpit of very commonplace design'.<sup>405</sup> However, Kermode hints at an important truth – namely that Miller's rebellion against literary convention was transparently literary. Contrary to Kermode's belief that Miller was too absorbed in his own anti-literary posturing to see that 'disgust with *literature* is very literary,' the conspicuous syncretism, the borrowing of high modernist and eschatological images and ideas throughout *Cancer* – all of which will be further detailed in Chapter Three via his textual relationship with James Joyce and Oswald Spengler – suggest an awareness of this paradox at the heart of an ostensibly anti-literary revolution.<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> 'Declaration of January 27, 1925', in Caws (ed.), *Manifesto*, pp.445-451, p. 450

<sup>404</sup> James Decker, p. 76.

<sup>405</sup> Kermode, 'Henry Miller and John Betjeman,' p. 89.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.



In *The Time of the Assassins*, Miller understands this as part of a deeper, inescapable paradox in all serious artistic endeavors:

All art must ... must one day disappear ... Man must become thoroughly religious, not a believer, but a prime mover, a god in fact and deed ... and of all the detours along this path, art is the most glorious, the most fecund, the most instructive. The artist who becomes thoroughly aware, consequently ceases to be one.<sup>407</sup>

In other words, art can be a 'glorious ... fecund ... instructive' means for the artist and audience to experience enlightenment but this primary aim, when taken to its ultimate conclusion, results in the medium's own redundancy. Miller demonstrates the same contradictory dynamic between proclamations of purpose and a deeper understanding of the futility of his fight in *Cancer*. Miller's position as 'incurably optimistic' inoculated against suffering is built on the paradoxical notion that aspiration itself is an unproductive psychological and emotional mode. Just as he describes taking 'nourishment' from suffering, he also talks about 'the salutary effect' of 'the realization that nothing was to be hoped for' (103). This statement comes at the end of a particularly demoralizing evening spent chaperoning an inexperienced acquaintance around the brothels of Montmartre. 'Suddenly inspired by the absolute hopelessness of everything' he goes on, 'I felt relieved, felt as though a great burden had been lifted from my shoulders' (103). In other words, his exposure to the experience of intense humiliation carries with it the concomitant exposure to an equally intense longing for its alleviation, creating a situation in which he in fact becomes immunized against feelings of hope and longing themselves.

This notion of a sense of productiveness arising from hopelessness is emphasized repeatedly throughout *Cancer*, and particularly through the narrator's projection of Paris as an alternative to the New York of his early life. In America, he says, 'potentially every man is Presidential timber. Here it's different. Here every man is a potential zero ... It's just because the chances are against you here, just because there is so little hope, that life is sweet over here' (154-5). The Paris he experiences is 'a

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<sup>407</sup> *The Time of the Assassins*, p. 115

world without hope but no despair' (156). The conceit is clearly connected to the liberating quality of limitation, the individual's realization of the sufficiency of his or her field of vision and the relinquishing of his or her desire to fight to change it. By accepting and appreciating the limits of his situation and by ceasing to struggle against them, the narrator finds himself liberated to experience relief and 'contentment'.

In these terms, both Pound and Miller are interested in the possibility of a positive existential transformation as contagious to the reader and observer. If, as we have already seen, Pound expresses his own 'relief' at the 'undercurrent of comfort' he finds in *Cancer* – implying that Miller somehow transmits his contented state to the discerning reader – Miller also explores the idea of the comfort to be had in observing such 'incurable optimism'. Throughout *Cancer* and his other semi-autobiographical works of the 1930s, he presents his narrative persona as a psychologically and spiritually strengthening influence on the people around him.

Miller gravitates towards people in whom he detects a similar capacity for sufficiency within ostensibly insufficient, dysfunctional environs. He talks wistfully and proudly, for example, about his prostitute lover Germaine whose talent for self-preservation is rendered within a limited, degrading and cut-throat environment. 'However vile and circumscribed was that world she had created for herself' he writes 'she functioned superbly within it. And that in itself is a tonic thing' (52).<sup>408</sup> Germaine offers a similar sort of invigoration to Miller, as his narrative in turn offers Pound. Such an alignment raises issues surrounding the power dynamic between the two writers – specifically relating to Pound's partisan use of Miller in his battle against literary and economic veniality, which will be further explored in Chapter

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<sup>408</sup> It will be seen that this word 'tonic' comes up repeatedly in interviews with Miller and in his correspondences with other writers in the immediate wake of *Cancer's* publication, most often in explanation for his use of sexual obscenity. Miller talks about his personal experience of employing such graphic and taboo terms in relation to sex as purgatory and speculates also that the same effect is transmitted to his readers. These intentions and effects are dealt with later in this section when we come to focus on Miller's sexual aesthetics in detail.

Three. Indeed, Pound can be read as having idealized Miller the down-and-out, vagabond artist just as Miller idealizes Germaine, the down-and-out, vagabond prostitute. Observing Germaine's display of resilience, of 'superb' functionality in the midst of difficult and dysfunctional circumstances, Miller is somehow cleansed and restored to 'moral health'.

### 2.3 'She functioned superbly': Reimagining the dysfunctional in *Tropic of Cancer*

'No reverence. No piety. No longing. No regrets. No hysteria.' Henry Miller, *Cancer* (245)

'Now all my faculties become alert. I know how to avoid work, how to avoid entangling relationships, how to avoid pity, sympathy, bravery, and all the other pitfalls.' Henry Miller, *Capricorn* <sup>409</sup>

Behind Miller's admiration for the prostitute Germaine, there is something more complex still than the notion of suffering as a means of self-liberation – namely an agenda, partly shared with Pound, to re-envision human functionality as exactly its opposite. A close reading of the rest of the 'Germaine' passage (originally published in 1931 as the short story 'Mademoiselle Claude' by the American-French Periodical, *New Review*) is symptomatic of this process:

It gave me pleasure to sit on the *terrasse* of the little *tabac* and observe her as she plied her trade, observe her as she resorted to the same grimaces, the same tricks, with others as she had with me. "She's doing her job!" – that's how I felt about it, and it was with approbation that I regarded her transactions ... Germaine was a hustler. She didn't wait for you to come to her – she went out and grabbed you. I remember so well the holes in her stockings, and the torn ragged shoes; I remember too how she stood at the bar and with blind, courageous defiance threw a strong drink down her stomach and marched out again. (53)

In contrast to the disgust he feels at Sylvester's suppertime hospitality – a scene of quiet civility and polite functionality – Miller celebrates this most chaotic, unstable and dysfunctional of working environments, as ethically and aesthetically sound. The description works according to an intuitive faith in the virtue of the spirited enactment of ostensibly immoral or dishonest behavior. Like El Greco within 'the belly of whale' Germaine has 'created' the world in which she exists, or so Miller imagines. Just as Miller relishes the apparent grimness of El Greco's 'The Dream of Philip the Second', for the artist's full inhabitation of his vision, he sees Germaine's 'vile and circumscribed' world as beautiful and virtuous because of her complete

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<sup>409</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 207.

acceptance of and command over it. Indeed, Miller embraces rather than resents his lover's commodification of her body and her use of 'the same tricks' on other men as she initially used on him, because of a perceived naturalness within her performance of the role. According to Miller, she both accepts her position as a prostitute – as he puts it later in the text, 'she was thoroughly satisfied with her role' (52) - and carries it out with a rare courage and gusto, defying weariness and ennui to 'march out again'. Immunized against ordinary suffering, Germaine is also presented as immune to moral or aesthetic disapproval because of the conviction with which she enters into her so-called 'transactions'.

Germaine represents a useful counter-point to Max in *Max and the White Phagocytes* within Miller's theory on the aesthetics of destitution. The 'pleasure' and 'approbation' the narrator feels in her presence contrasts starkly with the 'disgust' Max induces in him, and yet she is appropriated for a similar purpose - to attack and circumvent the temptation towards the false moral positions of compassion and moral outrage. If Max allows Miller to articulate feelings about the physical reality of suffering and misfortune, Germaine's situation allows him to explore his ideas about the hypocrisy of standard humanist reactions in a subtler way. Again, by his deliberate detachment from a more instinctive or conventional moral feeling – from the urge either to sympathize with her for the physical hardship she endures as a prostitute or to resent her and her pimp for the 'tricks' they play – he forces the reader to confront poverty and prostitution as physical, real conditions rather than abstract taboos that engender moral and condescending responses. And yet the point he makes, as with Max, is a perversely humane one – namely, that admiring or denigrating marginalized people on an aesthetic level is more honest and virtuous than displaying compassion or moral outrage.

Moreover, Miller finds something innately honorable in the guiltless enactment of moral transgression. In his eyes, Germaine attains worth by her marginality and her perceived lack of anxiety either about using her body as a commodity or breaking a moral or legal taboo. His approving exclamation that "She's doing her job!" very

deliberately puts her 'superb' functionality as a sex worker in superior relation to practitioners of more respectable professions. Whereas Germaine is celebrated for her work ethic, the fastidiousness of his colleagues at the expatriate newspaper is regarded with contempt. Indeed, describing the working men's café he and the other newspaper workers frequent, he writes that 'it's gratifying to observe how miserable they [his colleagues] can look when they are obliged to sit beside a pimp who, despite the little hardships of his profession, lives a life of luxury by comparison' (159). Unlike Peckover's hypocritical mourner – who will 'buy a wreath and go the funeral [and] be praising the shit out of himself for the way he handled the situation' – Germaine and the prostitutes and pimps at the cafe are under no illusions and are therefore automatically absolved of their crimes (142). Similarly, if these men at the office are under the false impression that their employment is gainful and contains some sort of wider significance, Germaine understands and fully accepts the 'vile and circumscribed' nature of her field. Indeed, the parallel we saw in the previous chapter between Pound's appropriation of Miller and Miller's appropriation of prostitutes rests on the acknowledgment that ethical improvement is impossible. In both cases, the absence of explicitly moral thinking paradoxically implies true morality, a courageous appreciation of the world *as it is* rather than as the observer thinks it should be. According to Nin, Miller preferred the company of prostitutes because 'There is no pretense there. They wash themselves in front of you.'<sup>410</sup>

His identification of moral transgression as a purifying act is based on the belief that sinfulness unites the individual with collective humanity, as opposed to piety - which denotes a desire for perfection and thus spiritual and psychological isolation. It is a theory that he outlines explicitly when describing life before Paris in *Capricorn*:

I have always fallen in with thieves and rogues and murderers ... And is it not just because of my crimes that I am united so closely to my fellowman? Always when I see a light of recognition in the other person's eyes, I am aware of this secret bond. It is the just whose eyes never light up. It is the just

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<sup>410</sup> Nin, p.10

who have never known the secret of human fellowship. It is the just who are committing the crimes against man, who are the real monsters. It is the just who demand our finger-prints, who prove to us that we have died even when we stand before them in the flesh. It is the just who impose upon us arbitrary names, who put false dates in the register and bury us alive. I prefer the thieves, the rogues, the murderers.<sup>411</sup>

If traditional definitions of justness are equated with true 'monstrosity' it is because they encroach upon the individual's freedom to act on his or her instinctive feelings. The criminal, condemned by the authorities, is able to feel a genuine sense of fraternity with others, as opposed to the person who believes in false notions of the 'brotherhood of man' described in 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere'. It is a stronger, more palpable 'human fellowship', Miller suggests, since it comes from a feeling of complicity rather than the self-righteous, smug sense of unity people feel when they obey laws and condemn others who do not. In this way, he posits the acceptance of moral transgression as a manifestation of the productive 'split' between the individual and collective discussed earlier.

In Chapter Three, these thoughts on moral transgression will be examined as part of a wider desire to return to the state of psychological and moral impunity found in childhood. It is a fixation that permeates Miller's career-long semi-autobiographical project and is astutely identified by Georges Bataille in 'La Morale de Miller' as the foundation for his moral code in *Cancer*. By accepting the 'dire material and social' consequences of his refusal to comply with adult expectations of social productiveness, Bataille claims, Miller engages in the impossible yearning for a return from the 'exile from childhood'.<sup>412</sup> Although Miller presents himself as a 'a monster of immorality', Bataille says, he should not be taken at face value. Rather than the anarchic rejection of all attempts to categorize behaviour as good or bad, 'his books should be read as though the author wanted them to be " a search for moral values lost.'"<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 208.

<sup>412</sup> Bataille, 'La Morale de Miller', p. 1

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

Importantly, Miller's pronouncements on justness and criminality also share certain reference points with those of late eighteenth century pornographer and philosopher Marquis de Sade, a link Bataille provides the basis for by devoting a chapter to de Sade in his 1985 study, *Literature and Evil*. Imprisoned for the physical crimes of rape and torture but also for transgressing literary obscenity laws, de Sade believed that vice should be accepted and celebrated rather than suppressed, since it functioned as a necessary balancing force in the natural order of things. Bataille addresses this aspect of de Sade's philosophy by quoting a letter de Sade wrote to one of his critics while in prison:

Everything would perish in an instant if there were nothing but virtues on earth ... You do not want to understand that, since vice must exist, it is as unjust of you to punish it as it would be to poke fun at a blind man.<sup>414</sup>

Because the existence of vice sustains the existence of virtues, de Sade claims, the morally absolute desire for its annihilation is absurd and self-defeating. Miller's declaration of solidarity with 'the thieves, the rogues, the murderers' arises from the same kind of impetus. The just 'whose eyes never light up', he believes, are unable or unwilling to understand the simple fact that their 'virtue', their position in relation to criminals or sinners is dependent upon the very existence of concepts such as sin and crime. Miller's identification of a fraternal spirit amongst criminals relies on the premise that the people who indulge in and admit to their tendency towards criminality understand that all human beings are necessarily and perpetually subject to this fundamental moral dynamic. On the other hand, those who believe themselves to be 'just' falsely, hypocritically and stupidly attempt to evade the possibility of crime as in and of itself truthful. As Miller puts it in *Capricorn*, 'I know what it means to be human, the weakness and the strength of it. I suffer from this knowledge and I revel in it also'.<sup>415</sup> 'Down to the closest friend', he writes later, 'every man is a potential murderer.'<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> Marquis de Sade, 29th January 1782, quoted in Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, p. 111.

<sup>415</sup> *Capricorn*, 208

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.



Miller's interest in the unifying power of moral transgression is illuminated by Simone de Beauvoir's discussion of de Sade's work in 'Marquis de Sade: An Essay' (1953). Here de Beauvoir identifies two related questions at the heart of de Sade's work that can be applied to Miller: 'Can we, without renouncing our individuality, satisfy our aspirations to universality? Or is it only by the sacrifice of our individual differences that we can integrate ourselves into the community?'<sup>417</sup> According to de Beauvoir, a crime is the expression of a person's 'individual differences', differences that 'are carried to the point of outrageousness' by de Sade.<sup>418</sup> Moral obedience and the denial of the impulse towards vice are motivated by the desire to be 'integrated ... into the community', a desire that damagingly renounces individuality. Thus, Miller's embracement of criminality can be connected to a Sadean desire for the elevation of the 'evil' acts of the individual over the diluted 'good' of the collective. If de Beauvoir presents de Sade's work as an embodiment of the paradox between yearnings for 'universality' and individuality, Miller understands vice as the very resolution of that paradox – both the evidence of a person's uniqueness and the common denominator that unites all human beings.

Like de Sade, whom Bataille says 'based himself on a common experience', Miller channels the sensory experiences of pleasure and pain to move beyond questions of moral acceptability and towards an understanding of life according to the dominance of appetite and desire.<sup>419</sup> Miller's descriptions of prostitutes again point to the theory of the morally dysfunctional re-envisioned as functional, a way to connect the physical with the spiritual. As Pound suggests with his application of Mallarmé's line 'the flesh is sad' in relation to *Cancer*, Miller rethinks ethical approaches to sex in a way that focuses questions of good and evil onto the relative physical functionality of the people involved rather than the social or material context in which the act takes place. As mentioned in Chapter One, in his review of Miller's novel, Pound writes 'La chair est triste? Perhaps, but not till it begins to give

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<sup>417</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, quoted in Richard Seaver, introduction to *Marquis de Sade, Letters from Prison* (London: The Harvill Press, 1999), p. 6.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

<sup>419</sup> *Literature and Evil*, p. 120.

way to wear and tear', implying an innate virtue in the experience of sensory pleasure that negates or neutralizes the potential anxiety generated by the commodification of flesh (88). This observation is corroborated by Miller's terrace-side portrait of Germaine as a 'natural' whore:

Germaine was thoroughly satisfied with her role, enjoyed it in fact, except when her stomach pinched or her shoes gave out, little surface things of no account, nothing that ate into her soul, nothing that created torment. *Ennui!* That was the worst she ever felt. Days there were, no doubt, when she had a bellyful, as we say – but no more than that! Most of the time she enjoyed it – or gave the illusion of enjoying it. (52)

The impression here is aligned with Pound's identification of Miller as an individual whose code of ethics is unaffected by external standards. Germaine, like Pound's Miller, is thus liberated from spiritual, psychological or emotional suffering. To Miller, the physical sensations of each moment – the pinched stomach because of hunger, the bruised feet because of worn-down shoes – are the true signifiers of good and evil in Germaine's world, not the social standards imposed by others or even her sexual objectification. By her daily endurance of physical hardship Germaine - like Miller - is desensitized to the fears and anxieties that are concomitant with a more physically healthy and stable existence.

Interestingly – given his narrow-sighted political reading of Miller – George Orwell arrives at a similar conclusion about the psychological effect of material poverty in *Down and Out in Paris and London*. 'There is [a] feeling of great consolation in poverty,' he writes 'a feeling of relief, almost pleasure':

It annihilates the future. When you have a hundred francs in the world you are liable to the most craven panics. When you have only three francs you are quite indifferent; for three francs will feed you till tomorrow, and you cannot think further than that. You are bored but you not afraid.<sup>420</sup>

Orwell's affinity with Miller arises in part from his belief that Miller understood the reality of the common man's plight, recognizing that by suffering at the bottom end of the social scale he is relieved of incrementally damaging anxieties about morality

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<sup>420</sup> George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (London: Penguin, 1987 [orig. ed.: London: Gollancz, 1933]), p. 19.

or politics. Despite his misreading of Miller's 'whale' metaphor, Orwell recognizes Miller's fundamental objection to ideological approaches to poverty and criminality. The 'just' and the pious are criminalized by Miller because of their attempts to apply abstract, foreign and irrelevant ethical standards to the lives of suffering people; indeed, it is not only futile but contaminates those people who are in fact blessedly free of neuroses. Exasperated at his friend Boris' attempts to psychoanalyse the 'morally broken' Max, Miller exclaims: 'everybody wants to right the world [but] nobody wants to help his neighbor. They want to make a man of your soul without taking your body into consideration. It's all cockeyed.'<sup>421</sup>

Miller expands on this polarized picture of physical suffering and moral abstraction in his 1963 interview with *The Paris Review*:

Whenever a taboo is broken something good happens, something vitalizing ... Taboos after all are only hangovers, the product of diseased minds, you might say, of fearsome [sic] people who hadn't the courage to live and who under the guise of morality and religion have imposed these things upon us.<sup>422</sup>

Thus the individual's defiance of a taboo is not only courageous and self-restorative, it functions as an act of revolutionary defiance against historically entrenched fears and constraints. More importantly, it highlights the absurdity and irrelevance of the power taboo wields over the collective imagination, engendering the thrill of discovery and newfound liberty both for the person who breaks it and the person who observes this. These ideas will be seen in Section 2.4, 'The Attraction of the Blemish: Pound and Miller's sexual aesthetics', to lie behind much of Miller's obscene language and imagery in *Cancer*.

Miller's mission to overthrow the oppressive power of taboo comes from the apparently anti-humanistic feeling – evident throughout his writings – that the individual's subjective experience of reality naturally abounds with imperfection, a simple truth that should be embraced. 'The world', Miller writes in 'Reflections on Writing', 'is pregnant with failure, is the perfect manifestation of imperfection, of the

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<sup>421</sup> 'Max', p. 151.

<sup>422</sup> 'Henry Miller', in *Writers at Work*, p. 154.

consciousness of failure. In the realization of this, failure is itself eliminated.’<sup>423</sup> Because she accepts the imperfections of her world, Germaine demonstrates the existential benefit of this ‘realization’. Similarly, the judgmental observers of prostitutes – his friends from the newspaper office who ‘begrudge [Lucienne’s] dishonesty’ and the bourgeois critics and readers who condemn Miller for such ‘low’ subject matter – are dismissed as misguided.

Miller develops this further still in *Cancer*, describing a moment of sudden revelation after a nightmarish tour of the brothels:

In this sort of hair-trigger eternity I felt that everything was justified ... If at any moment anywhere one comes face to face with the absolute, that great sympathy which makes men like Guatama and Jesus seem divine freezes away; the monstrous thing is not that men have created roses out of this dung heap, but that for some reason they should *want* roses. For some reason or other man looks for the miracle, and to accomplish it he will ... debauch himself with ideas, he will reduce himself to a shadow if for only one second he can close his eyes to the hideousness of reality. (102)

Here, Miller draws an ethical distinction between actual and theoretical approaches to reality, between an understanding of human behavior that takes account of existence as infinitely complex and a desire for an oftentimes reductive and restrictive version of perfection. His notion of imperfection rests on the premise that the true subjective experience of the world is corrupted or ‘debauched’ rather than illuminated or purified by the development and application of ‘ideas’. As I alluded to in my analysis of Bergson, Miller and T.E. Hulme in Section 2.1, Miller posits not only religious but humanist models of social and spiritual progress as evasive of reality and therefore counter-productive. By making a conventional ideological or moral judgment on the sphere in which Germaine exists the concerned observer, paradoxically, ‘closes his eyes to ... reality’. Like ‘justness’ in *Capricorn*, the concept of diluting existence through the prism of ideas, of ‘*wanting* roses’ instead of accepting the ‘dung’ of reality, is deemed ‘monstrous’, unnatural and inhuman.

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<sup>423</sup> ‘Reflections on Writing’, in *The Best of Henry Miller*, pp. 242-251, p. 246. Originally published in *The Wisdom of the Heart* (New York: New Directions, 1941).

Like T.E. Hulme, Miller combines an objection to the ideological desire for unattainable social progress with a progressive, Bergsonian approach to the individual's apprehension of subjective reality. In line with his reading of Bergson, Miller posits fixed ideas as inadequate means for framing and rendering the complexities of human experience, instead advocating an appreciation of 'the multiplicity of things', the simultaneous existence of opposing sensations, emotions and values in one moment, as the fundamental basis for a meaningful existential and artistic approach. Miller's epiphany in the brothel echoes Hulme in its celebration of philosophical pluralism as a revolutionary force against accepted paradigms of social and political evolution. Miller's impatience with ideologues who 'close [their] eyes to the hideousness of reality' thus corresponds with Hulme's labeling of Bergson's average reader as a 'progressive dotard' who looks away from reality like a child 'turning up a stone and seeing the creeping things revealed'.<sup>424</sup> Indeed, both appropriate Bergson for the simultaneous purposes of liberating the individual from the urge towards unity and perfection and instating a new sense of order that understands life as it *is*, rather than as it *should be*. As mentioned earlier, in *Capricorn* Miller claims that after discovering Bergson, 'everything the brain has labored for a lifetime to assimilate, categorize and synthesize has to be taken apart and reordered'.<sup>425</sup> He goes on to say that Bergson 'endowed me with such a marvelous sense of order that if a comet suddenly struck the earth and jarred everything out of place ... I could orient myself to the new order in the twinkling of an eye'.<sup>426</sup> Hulme, in his essay 'Mr Balfour, Bergson and Politics', describes his own discovery of Bergson in similar terms:

The state of my mind before I read Bergson ... can be compared to the state of men imprisoned all their life inside a walled town from which they would fain escape. They have been told that outside the walls there are green fields and the rest of it, but they cannot legitimately believe in these things as long as the walls of the town remain unbroken.<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>424</sup> Hulme, quoted in Mead, p. 250. See my p. 131.

<sup>425</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 199-200

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>427</sup> Hulme, 'Mr. Balfour, Bergson, and Politics', p. 161.

Their common readjustment of perspective, to take in the newly revealed imperfectability of existence, and their shared intolerance of people who are unable to, implies a certain conservative realism in Miller's project that is anathema to his wider objection to moral laws. Unlike the radically conservative Hulme, Miller's skepticism about ideas of human perfectibility is apparently contradicted by his fundamental conviction that the pluralism of subjective experience means 'that everything [is] justified'. Paradoxically, the basis of this feeling is exactly the pluralist philosophy William James takes from Bergson in his lecture 'A Pluralistic Universe', discussed in Section 2.1. As mentioned earlier, James popularized Bergson's belief that life – from the external workings of the physical and material to the internal activity of the mental and emotional – can be defined according to 'the multiplicity of elements and the interpenetration of all by all'.<sup>428</sup> These two vital facts are 'conditions that can hardly be reconciled in the field in which our ... intellect, is engaged.'<sup>429</sup> The subjective experience of reality is, Bergson claims, characterized by the constant fluid motion and interpenetrating feeling, thought and memory, of a process of perpetual creation and invention that cannot be fully apprehended by systems of logic:

The intellect, so skillful in dealing with the inert, is awkward the moment it touches the living. Whether it wants to treat the life of the body or the life of the mind, it proceeds with the rigor, the stiffness and the brutality of an instrument not designed for such use.<sup>430</sup>

Bergson's premise is paraphrased and developed by James in 'A Pluralistic Universe'. 'Concepts', James writes, 'are not *parts* of reality, not real positions taken by it, rather, notes taken by ourselves, and you can no more dip up the substance of reality with them than you can dip up water with a net, however finely meshed.'<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 162.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162-63.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>431</sup> William James, 'A Pluralistic Universe', in *A Pluralistic Universe* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1977 [orig. ed.: 1909]), p. 113.

In other words, the use of logical ideas or models to capture the truth of existential experience is both illusory and absurd.

Miller's description of a moment in the brothel as a 'sort of hair-trigger eternity' in which 'everything is justified', his conviction that ideas are a debauched form of distraction from 'the hideousness of reality', appropriates Bergson's theories towards a different paradigm that is both pluralistic and anti-pluralistic in its purposes, both democratic and humanistic in its approach to people and values and curiously in line with T.E. Hulme's objections to humanism as a falsely optimistic ideology.<sup>432</sup> In attacking any restrictions on what he defines as infinitely complex and contradictory emotional experiences, Miller clearly corroborates the pluralist critique of conceptualization. Moreover, he appears to accept the proposition – rejected when he tells Sylvester to 'fuck your two ways of looking at things' - of all positions and values as equal and incommensurable, equally valid and justifiable.<sup>433</sup> Whereas Bergson and James employ their philosophical approach in terms that imply a celebration of variety, Miller's pluralistic theory splices it with a partisan accusation levied at conventional, unenlightened people who 'want roses' instead of accepting the 'hideous' multiplicity of things.

These contradictions provide the impetus for the alternative mode of sympathy Miller proffers in *Cancer*. In place of 'that great sympathy which makes men like Guatama and Jesus seem divine', Miller offers a paradoxical model that is both more and less tolerant, a mode of reaction to suffering that sympathizes with all behavior and experience and therefore gives the appearance of sympathizing with none.<sup>434</sup> It is best delineated by returning to Miller's 1933 correspondence with Anaïs Nin - referenced in Chapter One – in which he attempts to explain his 'indifference' to her recent psychological troubles:

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<sup>432</sup> *Cancer*, p. 102.

<sup>433</sup> *Cancer*, p. 65. See my p. 106.

<sup>434</sup> *Cancer*, p. 102.

It is health not indifference or callousness. It's a very human condition which lifts you, temporarily at least, above so many useless problems and vexations. You just can't be made wretched, sorrowful, miserable. You live there for a while, at the apex of clarity, and you see things with the naked eye and everything looks good, *is good*.<sup>435</sup>

This new approach can be read as akin to the state of 'incurable optimism' outlined earlier. Just as Miller implied inoculation against fear, humiliation and the subjective experience of suffering through overexposure and acceptance of them, he suggests a transcendental perspective that makes all anxiety appear futile and therefore unworthy of sympathy. It was not callous to react without kind words to Nin, Miller suggests, since at that moment he understood a higher truth – that suffering should be met with acceptance rather than struggle, since it is an integral aspect of the human condition. It is – in essence – a total reliance on intuition, close in origin to the higher state of sympathy that Bergson uses to explain his theory of 'creative' time:

That each instant is a fresh endowment, that the new is ever upspringing, that the form just come into existence ... could never have been foreseen ... all this we can feel within ourselves and also divine, by sympathy, outside ourselves, but we cannot think it, in the strict sense of the word, nor express it in terms of pure understanding.<sup>436</sup>

Nonetheless, like his claim that 'everything is justified', Miller's ideas about 'sympathy' are jeopardized by his presumption of absolute authority and his refusal to consider the person he addresses. By assuming his own position at the 'apex of clarity' and dismissing Nin's emotional issues as 'useless problems and vexations', he suggests an omniscience and benevolence that is in reality entirely self-fixated.

Significantly, Miller himself alerts the reader to the strange and suspect nature of his new position:

Sympathy alone flourishes, not a human sympathy, a limited sympathy – it is something monstrous and evil. You care so little that you can afford to sacrifice yourself for anybody or anything. At the same time your interest, your curiosity, develops at an outrageous pace. This tool is suspect, since it is

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<sup>435</sup> Miller, *A Literate Passion*, p. 159. See my p. 81.

<sup>436</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 164.



capable of attaching you to a collar button just as well as to a cause. There is no fundamental, unalterable difference between things: all is flux, all is perishable.<sup>437</sup>

Thus he presents the enlightened capacity to perceive existence and human behavior in its full complexity as carrying with it the frightening but exhilarating risk of losing perspective on ordinary human values. When the individual arrives at the conclusion that 'there is no fundamental, unalterable difference between things', he or she also forfeits the ability to discriminate between good and bad, beneficial and harmful.

Coincidentally, in his essay 'Un Être Étoilique', Miller ascribes the same visionary capacity to Nin herself, claiming that Nin's writing develops 'a new kind of sympathy, a free, non compulsive sort' born of 'the totality of vision' and an all-encompassing and all-embracing 'tolerance'.<sup>438</sup> Thus, he redefines sympathy as a way of behaving that comes directly from individual freedom rather than as a reaction to collective expectations. Sympathy in its truest sense, he implies, arises from the individual's realization and appreciation of the pluralist nature of reality. A street scene in *Cancer* forms a prelude to the epiphanies described above:

This is the moment when the deserted street on which I have chosen to sit is throbbing with people and all the crowded streets are empty. This is the moment when any restaurant is the right restaurant so long as it was not indicated to you by somebody. This is the best food, though it is the worst I have ever tasted ... "The roquefort, was it good?" asks the waitress. *Divine!* (18)

The rare expansive perspective, Miller suggests, apprehends the co-existence of 'best' and 'worst' in the same object, the same taste, the same image. In stark contrast to Max in *Max and the White Phagocytes* who – we remember – descends into a state of panic when asked to choose between an expensive and cheap restaurant, Miller serenely surveys and accepts the inherent uncertainty of an objective reality: the crowded street can be 'deserted' if he desires it to be deserted; the objectively terrible

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<sup>437</sup> Capricorn, p. 59

<sup>438</sup> 'Un Être Étoilique', p. 301.

roquefort can be 'divine' if he so chooses. Paradoxically and problematically he suggests that the enlightened individual – and particularly the enlightened artist – can gain command over the multiplicity of experience both by submitting to it and exerting his or her true personal taste – 'this is the moment when any restaurant is the right restaurant so long as it was not indicated to you by somebody.' As we will see in the next section, this is a fundamental reason for Pound's identification of a Joycean scope in *Cancer*.

Katy Masuga uses this exploration of the multiplicity and ambiguity of impression as proof of her theory that Miller employs language to assert its limitations. Citing a similar episode in his novel *Sexus* (1949), in which Miller makes 'small talk about matches with a driver, while hitchhiking ... inwardly ponders the fundamental meaninglessness, and hence infinite meaning, in any facet of existence', Masuga concludes that Miller's writing process is an attempt to express the same truth about writing.<sup>439</sup> His 'fumbling over objects trying to transfer them into words' is a knowing exposition, Masuga believes, of the impossibility of ever truly representing experience in literature:

Miller playfully encourages the reader to question the idea that the object being described could ever be something beyond its presented manifestation in the text and to give up the vain and desperate desire to establish a reductive mental picture of an object beyond the fragmented components of the slippery and dynamic prose.<sup>440</sup>

This analysis is useful in so far as it establishes the impossibility of a fixed, objective truth as something that crosses over from Miller's ideas on existence into his writing, but it neglects the strong sense of authorship implicit in the writer's power to dictate his or her impression of reality. In other words, for Miller the chaos implied by the collapse between crowdedness and emptiness, between 'the best food' and 'the worst I have ever tasted' does not mean that all attempts to express experience in literature

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<sup>439</sup> Katy Masuga, *The Secret Violence of Henry Miller* (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2001), p. 75.

<sup>440</sup> Masuga, p. 75-6.

or make value judgments in life are doomed, but that the discerning individual can achieve understanding if he or she adheres to a deeper, visceral and wholly subjective truth.<sup>441</sup>

In line with this, Miller's redefinition of sympathy involves a necessary meditative distance between the purveyor and the sufferer. As he puts it in 'Un Être Étoilique', Nin's work evolves from a position of 'exaggerated sympathy for others' to one where 'the birth of a sense of humor denotes the achievement of an objectivity which the one who has realized himself attains.'<sup>442</sup> In Miller's paradoxical mode of thinking, objective distance leads to a stronger sense of communion between people. Rather than reacting compulsively and automatically to the pain of others, he suggests, the enlightened observer perceives that pain clearly in the context of the wider multiplicity of experience and so is able to respond with humor and genuine compassion.

This theory is manifested in *Cancer* through automatic outpourings of laughter and tears that propel the individual beyond rational and moral judgment and demonstrate the futility of struggling against suffering. While counseling his friend Fillmore about his turbulent relationship with his French lover, Miller presents crying as an act of pure, unmitigated emotional release that neutralizes anguish:

The tears gushed forth and he blurted out: "I'd like to be home with my people. I'd like to hear English spoken. The tears were streaming down his face. He made no effort to brush them away. He just let everything gush forth. Jesus, I thought to myself that's fine to have a release like that. Fine to be a complete coward at least once in your life. To let go that way. Great! Great! It did me so much good to see him break down that way that I felt as though I could solve any problem. I felt courageous and resolute. (308-309)

Thus surrendering the body to the true extremity of a set of negative emotions is posited as natural and incontestably good, an antidote to the lie of physical, mental and moral robustness. Fillmore, who has been agonizing endlessly about his next

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<sup>441</sup> *Cancer*, p. 18.

<sup>442</sup> 'Un Être Étoilique', p. 301.

move, is only able to understand what he truly wants when he lets everything 'gush forth'. His cowardice is thus posited as a perverse form of bravery, an evolutionary emotional step. Using war as a loose metaphor for daily life later in *Cancer*, Miller writes that 'one goes on butchering and butchering and the more cowardly one feels the more heroically does he behave' (147).

Miller's exclamation that 'it did me so much good to see him break down that way' appears at first to imply schadenfreude – and yet when Miller writes that it is 'fine to be a complete coward at least once in your life', he refers to the unifying strength that resides in the confession of weakness, the breakdown of the façade of the benefactor and the beneficiary, the imperative and the suppliant. Fillmore is presented as having liberated the narrator perceptually and emotionally by experiencing his own perceptual and emotional epiphany.

In the same vein, Miller posits laughter as a way to relieve the individual of the familiar, corruptive patterns of thought, idea and moral judgment that dictate his or her reactions to each situation:

When you laugh until the tears flow and your belly aches, you are really opening the skylight and ventilating the brain. Nobody can persuade you at that moment to take a gun and kill your enemy: neither can anybody persuade you to open a fat tome containing the metaphysical truths of the world and read it.<sup>443</sup>

Like crying, laughter is valuable because it is automatic rather than cerebral, a spontaneous physical reaction that demonstrates the instinctive acceptance of tragedy, suffering, guilt and humiliation as integral parts of life. In the moment of laughter, the mind – so used to searching for reasons as to why something has happened, what the self truly feels, how the self should respond – is relieved of the desire to make these connections. By extension, the bodily experience of laughter neutralizes righteousness – about the self or a collective cause – and renders violent thought and action impossible. Ultimately, Miller implies, laughter affirms the

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<sup>443</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 277.

primacy of instinct and the absurdity of intellectual and moral investigations into suffering.

Where Fillmore's 'gushing forth' of tears demonstrates his realization and externalization of the full extent of his pain, Miller understands laughter as the catalyst and the symptom of an even greater revelation:

If you know what freedom means, absolute freedom and not a relative freedom, then you must recognize that this is the nearest to it you will ever get ... I don't say that God is one grand laugh: I say that you've got to laugh hard before you can get anywhere near God. My whole aim in life is to get near to God, that is to get nearer to myself. This is why it doesn't matter to me what road I take.<sup>444</sup>

The full implications of this equation between the proximity to God and the proximity to the true self will be further delineated in Chapter Three. As Sarah Garland points out, Miller is caught up in a suspect and self-harmful mode of rhetoric that secularizes the prophetic religious language of an earlier era, often presenting the first person narrator as either God Himself or a messenger of concealed, metaphysical truths. This kind of rhetoric, Garland writes, 'puts the writer in a double bind: modernity and industrial society are felt as devastating to the self, but these almost superhuman efforts to galvanize the self in opposition are also potentially devastating.'<sup>445</sup> In this context, uninhibited laughter is a pre-requisite for self-knowledge and a clear understanding of the world one perceives. In other words, laughter induces the conditions necessary for the artistic and existential creativity for living 'inside the whale': 'At that moment you can really feel the hole in the top of the head; you know that you once had an eye there and that this eye was capable of taking in everything at once.'<sup>446</sup>

The narrator of *Cancer* is prone to laugh at incongruous and inopportune moments, usually where there is nothing expressly funny happening and sometimes,

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid., p. 277

<sup>445</sup> Garland, 'The Dearest of Cemeteries', p. 207.

<sup>446</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 277

mechanically and disturbingly, in the face of people who are experiencing pain. As he tells himself in *Capricorn*, 'you are always laughing at the wrong moment, you are considered cruel and heartless when in reality you are only tough and durable' (51). The most illustrative examples in *Cancer* involve his friend Boris, who represents Miller's close companion and literary collaborator Michael Fraenkel and, we shall see in Chapter Three, is caricatured as a pompous pseudo-philosopher. Here, the narrator reacts to Boris' grief over his estranged wife:

It is so tragic and so ridiculous at the same time that I am obliged to stop now and then and laugh in his face. "Why do you laugh so?" he says gently, and then he commences himself, with that whimpering, hysterical note in his voice, like a helpless wretch who realizes suddenly that no matter how many frock coats he puts on he will never make a man. (30)

In this instance, the philosophical ideas behind the act of laughing are eminently attractive – Miller appears to be relieving himself of the burden of anxiety that comes with personal experience of suffering and the effort to empathize with others by having the courage and audacity to dismiss it all as futile and absurd. But then, characteristically, he sadistically asserts his own masculinity over his weaker friend. Like Boris himself, we are duped into a feeling of camaraderie and complicity with Miller, only to be let down. Unlike Boris, however, we are made aware of Miller's betrayal. In this sense, the anti-humanist reversal works the other way also: Miller presents laughter as a tonic to be shared in the face of mystifying, debilitating psychological and emotional pain, but quickly and unexpectedly subverts it to score a cheap point against a friend and consolidate his superior position.

Thus, while redefining sympathy and compassion in terms he intends to represent a real rather than idealistic view of humanity, Miller implicitly warns the reader not to trust him. This is the moral manifestation of Masuga's comment on Miller's textual game. 'The reader discovers the multiplicity of the text' Masuga claims, 'through a use of language that calls attention to itself, suggesting that what is being described

is never a limitation'.<sup>447</sup> In place of 'text', I argue, one might just as easily read 'values'. This is a man, we remember, who admits his ability to 'orient myself to the new order in the twinkling of an eye', and is determined to understand the world on his own terms, even if that means excluding the 'useless problems and vexations' of others. Flagging up his own unreliability, Miller reasserts his concerns about the fallibility of ideology and belief, in the process refusing to give the reader a stable or clear alternative.

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<sup>447</sup> Masuga, p. 76.

#### 2.4 The Attraction of the Blemish: Pound and Miller's sexual aesthetics

'Instinct, like sex, cannot go wrong, whereas ideas – and particularly ideals – lead us woefully astray and bring about various mental and nervous disorders. Therefore, sexuality is exalted as salvation.' Charles I. Glicksberg, *The Sexual Revolution in Modern American Literature* (1970)<sup>448</sup>

Significantly, both Miller and Pound posit sexual activity as another natural and instinctual cure for the 'debauchery' or 'cramp' of intellectual beliefs and ideas.<sup>449</sup> Like the automatic processes of laughter and tears, sex functions for Miller as a means of breaking free from the rigid constraints imposed by intellectual thought, allowing the individual to move beyond the absolute logical positions of the mind and towards an appreciation of the full scope of experience. Significantly, Pound was motivated by a similar anti-puritanical drive to Miller. As such, he will be seen in this section to have understood the appreciation of the flesh as a pre-requisite for individual and cultural health and sanity. If both writers regard sex as a vital conductive force in literature and life, this is largely because they make comparable connections between the creative processes of the body and the mind.

As a prelude to a comparative analysis of their sexual aesthetics, it is important to delineate how Miller's ideas about perceiving the world through a 'naked eye' and attaining a 'totality of vision' relate to Pound's belief in the similarities between Miller and Joyce's aesthetic 'scope'.<sup>450</sup> As mentioned in Chapter One, Pound bases his positive critique of Joyce on the premise that he is able to see and apprehend a wide range of experiences – from the aesthetically high to the aesthetically low. Moreover, Pound sees Joyce as able to perceive beauty in situations, thoughts and experiences that are apparently ugly or sordid and vice versa, understanding fundamentally that 'there is no beauty without a corresponding disgust'.<sup>451</sup> Pound's identification of these same qualities in *Cancer* is supported by Miller's own comments on his artistic method:

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<sup>448</sup> Charles I. Glicksberg *The Sexual Revolution in Modern American Literature* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971 [orig. ed.: 1970]), p. 130.

<sup>449</sup> Miller, *Cancer*, p. 102; Pound, 'Axiomata', p. 260.

<sup>450</sup> Miller, 'Un Être Étoilique', p. 301; Pound, 'Joyce', p. 410.

<sup>451</sup> 'Joyce', p. 417. See my p. 93.



In the discarded, worthless *thing* which everyone ignored there was contained the secret of my regeneration ... I had a microscopic eye for the blemish, for the grain of ugliness which to me constituted the sole beauty of the object. Whatever set the object apart, or made it unserviceable ... attracted and endeared it to me.<sup>452</sup>

By experiencing beauty via the 'microscopic' focus on 'the grain of ugliness' in an object, Miller suggests an aesthetic thrill. To seek out 'the grain of ugliness' is to posit that part of the object, person or feeling as distilled to a point of preciousness and truth, thus subverting standard equations of the beautiful and the symmetrical with the pure. He presents his project as an attempt to clear away the dross that ordinarily constitutes beauty in order to reveal an essential and fecund ugliness at the core of reality.

In this respect, Miller's position corroborates Pound's belief in the symbiosis of these two extreme aesthetic states. The microscopic, irregular blemish entices him because it exists next to the larger regular whole. In line with Miller's Sadean reading of vice and virtue, the perception of one depends on the existence of the other and Miller's aesthetic works, as Pound suggests, with that vital correspondence at its center. Abnormalities and defects are presented in *Cancer* as elements to be relished because their corruptive presence contrasts with and intensifies the natural and the beautiful. Observing the difference between sexual tastes in New York and Paris, Miller writes approvingly of what he regards as the French attraction to deformity:

I have never seen a place like Paris for varieties of sexual provender.... A missing tooth or a nose eaten away or a fallen womb, any misfortune that aggravates the natural homeliness of the female, seems to be regarded as an added spice, a stimulant for the jaded appetites of the male. (166)

Later in this chapter, Miller's sometimes unsettling detached and graphic objectification of the female body will be explored as evidence of the connection between his and Pound's essentialist rhetoric. In this context, however, it is interesting to note his belief in aesthetic ugliness as an aggravation of the natural and beautiful, a disturbing but alluring reminder of its opposite counterpoint. Miller's project, indeed, is permeated by the desire to show that the human appetite – sexual

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<sup>452</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 50.

and aesthetic – is in its nature ‘jaded’ rather than wholesome or pure, drawn to a certain ‘spice’ that exhilarates and tantalizes by its imperfect deviation from the norm.

Just as physical suffering, humiliation and hopelessness are posited as perverse sources of spiritual and psychological strength, aspects which are conventionally regarded as ugly become a source not only of truth but unparalleled creativity. As Miller puts it when describing the visionary quality of Matisse’s paintings in *Cancer*, ‘that feline beauty which has us by the balls ... is finished. To fathom the new reality it is first necessary to dismantle the drains, to lay open the gangrened ducts which compose the genito-urinary system that supplies the excreta of art’ (170). For Nin, indeed, Miller ‘has an eagerness to catch everything without make-up, without embellishment, women before they comb their hair, waiters before they don artificial smiles with their artificial bow-ties.’<sup>453</sup>

These associations of the unadorned and unembellished with an overlooked, vital truth become part of Miller’s conscious campaign against conventional moral aversions to bodily functions and sensual pleasure. Pound’s appreciation of Miller’s ‘scope’, indeed his ‘hierarchy of values’, comes to a great extent from his own antagonism towards censorship and the association of the body and the flesh with sin and dirt. In various essays about art, Pound rails against the ‘stupidity’ of prudish moral codes. In his essay ‘Cavalcanti’, for example, he is apoplectic at the ‘idiotic asceticism’ that infects artistic attitudes towards sex. The ‘belief that the body is evil’, he writes, is ‘masochistic and hell-breeding ... almost always accompanied by bad and niggled sculpture’.<sup>454</sup> To Pound’s mind, the question of sex in art is, like so many important questions, a clinical one – ‘it is not the body but its diseases and infirmities which are evil’, he writes.<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> Nin, p. 16.

<sup>454</sup> ‘Cavalcanti’, pp. 150-51.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

Where Pound understands moral squeamishness about the body as motivated by the sadistic impulse 'to punish, not to heal, the individual sufferer,' Miller uses the violence and obscenity that arises from graphic sexual language and imagery as a means of therapy.<sup>456</sup> 'I was getting the poison out of my system' he writes to his friend Alfred Perles in 1947, 'Curiously enough, this poison had a tonic effect for others. It was as if I had given them some kind of immunity.'<sup>457</sup> The roots of Miller and Pound's shared animosity towards 'aescetism' and 'puritanism' will be seen in Chapter Three to reside partly in what Pound calls the 'hell-breeding' Protestant ethic of Martin Luther. In this context, however, it is important to recognize that Miller intends his unadulterated descriptions of sex as an antidote to what he considered a poisonous collective moral embargo. As he puts it in the 1963 *Paris Review* interview:

I am for obscenity and against pornography. The obscene would be the forthright, and pornography would be the roundabout. I believe in saying the truth, coming out with it cold, shocking if necessary, not disguising it.<sup>458</sup>

To get a better idea of Pound's approach to sex and obscenity in Miller, the allusion to Mallarmé in his review of *Cancer* needs to be taken into account. In some respects, this is Pound's only nod to the presence of sex or profanity in the novel, in which he suggests Miller's unembarrassed celebration of the flesh as a means of escaping the sadistic and masochistic moral system described above. Separating the body from the moral questions that surround its usage, Pound implies that the individual reclaims self-autonomy by refusing these questions. The functionality of the flesh itself is presented as a democratizing medium that propels the issue of sexuality beyond narrow subjective suppositions about normality and depravity and into the realm of unarguable physical facts. Getting beyond presumptuous and reductive

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<sup>456</sup> 'Cavalcanti', p. 150.

<sup>457</sup> Henry Miller, 'My Aims and Intentions,' in *Henry Miller on writing / selected by Thomas H. Moore from the published and unpublished works of Henry Miller* (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 155. Originally published in *Art and Outrage. A correspondence about Henry Miller between A. Perlès and Lawrence Durrell* (London: Putnam, 1959).

<sup>458</sup> 'An Interview with Henry Miller', *Writers at Work*, p. 153.

judgments about whether the flesh is fit for use, the flesh itself offers a truthful and objective answer.

Sex in *Cancer* does appear to always be posited in terms of lust rather than love, the emphasis falling on physical satisfaction, and explicitly not spiritual communion. As Norman Mailer puts it in *Genius and Lust*, 'Miller is one of the first to explore lust separated from love'.<sup>459</sup> Miller's narrator talks about 'a quick lay' in the same way as he talks about urinating, sleeping and eating. 'Fucks happen as naturally in Miller's prose', Mailer writes, 'as a piss against the wall'.<sup>460</sup> Nonetheless, Miller's apparent callousness belies a profoundly humanist concern – namely his genuine belief in the spiritual importance of sexuality, if not for the union it creates between the two people involved then for the autonomous individual in relation to the world. As Michael Woolf puts it in 'Beyond Ideology: Kate Millet and the Case for Henry Miller', 'Sex is ... what Miller called the 'omphalos', the central point of a system from which all else flows'.<sup>461</sup> Throughout *Cancer* and in his essays, Miller talks of the genitalia as prime conductors of a unifying life force. 'Perhaps a cunt', he writes in *The World of Sex* 'smelly though it may be, is one of the prime symbols for the connection between all things'.<sup>462</sup> Describing Germaine, he says that her vagina is 'a magic, potent treasure, a God-given thing', indisputably 'good' by its capacity to connect him and her with the natural order of the cosmos: 'That Sunday afternoon, with its poisonous breath of spring in the air, everything clicked again.' (51) 'It glowed down there between her legs where women ought to glow,' he continues, 'and there was established that circuit which makes one feel the earth under his legs again' (53).

Woolf's reference to the 'omphalus' draws attention to the crucial issue of carnal pleasure as a way to bypass the abstraction of ideas. In the *Cancer* passage from which Woolf takes this word, Miller declares his desire 'to erect a world on the basis of the *omphalos*, not an abstract idea nailed to a cross' (244). 'Omphalos', in its

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<sup>459</sup> Mailer, *Genius and Lust*, p. 94.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>461</sup> Woolf, p. 175.

<sup>462</sup> Miller, *The World of Sex*, p. 134, quoted in Mailer, p. 94.

original Ancient Greek, means 'the navel' and was used to describe the canonical stone at the oracle of Delphi, thought by the Greeks to have marked the center of the earth. Since Miller also associates ideas here with the crucifixion, he suggests a replacement of the weakness and abstraction of monotheistic religious symbolism with a pure, primal and sexual alternative. In line with this, the totemic image of Germaine's vagina takes on ironic biblical significance – 'Whenever I looked at another woman I thought immediately of Germaine, of that flaming bush which she had left in my mind and which seemed imperishable' (53). Thus, he attempts to reanimate cold, dead religious symbolism by celebrating and sanctifying the female sexual organ, his play on the Old Testament image of the burning bush and a slang word for vagina emphasising the absurdity of moral systems that constrict and deny the pleasure and power of sexual activity.

The same impulse towards a non-Christian, re-sexualized mode of thinking is manifested in Pound's writing in his emphasis on the healthy religious symbols of pre-Christian and pre-capitalist civilizations. As we shall see in Chapter Three, he and Miller were both anxious about the influence of Protestant-rooted utility as an ideal in modern society. In the introduction to his translation of *The Natural Philosophy of Love* by French philosopher Remy de Gourmont, Pound posits the faith human beings place in machinery and utilitarianism as part of a grave and ill-advised migration away from the natural approach to sensuality and sexuality of ancient polytheistic societies:

In its growing subservience to, and adoration of, and entanglement in machines, in utility, man rounds the circle almost into insect life, the absence of flesh; and may have need even of horned gods to save him, or at least of a form of thought which permits them.<sup>463</sup>

Thus the re-animalisation, the re-sexualisation of deific symbolism – 'or at least a form of thought which permits them' – becomes a way of reconnecting the mind with the body and arresting man's devolution towards an inhuman and mechanical mode of existence.

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<sup>463</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Introduction', Remy de Gourmont, *The Natural Philosophy of Love*, transl. by Ezra Pound (London: Neville Spearman, 1957), p. ix.

In line with this, Miller and Pound share an interest in the harmful effects of desexualized ideology on the creative potential of the mind. 'Ideas', Miller writes, 'have to be wedded to action; if there is no sex, no vitality in them, there is no action' (158). He follows this up later in the text with an explicit reference to libidinal energy and the willingness to admit and discuss sex, as dual sources of creativity: 'a man who is intent on creation ... hitches the dynamo to the tenderest part' (251). Where Miller sees sexuality as the catalyst for valuable, creative existence and thought, Pound understands intelligence as the result of a heightened sensitivity to physical sensation as well as emotional complexity and intellectual argument. In 'Cavalcanti', he applauds the 'medieval poets' because, with them 'the conception of the body as perfect instrument of the increasing intelligence pervades'.<sup>464</sup> In other words, true intelligence is unachievable without a healthy appreciation of the body and its sensual existence.

Pound goes on to claim that ascetic doctrines which are 'anti-flesh' inevitably lead to a way of thinking that is 'anti-intelligence, that praises stupidity as 'simplicity', the cult of *naivete*', making a direct link between the Alexandrian Emperor St. Clement's 'prohibition on bathing by women' and the diminishment of worthwhile and accurate artistic and philosophical discussion amongst his people.<sup>465</sup> For Pound, the ascetic war against the flesh is ignorant and unpardonable, a corrupt campaign that arises out of 'the envy of dullards who, not having 'intelletto', blame the lack of it on innocent muscles'.<sup>466</sup>

These anti-ascetic ideas, this condemnation of the corruptive tendency to celebrate the mind in opposition to the body, is connected in Pound's writings to his use of sexual intercourse and fertilization as a metaphor for creative and intelligent thought. In the introduction to *The Natural Philosophy of Love*, he builds an argument around the extended metaphor of the brain as 'a great clot of genital fluid held in

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<sup>464</sup> 'Cavalcanti', p. 152.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

suspense or reserve'.<sup>467</sup> Though the premise is eccentric and consciously absurd, he uses it to make various serious comparisons between the production of thought, image, argument and allusion in the brain and the growth, release and fertilizing activity of sperm. He is interested, he writes, in the similarities between 'the enormous content of the brain as a maker or presenter of images' and the seminal vesicle's production of 'spermatozoid'.<sup>468</sup> 'Creative thought', he goes on 'is an act like fecundation, like the male cast of the human seed'.<sup>469</sup> The idea is elaborated on through a shift to the metaphor of vegetable rather than animal reproduction:

I am perfectly willing to grant that the thought once born, separated, in regard to itself, not in relation to the brain that begat it, does lead an independent life much like a member of the vegetable kingdom, blowing seeds, ideas from the paradisaical garden at the summit of Dante's *purgatory*, capable of lodging and sprouting where they fall.<sup>470</sup>

The following chapter will discuss how Pound also draws important parallels between a healthy, natural attitude towards sexual pleasure and reproduction and a healthy, natural approach to the economy. Thought, sex and economic activity are inextricably, mysteriously – and often troublingly – connected for Pound through a universal 'process' in drastic need of reform.

Miller's own belief in sex as 'a pathway to enlightenment' depends on the same kind of condemnations as Pound's.<sup>471</sup> It ultimately leads him to a polarized vision of the world, in which men and women who are sexually promiscuous and adventurous are celebrated as free and virtuous, whereas those who are prudish or respectably monogamist are despised for their inability to realize the basic potential for self-autonomy. In contrast with the prostitutes he canonizes, Miller reserves a particular disgust for people who are sexually modest or reticent. The women in *Capricorn* who reprove him for his inappropriate sexual advances, or deny their own carnal desires, are presented as dumb beasts who sense the instinctive urge for freedom but are too

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<sup>467</sup> *The Natural Philosophy of Love*, p. vii.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vii

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vii.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi

<sup>471</sup> *Cancer*, p. 126.

indoctrinated and afraid to act upon it. Veronica, a woman he courts but fails to seduce, is caricatured in just such a fashion:

If you grabbed her by the boobies she would squawk like a parrot; if you got under her dress she would wriggle like an eel: if you held her too tight she would bite like a ferret. She lingered and lingered and lingered. Why? What was she after? ... She was like a pigeon trying to fly with its legs caught in a steel trap. She pretended she had no legs. But if you made a move to set her free she would threaten to molt on you.<sup>472</sup>

Similarly, the failure to make good on sexual desire is the basis for many of Miller's attacks on men. In *Cancer Boris*, Sylvester and Sylvester's friend Moldorf are lampooned as sexually neutered - through neurosis, a lack of assertiveness, or a combination of the two. Sylvester, we remember, 'makes water' rather than making love to his wife, a symptom of his misunderstanding of his fundamental role as a man (65).

In Miller's world, sexual modesty and timidity are particular kinds of slavery, exteriorly conceived but fundamentally self-imposed and therefore undeserving of sympathy. Like Pound on religious and artistic asceticism, he sees the use of modesty and honor in defense against the illusory sin of sexual misdemeanor as an example of base, dull stupidity masquerading as sophistication. Later on in *Capricorn*, Miller turns to his own family to explain the doctrinal origins of this unenlightened approach:

My people were entirely Nordic, which is to say *idiots*. Every wrong idea which has ever been expounded was theirs. Among them was the doctrine of cleanliness, to say nothing of righteousness. They were painfully clean. But inwardly they stank. Never once had they opened the door which leads to the soul; never once did they dream of taking a blind leap into the dark.<sup>473</sup>

When Miller observes Germaine 'rubbing her pussy affectionately, stroking it with her two hands, caressing, it, patting it, patting it', his tone is not lecherous, nor breathless with sexual arousal but awed by the reverence and care the prostitute shows her sexual organ (50). 'She spoke of it', he goes on, 'as if it were some extraneous object which she had acquired at great cost, an object whose value had

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<sup>472</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 169.

<sup>473</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 11.



increased with time and which now she prized above everything in the world.’ (50). In *Capricorn*, by contrast, he rages at one of his conquests for coveting rather than celebrating and making good on her sexual endowments:

She thought so much of her beautiful white ass that she wouldn’t part with it for anything. She wanted to take it with her to Paradise when the time came. As for her cunt ... well that was just an accessory to be brought along.<sup>474</sup>

Clearly, Miller’s view of sex as an existentially liberating force is complicated and worryingly jeopardized by the retrograde, essentialist nature of these statements. By focusing on the physical release that takes place in the instinctive act of sexual intercourse, he paradoxically fixes and preserves women in ‘natural’ states of moral transgression and ‘healthy’ suffering. Moreover, because his imagining of them as virtuous is dependent on their sexuality, it is also dependent on their consolidation of his own ideological convictions about gender and class polarity. His quest to distill subjective reality to a point where it is dominated by instinct rather than ideology inevitably results in hyper-sexualized portraits of women. Thus, his progressive aims are yet again compromised by latent conservative concerns about a set of absolute values and truths that require protection.

Miller’s affirmation of Germaine’s sexual potency, her strength and importance in her role as a prostitute carries with it the regressive implication that, as a woman of a certain background and disposition, her value is purely sexual. Thus Germaine and her ‘flaming bush’ work simultaneously as symbols of Miller’s program for existential enlightenment and the maintenance of an essentialist creed. ‘Germaine was a whore all the way through’, he writes, ‘even down to her good heart, her whore’s heart which is not really a good heart but a lazy one’ (52). Moreover, she ‘glowed down there between her legs where women *ought to glow*’ (Italics are my own) (52). This gender polarization is emphasized further still by Miller’s comparison of Germaine with Claude, the prostitute he visits after his relationship with Germaine has ended:

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<sup>474</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

Later, when I had taken up with Claude, and I saw her night after night sitting in her accustomed place, her round little buttocks chubbily ensconced in the plush settee, I felt a sort of inexpressible rebellion toward her; a whore, it seemed to me, had no right to be sitting there like a lady, waiting timidly for someone to approach and all the while abstemiously sipping her *chocolat*. (53)

For Miller, the quest to expose human sexuality as imperfect, as perplexing but wonderful, especially when detached from romantic idealism, brings with it a troubling, instinctive opposition to women who fail to meet his symbolic requirements. If he venerates the quintessential female prostitute above men because of her capacity for liberation through sexual experience, he also follows the standard, retrograde impulse to judge women more harshly than men for the crime of hypocrisy and ignorance in this area. Miller strips away romance to reveal a vital element of life that has been harmfully repressed by insidious moral dogmatism but in the process exposes his own dogmatic intuitions about the way women (and men) should behave.

These 'inexpressible', felt truths about gender and sexual difference relate interestingly to Pound's assertion, in his *Cancer* review, that in Miller's world, 'the sense of sphericity of the planets presides' (88). As we saw in Chapter One of this thesis, Pound refers to Miller's ability to identify the inherent characteristics of certain nationalities – 'Miller's Americans are very American, his orientals, very oriental and his Russians, oh quite so' (88). These issues of cultural and racial difference will be further illuminated in Chapter Three through readings of *Cancer*. Most importantly though, Miller's statements about his Jewish friends and girlfriends will be looked at in relation to Pound's expressly Anti-Semitic pronouncements, principally as an example of Pound's misinterpretation of Miller's rhetoric and tone.

The paradox of the essentialism at the center of Miller's sexual and existential revolution is indicative of his desire – as Lawrence Durrell put it – to 'do down ... the dreadful sentimentality which disguises brutality'.<sup>475</sup> Miller's quest, in Anaïs Nin's

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<sup>475</sup> 'An Interview with Lawrence Durrell', 1<sup>st</sup> October 1985. Quoted in Michael Woolf, p. 176. See my p. 125.

words, 'to see the world naked, without makeup' inevitably and paradoxically ends in a totalising vision from which elements of aesthetic and existential subtlety and ambiguity are excluded.<sup>476</sup> Miller claims, as Nin says, to love the prostitutes 'who wash themselves in front of you'.<sup>477</sup> However, his fascination with their difference and their irreverence for social mores and taboos, willfully allows him to also lose sight of their complexity as human beings. As Norman Mailer puts it in *Genius and Lust* 'the cunts are always closer than the faces' and the idea is borne out by Miller's wife June, whose distraught reaction to her own depiction in *Cancer* is recollected by Nin in her diaries:

She died that night because of its brutality. She wept and repeated over and over again, "It is not me, it is not me he is writing about. It's a distortion. He says I live in delusions, but it is he, it is he who does not see me, or anyone, as I am, as they are. He makes everything ugly."<sup>478</sup>

June could well be speaking for Germaine, Claude or any of the women who appear in *Cancer* and *Capricorn*. In trying to explode others' 'delusions' - about themselves, about life and society - Miller in fact falls fascinatingly but dangerously under the spell of his own. It is a source of his enlightenment, his strength and his violence and it will be examined in more detail when we look at the blood and fire of Miller and Pound's eschatological narrative modes in the following chapter. At the heart of Miller's aesthetics lay a totalising supposition - that a truly humanistic attitude could only be attained if the individual accepted his or her truly anti-humanist urges. As Anaïs Nin puts it, Miller's writing, his radically progressive perceptual rebirth depends on the thrillingly paradoxical idea of doing 'violence to [one's] illusions'.<sup>479</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> Nin, p. 16.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid., p. 10. See my p. 166.

<sup>478</sup> Mailer, *Genius and Lust*, p. 37.; Nin, p. 34.

<sup>479</sup> Nin, p. 34.

### 3. 'The Festival of Death': Eschatology, Economics and Fascism

#### 3.1 'The Last Four Things': Inter-war eschatological obsessions

'I understood then why it is that Paris attracts the tortured, the hallucinated, the great maniacs of love. I understood why it is that here, at the very hub of the wheel, one can embrace the most fantastic, the most impossible theories, without finding them in the least strange ... Here all boundaries fade away and the world reveals itself for the mad slaughterhouse that it is. The treadmill stretches away to infinitude, the hatches are closed down tight, logic runs rampant, with bloody cleaver flashing. The air is chill and stagnant, the language apocalyptic. Not an exit sign anywhere; no issue save death.' Henry Miller, *Cancer*<sup>480</sup>

'The milieu of La Coupole seen from somewhere near its nadir, but [not] thereby limited, the circle of reference considerably wider than that of Joyce's fetid Dublin, or the more special inferno of [Wyndham Lewis'] *The Apes [of God]*.' Ezra Pound, 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*'<sup>481</sup>

Pound and Miller's arrival at the shared aesthetic and ethical positions outlined in the previous chapter is connected to a mutual preoccupation with death, divine judgment and the prospect of an impending millennial dawn; tropes that were commonplace in much of Anglo-American avant-garde literature in the first three decades of the twentieth century but connect in peculiar ways across the works of these two writers. This common interest will be explored here, in the final chapter of the thesis, to consolidate the picture of Miller's radical aesthetic and moral project formed over the previous two chapters.

'Eschatology' (defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'the department of theological science concerned with 'the four last things: death, judgment, heaven and hell') has widely been identified – most notably by Frank Kermode, Northrop Frye and Bruce Comens – as a crucial concern in the writings of some of the principal members of the early twentieth century modernist avant-garde.<sup>482</sup> Indeed, in his 1967 lecture 'The Modern Apocalypse' Kermode declared that 'during the first phase

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<sup>480</sup> *Cancer*, p. 186.

<sup>481</sup> 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 87.

<sup>482</sup> OED.com, 'Home: Oxford English Dictionary', 1709  
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/64374?redirectedFrom=Eschatology#eid>>  
[accessed 10th December 2013]

of modernism, which as far as the English language goes we associate with Pound and Yeats, Wyndham Lewis and Joyce ... the mood was predominantly eschatological'.<sup>483</sup> Kermode's seminal lecture will help to frame my conclusions about Pound in relation to "prophetic" theories and pronouncements, both in terms of Miller and Pound's contemporaries and of writers traditionally associated with later modernisms. Indeed, Kermode goes on to draw a favorable comparison between this 'phase of modernism' and the phase occurring in the 1960s, when he himself was working as a critic.<sup>484</sup> In the writings of Pound, Lewis, Yeats and Joyce - Kermode claims - 'a skepticism and a refined traditionalism held in check what threatened to be a bad case of literary primitivism', whereas writers such as Jack Kerouac, Norman Mailer and Allen Ginsberg suffer for their lack of these checks.<sup>485</sup> Miller's own position as an author of 'eschatological' prose will be shown to fall somewhere between the 'early modernists' and the figures Kermode reluctantly discusses as their successors.

That position is implied by Sarah Garland in her essay 'The Dearest of Cemeteries', which connects Comens' ideas to Leon Surette's study of modernism and the apocalyptic, *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, and the Occult* (1993), and reads Miller through both. Surette notes that Pound, W.B. Yeats and D.H. Lawrence were heavily influenced by the ideas of Frederick Nietzsche, A.R. Orage - Pound's early editor at 1910s London periodical *The New Age* - and early twentieth century German meta-historian Oswald Spengler. When Kermode refers to the 'eschatological' 'mood' of the 'first phase' of modernism, he is commenting on a literary atmosphere in which a common emphasis fell on ideas relating to the epochal significance of the early twentieth century, the immanence of decay and the imminence of destruction in Western society. Comens, in his 1995 study *After the Apocalypse*, is one of many modernist scholars to explain this in relation to World War One and its predominance in the imaginations of writers like Pound, W.B. Yeats and Gertrude Stein. As Comens, Marjorie Perloff (*The Futurist Moment*, 1986) and

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<sup>483</sup> Kermode, 'The Modern Apocalypse', p. 104.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

Mary Ann Caws ('The Poetics of the Manifesto: Nowness and Newness', 2001) all point out, the period before, during and immediately succeeding the First World War also saw the emergence of various movements whose manifestos are steeped in language condemning the decadence of the old guard – political and artistic. Many of these suggest the inevitability of an apocalyptic military conflict that will create conditions conducive to aesthetic and political renewal. 'Pound's wartime artistic milieu' Comens claims, 'was particularly rife with apocalyptic rhetoric: consider the Dadaists' destructive impulses, the Futurists' glorification of war, the Vorticists' own *Blast*.'<sup>486</sup>

Indeed, William Wees (*Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, 1972) and Marjorie Perloff (*The Futurist Moment*, 1986) have both pointed out that, despite Pound and Lewis' statements to the contrary, Marinetti's Italian Futurist movement was a major influence on Vorticism, providing it with the precedent for its militaristic rhetoric as well as a foreign counter-model against which to define itself.<sup>487</sup> The first *Blast* manifesto, for example, conspicuously commandeers Futurism's tone and typeface in its attack on the "'advanced", perfected, democratic Futurist individual of Mr. Marinetti's limited imagination'.<sup>488</sup> Likewise – as we have seen – Miller openly declared his solidarity with the anarchical and brazenly incendiary artistic pronouncements of the Dadaists and Surrealists. He went on, indeed, to mimic their syntactical formula for 1936's 'The Booster', his, Lawrence Durrell and Alfred Perles' own semi-satirical attempt at a manifesto. More importantly, there are clear correlations between the incendiary nature of Pound and Miller's prose and the calls to arms that permeate Lewis and Pound's Vorticist writings. As Wees puts it, 'the 'very militant years' of 1910-14 were the germinating period of Vorticism, and the

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<sup>486</sup> Comens, *Apocalypse and After*, p. 29. We have seen and will see more evidence to support Comens' claims regarding the Vorticists. As for the Futurists, their 1910 manifesto announces 'we will glorify war – the world's only hygiene.' ('The Manifesto', in Mary Ann Caws (ed.), *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, p. 187).

<sup>487</sup> As Perloff puts it in *The Futurist Moment* 'to study *Blast* and related books and journals of 1914 is to see that, whatever the protests lodged by Lewis, Pound, and their artist friends, Vorticism would not have come into being without the Futurist model' (p. 173).

<sup>488</sup> 'Manifesto II', in Lewis (ed.), *Blast 1*, p. 24.

last summer [before the First World War] produced the movement in full bloom'.<sup>489</sup> Wees also asserts that the Vorticist movement 'gave to the times an aesthetic and body of painting, sculpture and writing that transformed violence into art', suggesting the conversion of brute force into written language discussed in Chapter Two as a key ingredient of Pound's poetry and Miller's diatribes.<sup>490</sup>

The concerted monstrosity of both writers' narratives must be understood in two contexts - first, the pre-war atmosphere that shaped Pound's 1910s modernising project and, secondly, the cultural trauma of the Great War. In contrast to the manic but triumphalist condemnation of literary 'obstructionists' in Pound's poem 'Salutation the Third', his essays of the 1920s and 30s are characterized by social and economic ideas that are equally manic but delivered with unsettling certainty. Miller's own reaction to the traumatized cultural landscape of post-war Europe incorporated an awareness of the mania and its roots in suffering as well as a conviction that real artistic and existential progress lay in the acceptance of irrationality rather than rational schemes for reform. As referenced among the epigraphs at the beginning of this chapter, Miller luxuriates in the idea that he has entered a post-war Paris in which morality has been permanently and irrevocably jilted: 'the world reveals itself for the mad slaughterhouse that it is. The treadmill stretches away to infinitude, the hatches are closed down tight, logic runs rampant.'

Though Pound did not fight in France, he was gravely affected by the wartime deaths of his two close friends and artistic allies, T.E. Hulme and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. Consequently, his writing after 1918 bears the mark of an obsessive desire to make sense of that war, and indeed *all* wars, in the context of larger political and economic forces. As William Chace puts it in *The Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot*, Pound 'sought to discover why wars were apparently so inevitable, so much the final product of laws and pressures beyond individual control'.<sup>491</sup> Pound's understanding of Miller as a writer of the 'prospect' must therefore be looked at in

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<sup>489</sup> Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, p. 16.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>491</sup> Chace, p. 24

relation to the former's anti-war zeal and his notion that a revolutionary, millennial change could be brought about in the aftermath of a so-called 'Armageddon'.

By contrast, as Sarah Garland points out in 'The Dearest of Cemeteries', the effect of war on Miller's writing is more appropriately read via its absence from *Cancer's* main narrative. Garland references Richard Sheppard's *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism*, mentioned in Chapter Two of this thesis:

The modern megalopolis, mass politics and culture, and the Great War [have] increasingly come to be seen as complex, interrelated and deeply disturbing manifestations of modernity that ... may be strikingly visible in modernist texts but that may also exist there ... as their "repressed other"<sup>492</sup>

Sheppard's observations, Garland claims, bring new significance to Miller's reluctance to write explicitly about the First World War, the radicalized politics it left in its wake or the increasing likelihood of another mass conflict. Indeed, despite living in a major European city deeply affected by the events of 1914-18, Miller 'never writes of the war, instead he writes around it and through it, using the apocalyptic voice to try to devour and absorb the power of death, disease and conflict.'<sup>493</sup> We will see that Pound and Miller's mutual attraction - Pound's belief in Miller as a writer who was plugged into a meta-historical 'process', and Miller's feeling that Pound's *Cantos* 'sounds like stuff I say to myself all day long' - exists despite these differences; an anomaly that again points to Pound's deeper misunderstanding of Miller's purposes.<sup>494</sup> In Section 3.3, 'Miller's Inferno: A Poundian economic reading of *Tropic of Cancer*', Miller will be seen to have used economics to express ideas about the virtue of expending energy (specifically non-reproductive sexual energy) without the promise of return - ideas that ally him in crucial ways with Georges Bataille rather than Pound. More importantly, Miller is drawn to Spengler's eschatological prophecies for 'the intoxicating' effect of the language, making it clear that he feels this attraction despite rather than because of the intellectual theories expounded in *The Decline of the West*. Pound's myopia concerning this crucial element in Miller's approach to eschatology clearly

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<sup>492</sup> Sheppard, *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism*, p. 7.

<sup>493</sup> Garland, 'The Dearest of Cemeteries', p. 209.

<sup>494</sup> *Letters to Emil*, p. 4



undermines his reading of *Cancer* as a reflection of certain economic, cultural and social patterns but it also makes it paradoxically more relevant. Indeed, regardless of Miller's purposes, Pound's insistence on their ideological compatibility points again to the potential for an unintended slippage between progressiveness and regression in Miller's work.

Leon Surette offers a helpful, alternative means of approaching the 'intoxicating' effect of the language of 'end times' by understanding it in the context of a growing interest in the occult at the beginning of the twentieth century. Indeed, Surette redefines the eschatological mode in work by Pound and Yeats as incorporating precisely the 'literary primitivism' Kermode claims they manage to avoid. 'Pound's work', Surette writes, 'captures and expresses a set of passions, fears, hopes, and errors that were ubiquitous in the political and cultural history of the first half of the century.'<sup>495</sup> Thus Pound's literary and cultural essays can be read as evidence of the normalization of intellectually suspect 'occult' ideas in the works of otherwise skeptical English artists of the 1910s and 20s. Surette lays the groundwork for an exploration of the eschatological in Pound and Miller as a rhetorical mode dangerously predicated on epiphany rather than empiricism.

As was clear throughout Chapter Two, Miller's awareness of the absurdity and the risks involved in a personal instinctive response to the world mark him out from Pound. While Pound expressed his often diffuse and chaotic 'occult' hunches with unwavering conviction, applying a stringent, logical schema to apparently unempirical ideas, Miller's writing demonstrates his pleasure in anticipating an incredulous reaction to his 'impossible theories'. Thus, his position in the modernist lineage sheds new light on Kermode's notion of 'high' or 'early' modernism as a healthily skeptical literary scene. As quoted in the epigraphs to the section, Miller writes of Paris in 1934 that 'here, at the very hub of wheel, one can embrace the most fantastic, the most impossible theories, without finding them in the least strange'.<sup>496</sup> Miller's consciousness of his own apparent credulity is pervasive in *Cancer*, his

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<sup>495</sup> Leon Surette, *The Birth of Modernism: T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and the Occult* (London: McGill Queen's University Press, 1993), p. 290.

<sup>496</sup> *Cancer*, p. 186.

literary essays and his correspondence from the period, and acts in crucial ways as a kind of 'check' on the 'literary primitivism' attributed by Kermode to Pound. In this sense, Miller is an important commentator on, as well as participator in, the zeitgeist of intersecting modernist narrative and ideological modes in the interwar period.

In line with this, Sarah Garland also discusses the eschatological preoccupations of writers like Yeats, Pound and Joyce as examples of non-religious or anti-religious writers secularizing traditionally religious rhetorical positions. As Peter Crisp suggests in his essay 'Pound: Millenarian or Utopian?', images relating to the apocalypse were no less prevalent in the Christian-skeptic literary milieu of the early twentieth century than in earlier, more religious ages (1996).<sup>497</sup> Invoking Surette, Garland argues that the prophetic position taken up by the anti-religious Pound produces a problematic narrative because it renders Pound rationally accountable to himself alone. 'One cannot step in and out of this portentous rhetoric' Garland writes 'without repercussions for the self'.<sup>498</sup> They are 'repercussions', that arise from 'a kind of hubris that haunts eschatological language when it is secularized'.<sup>499</sup> In other words, confident predictions of historical disaster and renewal are often founded on hyperbolic claims to extraordinary, instinctual insight; claims that loosen the author's grip on reality and damage him or her psychologically. Indeed, by his 'efforts to galvanize the self in opposition' to the evils of 'modernity and industrial society' (principally war), Pound takes on the dangerously 'megalomaniacal' tone not only of the prophet but the deity he purports to denigrate.<sup>500</sup> By making it his mission to highlight indisputable objective truths he ends up consumed by his own highly subjective and logically untenable vision.

As such, Miller's experimentation with 'cancer and delirium' for the purposes of truth and self-liberation can be contrasted with the genuine hysteria of Pound's narrative voice.<sup>501</sup> While Miller's usually signposts madness, Pound regresses from

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<sup>497</sup> Peter Crisp, 'Millenarian or Utopian?', *Paideuma*, 25 (1996), 117-37.

<sup>498</sup> Garland, 'The Dearest of Cemeteries', p. 207.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>501</sup> *Cancer*, p. 65.

the deliberate use of an unhinged pose in his 1910s poems to a position of alarmingly unintentional irrationality in his post-First World War essays. Examined alongside Pound, Miller's awareness of his persona's 'madness' exposes rather than masks the dangers identified by Garland. From the viewpoint of someone who arrived 'late' on the scene, self-schooled and relatively uninitiated in the aesthetical and political discussions of the Vorticists, Futurists or Surrealists, Miller demonstrates the intoxicating yet highly suspect appeal of the prophetic register, with its heady, portentous rhetoric and post-biblical apocalyptic tropes.

Pound's presentation of himself as oracle – 'the antennae of the race' discussed in Chapters One and Two - is mirrored in the works of various other 'early modernist' writers in ways that help explain his relationship with Miller.<sup>502</sup> As Comens points out, James Joyce provides the blueprint for 'The Author as God' in *A Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man* when he defines his protagonist Stephen Daedalus as 'the eternal priest of the imagination'. Joyce conceives of the artist, Comens writes, as 'closest to [a] visionary reality ... which provides the basis of his art and insight' and it is his 'task to ... mediate that vision and its wisdom for humanity.'<sup>503</sup> Likewise, D.H. Lawrence's essays of the 1920s contain the post-Romantic presumption of the author as an unquestionable authority on larger forces and patterns at play in the universe. They abound with abstractly symbolic references to 'life', 'livingness', 'the sun', 'the blood', 'good' and 'evil' that also find their way into Miller's rhetoric. Essays like Lawrence's 1921 piece 'Aristocracy', in which he claims that the 'democratic mass ... are a vast, sluggish, ghastly greedy' collective entity that require awakening from 'inertia', highlights the troubling and unintended fascistic overtones in Miller's own theories about the artist and the masses.<sup>504</sup>

These totalitarian implications in Lawrence's narrative mode have been noted by various critics since the Second World War, chief among them Rex Warner (1946) and Bertrand Russell (1956). As such, the latter's often-quoted conclusion that

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<sup>502</sup> Pound, 'Henry James', p. 297; 'The Teacher's Mission', p. 58. See my p. 65.

<sup>503</sup> Comens, p. 35.

<sup>504</sup> D.H. Lawrence, 'Aristocracy', in *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1988), pp. 365-75, p. 376.

Lawrence's 'philosophy of "blood" ... led straight to Auschwitz' should be borne in mind when approaching Pound's own increasingly anti-democratic position at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s.<sup>505</sup> Lawrence and Pound's ideological trajectories provide useful ways of reading Miller since, as seen in the previous two chapters, he himself straddled contradictory positions, at times displaying a pluralistic tolerance and at others a thoroughly elitist intolerance. All three writers are caught up to different extents in what Caroline Blinder identifies as a dangerously 'totalizing attempt – especially "metaphysical" – to define what is mystical and universal'.<sup>506</sup>

The issue of hubris in secular eschatological narratives is fundamental to our reading of Miller, particularly in the context of Pound's review. 'Part of this prophetic and oracular tradition', Blinder continues, 'can be traced back to the act of egotism, the creative hubris which characterized early Romantic writers.'<sup>507</sup> Indeed, as Sarah Garland observes in 'The Dearest of Cemeteries', Miller himself devotes long swathes of *Cancer* to the various 'mad', 'megalomaniacal' artistic voices who have influenced his writing style - writers like the aforementioned Spengler and Lawrence, as well as August Strindberg, Giovanni Papini and Van Gogh (whose letters Miller obsessed over). Moreover, Miller uses discussions of these artists to express his belief in an elusive but deeply personal, subjective inner truth, unbearably pure for writer and reader alike because it exists beyond literary, social or psychological borders: 'If any man ever dared to translate all that is in his heart, to put down what is really his experience, what is truly his truth' Miller writes in *Cancer*, 'I think then the world would go to smash' (250).

By admiring and channeling instinctive and non-rational voices - 'the violence of the prophets, the obscenity that is ecstasy, the wisdom of the fanatic, the priest with his rubber litany' - Miller flags up the zealous and prophetic nature of his own narrative persona, consciously directing the reader's attention to the sort of

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<sup>505</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell* (London: Routledge, 1998 [orig. ed.: 1975]), p. 245

<sup>506</sup> Blinder, *Sexual Aesthetics*, p. 123.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*, p.

'repercussions for the self' that Garland points out in Pound.<sup>508</sup> Miller's aesthetic manipulation of that risk differentiates him again from Pound. The notion of Miller as immersed in portentous rhetoric, while simultaneously aware of its risks, is particularly pertinent in relation to the fascistic overtones he shares with Pound. As Pound puts it in 1933's pro-Mussolini political treatise *Jefferson And/Or Mussolini*, the individual's 'authority comes [from the feeling] that he is more likely to be right than anyone else is'.<sup>509</sup> These statements highlight a vital correlation between political fascism and the romantic urge to resist respectability and rationality by harnessing instinct rather than what Pound saw as the 'mimetic' forces of the intellect. As Surette points out, this problem arises because, 'in D.H. Lawrence's phrase, the reason is regarded as a "bit and bridle" on the soul.'<sup>510</sup>

Garland likewise places Miller in this tradition of rhetorically and ideologically connected prophetic voices, when she defines him as a casual user of culturally pervasive militaristic language. Citing Comens on Pound, she argues that Pound and Miller's offhanded proclamations of unfounded and outrageous apocalyptic diagnoses are proof of the ubiquity of eschatological and militaristic ideas and images in literary works of the period:

Comens ... argues that in 1915 war would have saturated consciousness to such an extent that the very casualness of Pound's use of the apocalyptic, coupled with the 'urgency and purpose' of the prose it is embedded in, can be taken as an indication of the pervasiveness of the apocalyptic narrative.<sup>511</sup>

Garland's point extends her reading of Miller as a 'syncretic and parodic' appropriator of modernist modes and the eschatological, simply one of many popular stylistic turns Miller played around with in the 1930s. Nonetheless, Miller's sense of playfulness is not only a fundamental difference between his and Pound's approaches to the eschatological, it touches on certain fundamental differences between Miller's modernism and that of his contemporaries. Moreover, it is one of the main reasons why Pound misunderstands Miller. In this sense, Garland

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<sup>508</sup> *Cancer*, p. 285.

<sup>509</sup> Ezra Pound, *Jefferson And/Or Mussolini* (London: Stanley Nott, 1935), p. 110.

<sup>510</sup> Surette, *The Birth of Modernism*, p. 285.

<sup>511</sup> Garland, 'Dearest of Cemeteries', p. 209.

underestimates the seriousness and depth beneath Miller's parodic Jeremiad pose, particularly in relation to the mystical connection he claims to find with language used by Oswald Spengler and Pound. If Miller described *The Cantos* as work he could 'swallow down like homebrew', Spengler was an equal source of intoxication and philosophical instruction.<sup>512</sup>

Miller posits the imminent collapse of Western civilization as a simultaneously indisputable and farcical proposition. While announcing in *Cancer* that 'the world is dying piecemeal', that 'we must get in step, a lock step toward the prison of death', he also lampoons the 'Death Theme' in 1930s literature by creating caricatures of Michael Fraenkel and Walter Lowenfels, his friends and literary collaborators on the subject.<sup>513</sup> Miller's extreme and inconsistent treatment of these characters is one of many ways in which he postures aesthetically, entertaining contradictory notions of the artist as at times a genuine prophetic figure and - at others - a self-indulgent fantasist in search of his own catharsis.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Pound's review of *Cancer* – like Orwell's, Edmund Wilson's and most other serious responses to Miller in the 1930s – also reflects the cultural trend towards eschatology. Pound's belief that Miller's writing corrects the 'slump towards the impoverishment of values' is in fact directly associated with the political, social and economic condition of Europe in the aftermath of the First World War.<sup>514</sup> For Pound, the 'hierarchy of values' he sees in *Cancer* represents an antidote not only to literary but to political and economic 'chaos'.<sup>515</sup> As we shall see, Miller passes what William Chace, in *Political Identities in of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot*, describes as Pound's 'test of man [in the 1920s and 30s] ... his ability to endure the contemporary hell contrived by usurers'.<sup>516</sup> Indeed, Pound opposes Miller to the mediocre critics and writers described in Chapter One, the

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<sup>512</sup> *Letters to Emil*, p. 5.

<sup>513</sup> *Cancer*, p. 9; Michael Fraenkel, 'The Genesis of *Tropic of Cancer*', in *Critical Essays on Henry Miller*, ed. by Gottesman, pp. 51-70, p. 55.

<sup>514</sup> 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 87.

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>516</sup> Chace, p. 71.

same sort of people who are later castigated in the forty sixth installment of *The Cantos* because they 'think [they] will get through hell in a hurry' (1944).<sup>517</sup>

For both Pound and Miller, then, the artist's ability to suffer 'contemporary hell', while steadfastly maintaining an independent social vision, is crucial. The following section will investigate the social, political and economic implications of the apocalyptic terms Pound uses in relation to Miller's writing, as well as those Miller uses to present his own 'experience' and to describe other artists. By doing so, we may rethink the prominence of 'Armageddon' and the 'inferno' in the work of Miller's contemporaries as well.

Significant among these contemporaries was his aforementioned friend and collaborator Michael Fraenkel, an amateur philosopher and novelist whose interpretations of eschatological ideas (in particular Spengler's *The Decline of the West*) are discussed by Miller as a major influence on *Cancer*. 'You have' Miller writes in a 1933 letter to Fraenkel 'said it all violently, terribly, beautifully.'<sup>518</sup> *Hamlet*, a compendium of correspondence between Miller and Fraenkel on 'the Death Theme', offers crucial insights into those episodes from *Cancer* that involve the character Boris, Fraenkel's pseudonym in the novel, as evidence of what the two writers called their 'School' or 'Festival' of 'Death'. Not coincidentally, in his own early response to Miller's debut novel, Fraenkel echoes many of Pound's statements regarding the 'moral implication' of Miller's text.<sup>519</sup>

Miller's fidelity to the ideas he generated with Fraenkel also demonstrates another vital difference between his and Pound's use of eschatological rhetoric and logic. Miller's descriptions of the 'Festival of Death' can be read according to Comens' categorizations of apocalyptic modes in Pound's writing, resulting in a differentiation between Miller's 'perceptual revolution' and Pound's 'historical or literal apocalyptic'. Indeed, taking Comens' lead, Garland distinguishes between

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<sup>517</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Canto 46', in *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975 [orig. ed.: 1954]), p. 231-39, p. 231. Originally published in *The Fifth Decade of Cantos* (New York: Ferrar & Rhinehart, 1937).

<sup>518</sup> Miller quoted in Fraenkel, 'The Genesis of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 56.

<sup>519</sup> Fraenkel, 'The Genesis of *Cancer*', p. 62.

Miller's interest in 'the vocabulary of destruction ... as hyperbole and global, eschatological prophecy' and Pound's 'call for political revolution.'<sup>520</sup> As we shall see, these categories are useful but not entirely stable – Miller is in fact more committed to his 'prophecy' and the socio-political changes it implies than the term 'perceptual revolution' allows for.

The issue of whether we should implicate Miller in Pound's national and racial essentialism – as discussed earlier – is complicated by Pound's interest in Miller as a 'prophet' of 'End Times', as well as by Pound's growing fixation with the evils of the monetary system in post-war Europe and by Pound's zealous conversion to the cause of economic 'Social Credit' and Italian fascism in the period when he wrote his review of Miller. Indeed, this correlation is both clarified and further complicated by Pound's promotion of Miller as an important exposé of the evils of 'usury' in the early twentieth century. William Chace, K.K. Ruthven (*Ezra Pound as Literary Critic*, referenced throughout Chapter One) and Alec Marsh ('Politics', 2010), all focus on the economic basis behind Pound's statements of support for fascism. As Chace puts it in *The Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot*, Pound saw Mussolini's totalitarian project as the sole possible 'check' on the 'big lie' of 'capitalism' in the aftermath of the Wall Street Crash.<sup>521</sup>

In this context, the virtue that Miller and Pound associate with sincere responses to suffering must be read in the light of a realization of spiritual 'death' and 'decay' as something both immanent and inherent in the modernist project. They share the belief that images relating to the sensation of being alive within an emotionally and spiritually deadened world, situate true artists as the enlightened few amongst the 'cow-towing', unenlightened many. Miller's theory on the nourishment to be taken from suffering, on the spiritual regeneration and self autonomy derived from embracing physical and emotional hardship, take on new dimensions in this light.

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<sup>520</sup> Garland, 'Dearest of Cemeteries', p. 209-10

<sup>521</sup> Chace, p. 103-04.



Being alive begins with being awake to what Pound calls 'the process' and Miller 'the death process' or the 'automatic infernal process'.<sup>522</sup>

Taking its lead from Leon Surette's conclusions on 'the occult' in early modernism, this chapter will treat Miller's *Cancer* and Pound's reading of it as idiosyncratic works that 'capture and express a set of passions, fears, hopes, and errors that were ubiquitous in the political and cultural history of the first half of the century'.<sup>523</sup>

Crucially, Pound reacts positively to Miller at a time when his own eschatological, economic and fascistic ideas are coming together to form a unified – albeit morally and often logically indefensible – theory of history. This points to various unlikely, fascinating similarities between the ways in which both writers absorb and manifest some dominant radical literary and political trends of the early twentieth century. Pound's unusual cooption of Miller poses a set of fundamental questions: How can Pound, an elitist writer with an interest in clear and concrete writing have marked the professedly overelaborate, unrestrained and confessional Miller as a 'prospect'? How can he have found such a strong sense of order in Miller's muddled and ad hoc borrowings from philosophers like Spengler? Most importantly, how did Miller – so adamantly opposed to literature that preached a political or economic agenda – end up being boosted by Pound as a writer who understood the economic and racial 'process'? By situating Miller within his particular scheme of social, economic and political morality, Pound does more than appropriate an emerging writer for his cause; he clears new ground for unexpected and crucial questions about Miller's own complex textual response to eschatological, economic and fascistic ideas and tropes in the 1930s.

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<sup>522</sup> Pound, *Guide to Kulchur*, p. 51-52; Miller, 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere', p. 194; *Capricorn*, p. 280.

<sup>523</sup> Surette, *The Birth of Modernism*, p. 290.

### 3.2 James Joyce and Henry Miller: 'The retrospect' vs. the 'prospect'

At the root of Pound's perception of an infernal world in *Cancer* lies his belief that the narrator's field of vision has expanded as a result of an involuntary social and economic descent. Miller the author/narrator is, Pound claims, 'plunged into ... the low life ... by the destiny of our epoch, namely the monetary system' (88). 'The milieu of La Coupole [a Montmatre café synonymous in the 1920s and 30s with expatriate bohemian social life] is seen from somewhere near its nadir', Pound goes on, producing a 'circle of reference considerably wider than that of Joyce's foetid Dublin, or the much more special inferno of [Lewis'] *The Apes [Of God]*' (88).

The comparison with James Joyce is crucial. As we have seen, Miller is praised for understanding and implementing Joyce's premise that 'there is no beauty without a corresponding disgust' and for representing both the sordidness in the apparently beautiful and the beautiful in the apparently sordid. Pound compares Miller to Joyce because he sees him as achieving the equivalent 'swift alternation of subjective beauty and external shabbiness, squalor and sordidness',<sup>524</sup> switching his attention seamlessly from destitute prostitutes by the city walls to 'a finer appreciation of Matisse's particular gift, than I have found anywhere else' (89). Aesthetically, according to Pound, Miller shares Joyce's talent for appreciating each scenario on its actual merits and without the sort of generalizing judgments that are standard in most works of literature. By this, Pound implies that Miller inherits Joyce's flair for contrast, offsetting external squalor with the poetry of interior thought; 'the contrast', as Pound puts it in a 1918 letter to Joyce 'between [*Ulysses*' protagonist] Blooms [sic] poetry and his outward surroundings is excellent'.<sup>525</sup> On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that there is a vital connection between these descriptions of 'scope' and 'a circle of reference' in Joyce and Miller's work and Pound's idea of Miller as a 'victim' of social and economic forces.

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<sup>524</sup> 'Joyce', p. 412. See my p. 91.

<sup>525</sup> *Pound/Joyce: The Letters of Ezra Pound to James Joyce*, ed. with commentary by Forrest Read (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), p. 131, March 29<sup>th</sup> 1918.

My earlier analysis of the Poundian Miller as virtuous and sincere in his suffering thus acquires heightened significance in the light of Pound's wider historical and economic theories. His perception of Miller as 'incurably healthy' and a 'natural' sufferer is clearly related to his understanding of *Cancer* as an important text in a grander economic scheme (88). This scheme - inchoate in the 1910s reviews of Joyce, Lewis and Henry James - was developed in earnest in the late 1920s and the 1930s as economics began to take the place of literature as Pound's principal area of interest. As K.K. Ruthven puts it in *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, 'by the middle of the 1930s Pound had come to believe that the moment of literature had passed.'<sup>526</sup> 'The vitality of thought now' Ruthven quotes Pound writing, in a 1935 letter to his old University professor, 'Bib' Ibbotson 'is in econ[omics]'.<sup>527</sup> Indeed, four works from the this later period - *ABC of Economics* (1933), *Social Credit: An Impact* (1935), *Jefferson And/Or Mussolini* (1935) and *Guide to Kulchur* (1938) - provide the basis of an economic theory that in crucial ways informs Pound's aesthetic ideas.

Through analysis of these works, this chapter will describe the radical economics that were integral to Pound's opinions on literature in the 1920s and 30s and must be taken into account when interpreting his praise for Miller. In particular it will deal with Pound's obsessive interest in 'usury' (defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as 'the action or practice of lending money at unreasonably high rates of interest'<sup>528</sup>) as what Ruthven calls his 'original sin' at the root of a modern misalignment in linguistic, societal and sexual relations.<sup>529</sup> It will be seen that Pound used economics to explain his concerns - delineated in Chapters One and Two - about the failure of abstract language to represent reality and of limited puritan ideas to express anything meaningful about sex. By focusing on the basic principle of usury - the growth of money from money alone - he thought he had identified the primal cause

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<sup>526</sup> Ruthven, p. 150.

<sup>527</sup> Pound, quoted in Ruthven, p.150.

<sup>528</sup> OED.com, 'Home: Oxford English Dictionary', 1709

<http://www.oed.com/search?searchType=dictionary&q=usury&searchBtn=Search>  
[accessed 21<sup>st</sup> January 2014]

<sup>529</sup> Ruthven, p. 150.

of the literary and social evils that dominated his essays on writers like Joyce, Lewis and Henry James.

In accordance with so much historical anti-Semitism, Pound's hatred of usury also led to the programmatically racist ideas he propagated in the late 1930s and 40s. Crucially, he defines Miller as a writer of unparalleled relevance just as these intimations about usury are beginning to coalesce into a unified anti-capitalist, anti-democratic and anti-Semitic economic and political theory. Having so far approached this controversial area of Pound's worldview cautiously – in an attempt to avoid reductively focusing on his partisan appropriation of Miller at the expense of the more complex overtones of the *Cancer* review – I will now examine it alongside Miller's own portrayal of an 'inferno' between the wars. Over the following three sections, the ethical positions and eschatological imaginings of Miller's narrator will be looked at in direct relation to Pound's theories on usury, war, and fascism. In the process, it is important to note this is not an attempt to test the efficacy of Pound's interwar theories – indeed, his extreme economic and political naivety has been successfully pointed out by various Poundian scholars, including Roger Griffin, Alec Marsh and Leon Surette. As Leon Surette notes, over the course of 1920s and 30s Pound became blinded by his 'belief that he understood the *au dela* [*the beyond*], the world, and history was a fantasy. He was, after all, just a very talented poet, not a prophet or a seer.'<sup>530</sup>

Before defining exactly what Pound means when he calls 'the monetary system' the 'destiny of the epoch', it will be useful to go back a step and investigate the comparison of Joyce's 'foetid Dublin' with Miller's Paris. The term refers to Joyce's novel *Ulysses* (published in serialized form in 1918 and set over one day in June 1904), which Pound took to represent the height of what could be done with literature in the years leading up to the First World War.<sup>531</sup> In his 1922 review of

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<sup>530</sup> Surette, *The Birth of Modernism*, p. 36.

<sup>531</sup> Similarly, Wyndham Lewis' 1930s novel *The Apes of God* is read by Pound as having violently exposed the cardinal sins of his age via the rarified setting of a few square miles in Bloomsbury. This is what he means when he writes about 'the special inferno of *The Apes*'. In Lewis' satire of 1920s London bohemia, Pound again

*Ulysses*, Pound writes that ‘as far as matters beyond dispute, we must praise *Ulysses*’, going on to triumphantly declare that Joyce has ‘set out to do an inferno and has done an inferno’, suggesting an ambitious and successful attempt at capturing the evils of the pre-war period.<sup>532</sup> For Pound, Miller’s significance depends on his ability to contribute to the 1930s what Joyce had to the 1900s and 1910s – namely, ‘an epoch-making report on the state of the human mind in the twentieth century’, reflecting the larger problems of its age by honestly recording the way that individuals in European cities thought and behaved.<sup>533</sup> This reportage on the state of the times is what Pound refers to in the *Cancer* review when – as noted in Chapter Two – he writes that Miller ‘has very strongly a hierarchy of values. And in the present chaos this question of hierarchy has become almost as important as having values at all’ (88).

If Pound depicts Joyce’s art as representative of Europe before the ‘Armageddon’ of The Great War, when he writes his review of *Cancer* he has begun to think of Miller as a post-apocalyptic, millennial artist.<sup>534</sup> As we shall see, in his 1933 essay ‘Past History’ and in *Guide to Kulchur* Pound relegates Joyce to the category of ‘retrospect, not the prospect’. In the same period he promotes Miller in terms that suggest that, unlike Joyce, he is able to apprehend ‘the process as it is now going on’.<sup>535</sup> Pound’s review of *Cancer* implies that Miller is alert where Joyce is ‘nearly unconscious’ to ‘the dominant cleaving ideas of the last decade’.<sup>536</sup> In order to understand Pound’s criteria for reading Miller in this way, it is first necessary to assess what Pound means and implies by ‘Joyce’s foetid Dublin’. What is the nature of the ‘inferno’ Pound sees in Joyce’s *Ulysses*? How does his reading of Miller at ‘the nadir’ of ‘milieu

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sees ‘sloppiness’ of expression as the principal target, delighting in Lewis’ exposition of the pretensions and hypocrisies of the London arts world.

<sup>532</sup> Ezra Pound, ‘Ulysses’, p. 406.

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 408.

<sup>534</sup> ‘Joyce’, p. 415

<sup>535</sup> *Guide to Kulchur*, p. 57.

<sup>536</sup> Ezra Pound, ‘Past History’, in *Pound/Joyce*, ed. by Read, pp. 245-54, p. 252. Originally published in *The English Journal* (May 1933).

of the Coupole' differ? In what ways – literary and philosophical - does he see the 'process' of the 1930s reflected in Miller's writing but ignored in Joyce's?

For Pound, Joyce's early genius is his comprehension that many of the impurities of the modern world come directly from the imprecise use of language. As we saw in Chapter One, Pound's literary essays and reviews of Joyce, Lewis and James consistently attribute the evils of the period to the inaccurate use of words in the public sphere. By adhering to Flaubert's principle of the 'mot juste' – by respecting the direct relationship between 'word and thing' in each sentence and therefore fulfilling his primary responsibility as a writer - Joyce has exposed 'the difference between reality and reality as represented in various lofty forms of expression'. This position is usefully summarized in Pound's review of Joyce's earlier novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1911):

The obstructionist and the provincial are everywhere, and in them alone is the permanent danger to civilization. Clear, hard prose is the safeguard and should be valued as such. The mind accustomed to it will not be cheated or stampeded by national phrases and public emotionalities.<sup>537</sup>

The clarity of Joyce's prose, in other words, protects the reader's mind not only from the tendency among 'third rate' writers like Wells, Shaw and Bennett towards 'abstraction' – discussed in Chapter One - but from their provincialism (by which he means petty-mindedness rather than the political impulse towards decentralization) and jingoistic, reductive nationalism.<sup>538</sup> More importantly, in his 1922 *Ulysses* review Pound goes on to claim that Joyce succeeds in satirizing 'the various dead manners of language', of 'cliches and rhetoric' instrumental in the civilization's decline.<sup>539</sup> By depicting 'the variegation of thought' of a range of characters in the specific locale and temporality of 1904 Dublin, Joyce has managed to demonstrate the psychological effects of a grossly inaccurate, corrupt and corruptive wider public discourse; a discourse that is overwhelmingly accepted by the majority of writers and artists,

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<sup>537</sup> 'James Joyce: *At Last the Novel Appears*', in *Pound/Joyce*, ed. by Read, pp. 88-91, p. 90. Originally published in *The Egoist* (February 1917).

<sup>538</sup> 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 87.

<sup>539</sup> 'Ulysses', p. 406.

themselves too assimilated to notice its malignancy.<sup>540</sup> As Pound suggests in 'Past History', Joyce's characters' muddled streams of consciousness are the author's deliberate attempt to show that the indistinct and false words used in the public domain – in journalism, government, the law-courts and literature – inevitably spread to the minds of individual citizens, contaminating their thoughts, values and actions:

*Ulysses* is a summary of pre-war Europe, the blackness and mess and muddle of a "civilization" led by disguised forces and a bought press, the general sloppiness, the plight of the individual intelligence in that mess! [Leopold] Bloom [Joyce's protagonist] very much *is* the mess.<sup>541</sup>

If reading messy sentences leads one to have messy thoughts, the same can also be said for trivial ideas. In the 'Ulysses' review, Pound finds evidence for this in Joyce's description of his protagonist's wife Molly:

Molly Bloom judges [Arthur] Griffith derisively by "the sincerity of his trousers," and the Paris edition of the Tribune tells us that the tailors' congress has declared Pres. Harding to be our best dressed Chief Magistrate.<sup>542</sup>

These references to Irish and American politics (Arthur Griffith was the founder of Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army, and Warren Harding was the American President between 1921 and 1923), to the 'Paris edition of the Tribune', to 'disguised forces' and 'a bought press', hint at the complex web of conspiracy Pound identified as the cause of corrupt European and American foreign policy. In particular, he came to believe that international trade wars were conducted cooperatively by certain vested interests within all nations in order to uphold an evil financial system. As Alec Marsh explains in his 2010 essay 'Politics', 'Pound believed that wars are made to create debt because under the perverse values of economic liberalism debt is equivalent to wealth.'<sup>543</sup> Over the course of this chapter, we shall see that Pound's reading of Miller was motivated by his search for writers who were

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<sup>540</sup> 'Joyce', p. 411.

<sup>541</sup> 'Past History', p. 251.

<sup>542</sup> 'Ulysses', p. 408.

<sup>543</sup> Alec Marsh 'Politics', in *Ezra Pound in Context*, ed. by Ira B. Nadel (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2010), p. 96-102, p. 99.

capable of exposing and countering the damage wrought on individuals by pernicious and powerful elites. Indeed, his celebration of Miller as a 'victim' of 'the monetary system' is inextricably connected to his ideal of individuals battling against a 'destiny' determined by malevolent financial, political and industrial groups.<sup>544</sup> This is also the impetus, Marsh points out, for Pound's promotion of fascist ideas in the 1930s and 40s: '[Pound saw Mussolini's politics as] a check on the big lie that capitalism and political liberty were compatible'.<sup>545</sup>

The connection between a highly politicized worldview and Pound's literary critique are thus inseparable. Just as Pound sees 'the blackness and mess and muddle of "civilization"' reflected through specific literary and structural devices in *Ulysses*, his reading of Miller's work cannot be divorced from his economic theories. According to Forrest Read in his introduction *Pound/Joyce: The Letters of Ezra Pound to James Joyce, with Pound's Essays on Joyce*, 'Joyce appeared to Pound as the great new urban writer, a great synthetic expresser of the modern consciousness'.<sup>546</sup> By 'modern consciousness' Read refers to Pound's admiration for Joyce's ability to accurately depict '*l'homme moyen sensuel*' (the average sensual man), the city-dweller of medium intelligence who thinks sometimes intelligent, sometimes stupid, sometimes beautiful, sometimes ugly thoughts and experiences confused, intense and contradictory feelings. As Pound puts it in his *Ulysses* review:

Bloom is ... the man in the street, the next man, the public ... *l'homme moyen sensuel*; he is also Shakespeare, Ulysses, The Wandering Jew, the Daily Mail reader, the man who believes what he sees in the papers, Everyman, and "the goat" ... *πολλα ... παθεν ... κατα θυμον* [he suffered all things ... in his heart", *The Odyssey*]<sup>547</sup>

Again comparing him to Flaubert, Pound claims that both writers are adept at 'presenting all sorts of things that the average man of the period would have had in his head'.<sup>548</sup> Though 'the details of the street map are local', he goes on, 'Leopold

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<sup>544</sup> 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 88.

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>546</sup> Forrest Read, 'Introduction', in *Pound/Joyce*, ed. by Read, pp. 1-16, p. 8.

<sup>547</sup> 'Ulysses', p. 403. .

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 403.



Bloom ... is ubiquitous.<sup>549</sup> This ubiquity arises out of unpredictable thought and action, thus rendering Joyce's 'everyman' more alive and accurately representative of individual subjective experience than Flaubert's. As Pound puts it in a 1918 letter to Joyce: '[In *Ulysses*] anything might happen at any moment, while in [Flaubert's novel] *Bouvard [Bouvard et Pecuchet]* they are anchored in the mud and even when some thing does happen you keep on feeling that nothing can.'<sup>550</sup> For this reason, Pound exclaims in a 1918 unpublished note on the first serialized episodes of *Ulysses*, 'All Bloom is vital' - he is a real human being who thinks and acts on moment-by-moment impulses rather than a fixed representation of a set of ideas and values the author wishes to express.<sup>551</sup>

Pound's reading of an 'inferno' in *Ulysses* is aggressively critical of the conditions that have created 'the modern consciousness' but sympathetic towards Bloom as the hapless absorber and mimic of that mess: 'Bloom suffers *kata thumon* ['he feels it in his heart']; "every fellow mousing round for his liver and his lights": he is *polumetis* ["many-minded", or "of many contrivings"] and a receiver of all things'<sup>552</sup>. These direct allusions to Homer's *Odyssey* - the classical model for Joyce's 'schema' in *Ulysses* - suggests the discrepancy between a sensory and emotional sensitivity that is timeless and an intellectual desensitization that blights the 'modern consciousness'. The hell Pound believes 'Joyce has set out to do' is also the individual's hell, created by his or her incurred inability to organize ideas and feelings. As the following passage from *Ulysses* shows, Bloom might receive and feel 'all things' but he is unable to stay focused on one thought for long enough to process his impressions and produce intelligent or satisfying conclusions:

Mild fire of wine kindled his veins. I wanted that badly. Felt so off colour. His eyes un hungrily saw shelves of tins, sardines, gaudy lobsters' claws. All the odd things people pick up for food. Out of shells, periwinkles with a pin, off trees, snails out of the ground the French eat, out of the sea with bait on a hook. Silly fish learn nothing in a thousand years. If you didn't know risky

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<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 407

<sup>550</sup> 'Pound to Joyce', in *Pound/Joyce*, ed. by Read, pp. 145-46, p. 145, November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1918.

<sup>551</sup> *Pound/Joyce*, ed. by Read, pp. 139-140, p. 139, 1918.

<sup>552</sup> 'Ulysses', p. 404.

putting anything into your mouth. Poisonous berries. Johnny Magories. Roundness you think good. Gaudy colour warns you off. One fellow told another and so on. Try it on the dog first. Led on by the smell or the look. Tempting fruit. Ice cones. Cream. Instinct. Orangegroves for instance. Need artificial irrigation.<sup>553</sup>

Bloom's peripatetic thought process leads to an accumulation of endlessly unanswered questions and a sense of perpetual dissatisfaction. As Morton P. Levitt puts it in his 1972 essay *A Hero of Our Time: Leopold Bloom and the Myth of Ulysses* 'the questions and answers of Bloom's silent monologues suggest a kind of popular catechism of the rationalism of the age, that ethic of faith in reason to which Bloom is devoted but which has so patently failed him'.<sup>554</sup> Because his mind is dominated by immediate instinctual reactions— like the dog in this passage, 'led on by the smell or the look' - he is doomed to search in vain for empirical causes, understanding everything vaguely and confusedly rather than clearly, in its wider intellectual context. Bloom's ambling digression - from the scanning of the 'shelves of tins' at the bar, to 'the odd things people pick up for food', to the comment that 'silly fish learn nothing in a thousand years' then a rumination on the dangers of testing different kinds of food – thus represents for Pound the 'sloppiness, the plight of the individual intelligence in that mess'.<sup>555</sup>

By contrast, Pound's depiction of Miller the author/narrator in the *Cancer* review suggests certainty in the face of external 'sloppiness'. Where Joyce contributes to his epoch by using 'clear, hard prose' to express a mind helpless under contemporary pressures, Miller's contribution to the 1930s is the literary documentation of his own ability to thrive rather than buckle at 'the nadir' of 'the milieu of La Coupole'.<sup>556</sup> In Pound's scheme, Joyce diagnoses literary, social and political problems using a 'variegation of thoughts' from other peoples' heads but Miller counters them with his own uncontaminated thoughts: 'he paints in honest colors life of the café international strata' and he maintains a clear 'sense of good and evil' as well as a

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<sup>553</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin, 2000 [orig. ed., 1922]), p. 222.

<sup>554</sup> Morton P. Levitt, 'A Hero of Our Time: Leopold Bloom and the Myth of Ulysses', in *James Joyce Quarterly*, 10 (1972), 132-146 (p. 140).

<sup>555</sup> 'Past History', p. 251.

<sup>556</sup> 'James Joyce: *At Last the Novel Appears*', p. 90; 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 88.

strong 'hierarchy of values'.<sup>557</sup> The following street scene from *Cancer* illustrates the point:

Prowling around aimlessly. A beautiful day – so far. The Rue de Buci is alive, crawling. The bars wide open and the curbs lined with bicycles. All the meat and vegetable markets are in full swing. Arms loaded with truck bandaged in newspapers ... High noon and here I am standing on an empty belly at the confluence of all these crooked lanes that reek with the odor of food ... there's a fever in the streets. Nothing like it anywhere, except perhaps on the East Side, or down around Chatham Square. The Rue de l'Echaude is seething. The streets twist and turn, at every angle a fresh hive of activity. Long queues of people with vegetables under their arms, turning in here and there with crisp, sparkling appetites. Nothing but food, food, food. Makes one delirious. (44-45)

Like Joyce expressing Bloom's thoughts, Miller the narrator purports to record each impression just as he receives it. Miller is equally 'led on by the smell and the look' of one image to the next, and from one idea to another in quick succession, giving the effect of a pair of eyes scanning the scene. Although his observations are abbreviated, like Bloom's, to resemble the private thought process, they are more precise and purposeful. Miller might be 'prowling around aimlessly' but his thoughts are coherent, directed by assertions rather than questions. Indeed, his ideas are as unfounded as Bloom's – 'no where like it anywhere' for example – but they are expressed with total confidence rather than doubtful speculation. Most importantly, Miller's narrator differs from Bloom in his capacity to remain alert to the objects he is recording throughout the episode. His hunger dominates the scene - 'crooked lanes that reek with the odor of food', 'walking about like a leper with crabs gnawing at my entrails', 'crisp sparkling appetites' – but he is in control of rather than swamped by his instincts and the thoughts they produce. Contrasted with the melancholia induced in Bloom as he takes in the variety of strange foods available to him, Miller's celebration of 'crisp, sparkling appetites' also suggests the difference between his American 'optimism' about consumption and the European pessimism of his friends, discussed in Chapter Two. Indeed, he explains his 'really superb health' in *Cancer* as a byproduct of being American: 'Still have one foot in the nineteenth century ... I'm a bit retarded, like most Americans. Carl finds this disgusting, this optimism: "I have

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<sup>557</sup> 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 88.

only to talk about a meal," he says, "and you're radiant!" (56). If Pound sees Joyce's protagonist as representative of the uncertainty and mess of the European 'modern consciousness', Miller's freedom from that mess is also implicitly connected to the notion that he has resurrected a healthy, pre-modern American appetite.

In many ways, Pound's comparison of Miller with Joyce also echoes Miller's own comparison of himself with the homeless neurotic Max in *Max and the White Phagocytes*. In relation to his poverty, his suffering, even the simple task of choosing between a cheap and expensive restaurant, Max is 'bewildered. He's lost all sense of values.'<sup>558</sup> The hell Pound sees represented in Bloom's streams of consciousness is a version – albeit a less extreme one - of the hell that Max endures. The Poundian Bloom is not terrified by the world as Max is – 'I am crying and cant stop' Max tells Miller, 'I hear music playing in my ears, but in reality I hear screaming in the street'<sup>559</sup> – but he is nevertheless hindered by his inability to define and order his perceptions and feelings: 'All the odd things people pick up for food. Out of shells, periwinkles with a pin, off trees, snails out of the ground the French eat, out of the sea with bait on a hook. Silly fish learn nothing in a thousand years.'

Thus Pound corroborates Miller's own image of himself as superior to confused and inarticulate ordinary men who are unable to cope with the reality they perceive. Wondering the Parisian streets with the inconsolable Max, Miller feels 'at peace with the world.' 'It's the hour', he goes on 'when Paris produces almost the effect of music upon one. Each stop brings to the eye a new and surprising architectural order.'<sup>560</sup> Once again, Miller points out his ability to intuit a sense of order in the midst of his ostensibly disordered existence. Unlike Max – indeed, unlike Bloom – he has the wherewithal to still his thoughts and absorb the objective world in a clear and uncontaminated fashion. This is also indicative of the contradiction – discussed in Chapter Two – between his Bergsonian insistence that he is at ease within chaotic,

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<sup>558</sup> 'Max', p. 161. For an explanation of Max's moral bewilderment, see my Chapter Two, pp. 138-40.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid., p.166.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

anarchical subjective reality and his deeper desire for a world that is more ordered and controlled.

Beyond the contaminative effect of literature and journalism Pound, as previously mentioned, traces the principal cause of misalignment to the dominance of usurious banking practices. Indeed, usury lies at the heart of his conception of social, political and economic evil. He sees it as an unnatural practice 'which,' as K.K. Ruthven puts it, 'by corrupting the benefits to be had from a "natural" economy, deferred endlessly the prospects of a just society'.<sup>561</sup> By the 1930s, in fact, Pound is certain that the 'growth of money from money alone' has jilted the fundamental natural relations between people and things at all levels of existence – social, political, psychological, spiritual and sexual. Writing to his friend W.H.D. Rouse in 1934, Pound claimed 'I have been for two years in a boil of fury with the dominant usury that impedes every human act, that keeps good books out of print, and pejorates everything'.<sup>562</sup>

Pound's identification of Joyce as 'retrospective' and diagnostic and Miller as prospective and curative comes from these changing ideas about 'The Age of Usury', a term coined in 1938's *Guide to Kulchur*.<sup>563</sup> In one of the many broadcasts he made for Italian government controlled Radio Rome during the Second World War, Pound went on to claim that *Ulysses* had 'cooked up and served the unmitigated god damn stink', suggesting a collective purging process facilitated by the transcription of the effects of economic evil.<sup>564</sup> Similarly, in *Guide to Kulchur* he describes Joyce's novel in terms of belching, vomiting and excretion; a scatological 'answer' as well as 'the end, the summary' to the 1910s:

In 1912 or eleven I invoked whatever gods may exist, in the quatrain: Sweet christ from hell spew up some Rabelais,/To belch and ... and to define today/In fitting fashion, and her monument/Heap up to her in fadeless excrement' "Ulysses" I take as my answer ... "Ulysses" is the end, the summary, of a period ... the "age of usury". The reader, who bothers to think,

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<sup>561</sup> Ruthven, p.151.

<sup>562</sup> Pound, quoted in Leon Surette, *Pound in Purgatory*, (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1999), p. 136.

<sup>563</sup> *Guide to Kulchur*, p. 96.

<sup>564</sup> Pound, quoted in *Pound/Joyce*, ed. by Read, p. 267.

may now notice that in the new paideuma I am not including the monumental, the retrospect, but only the pro-spect.<sup>565</sup>

In Pound's socio-political-economic scheme, the term 'paideuma' means 'the tangle or complex of the inrooted ideas of any period', and it will be explored later in relation to Miller and Leo Frobenius, the archeologist and cultural anthropologist who coined it.<sup>566</sup> When Pound talks in 1935 about a 'new paideuma' what he is getting at is a complex network of ideas that are definitive of that year. At this stage, however, it is important to note that the Joyce of Pound's 1930s essay work is an artist who – by satire, or what Pound elsewhere calls 'the Rabelaisian guffaw' – represents the horror of the 1910s but whose vision is disconnected from current reality by an inability to render a new economic vision of Europe.<sup>567</sup> According to Forrest Read, Joyce is 'purged [by Pound] from the ranks of those who would define the present and prepare the future.'<sup>568</sup>

Indeed, in his retrospective piece on Joyce, Pound goes on to discuss him as 'ignorant [or] little concerned' with the modern individual's experience of life in a dramatically altered world:

A world in which technocracy has just knocked out all previous economic computations ... in which the network of French banks and international munition sellers is just beginning to be expressible on the printed page; in which class-war has been, or is as I write this, simply going out of date ... and being replaced by a different lineup or conflict.<sup>569</sup>

Despite Miller's own apparent lack of interest in practical economic problems, and the absence of references in *Cancer* to the new 'world' of 'technocracy', 'French banks and international munitions sellers', Pound sees him as representing the new 'line-up or conflict' of Europe after World War One. A 'chap called Miller', he writes in a 1934 letter to his lover Olga Rudge, 'has written a bawdy that puts Joyce and Lewis

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<sup>565</sup> *Guide to Kulchur*, p. 96.

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>567</sup> 'To Felix Schelling', *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, July 8<sup>th</sup> 1922, p. 181.

<sup>568</sup> Read (ed.), *Pound/Joyce*, p. 256.

<sup>569</sup> 'Past History', p. 252.

back in their cubby-holes: cause Miller is sane and without kinks'.<sup>570</sup> If Joyce is presented as a pre-Armageddon voice, redundant in its aftermath, then Miller is seen as a writer who inspires hope for the future thereafter. In order to understand these opposite positions– and to fully appreciate the links Pound made between literature, society and economics between the 1910s and 30s - it is vital to explore his objection to 'the growth of money from money alone' and to relate this to Miller's own ideas on economic bartering, exchange and exploitation.

According to Pound, by practicing, facilitating and encouraging the earning of money from money alone, rather than in fair proportion to 'work done', the central banks of Western democratic nations have contaminated the value systems of the cultures they were designed to serve, from the daily running of the executive and legislature down to the behavior of each individual citizen. Usury or 'usura' – as he calls it in his 1937 canto of that name – represents a crime 'against nature':

with usura, sin against nature,/is thy bread ever more of stale rags/ is thy  
bread dry as paper,/ with no mountain wheat, no strong flour/ with usura the  
line grows thick/ with usura is no clear demarcation .../ Stonecutter is kept  
from his stone/ weaver is kept from his loom/ WITH USURA/ wool comes not  
to market/ sheep bringeth no gain with usura/ ... usura/ blunteth the needle  
in the maid's hand/ ... Usura slayeth the child in the womb/ It stayeth the  
young man's courting/ It hath brought palsey to bed, lyeth/ between the  
young bride and her bridegroom/ CONTRA NATURAM.<sup>571</sup>

His underlying premise is that usury causes the dislocation of the natural relationship between labor and production. The virtue of work lies in its manual rendering of the goods it eventually barter. Paper money should be understood as a 'promissory' note of value, to be proportionately exchanged for goods according to their quality as well as the skill and effort that went into producing them. When money is regarded as an object of intrinsic value in and of itself, this natural relationship is hindered. As a consequence the skill of producers and the quality of goods inevitably fall into decline, leading to disastrous effects for the cultural health of the nation.

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<sup>570</sup> Pound, quoted in Read (ed.), *Pound/Joyce*, p. 256, December 1<sup>st</sup> 1934.

<sup>571</sup> 'Canto 45 - With Usura', *Selected Cantos*, pp. 67-68, p. 67. Originally published in *The Fifth Decade of the Cantos XLII-LI* (London: Faber & Faber, 1937).

Moreover, by lending money at interest rates that exceed the small percentage required for protection against non-payment, and by giving credence to the illusion that money is itself a 'commodity' rather than a ticket to be exchanged for a commodity, usurers are guilty of promoting 'unnatural increase'.<sup>572</sup> In *Guide to Kulchur* he expands on this theory, claiming that 'the evils of usury' lie in 'the injustice of supposing that money 'grows' (*vide* Shylock, etc.), while goods perish.'<sup>573</sup> If a population becomes dependent upon a usurious banking system, the disease of 'unnatural increase' works its way from the banking system into the working habits of its food producers, stonemasons, artisans, artists and inventors and ends by restricting the basic and vital function of sexual activity and reproduction ('usura slayeth the child in the womb/ it stayeth the young man's courting').

In this scheme then, usury causes the 'dead manners of language' represented and satirized by Joyce. Pound posits corrupt modes of economic exchange and growth as the primal reason for the 'sentimental rhetorical journalism' and 'the blackness and mess and muddle of civilisation' that finds its way into Bloom's thought process. The 'plight of the individual intelligence in that mess' first takes shape through 'unnatural increase' in monetary affairs, then spreads out to the newspapers and books before infecting the minds of individual readers. As we shall see in the following section, in the 1920s and 30s Pound became so convinced of the correlation between usury and language, creativity and thought that he believed he could 'tell the bank-rate and component of tolerance of usury in any epoch by the quality of *line* in painting'.<sup>574</sup> Indeed, elsewhere he writes that 'the kind of thought which distinguishes good from evil, down into the details of commerce, rises into ... the clear definition of the word written'.<sup>575</sup> The review of *Cancer* was written as Pound

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<sup>572</sup> Ezra Pound, *The ABC of Economics*, p. 18.

<sup>573</sup> *Guide to Kulchur*, p. 247. The reference to Shylock here is indicative of the connection Pound made between the sin of usury and Judaism throughout his economic writings. This will be dealt with later in the chapter when we come onto overlapping racialist categorizations in Miller and Pound.

<sup>574</sup> 'To Carlo Izzo', *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound*, p. 303, January 8<sup>th</sup> 1938.

<sup>575</sup> Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose*, ed. by Cookson, p. 76.



was developing this method - pithily christened 'usurocriticism' by K.K. Ruthven - and it is in this context that its 'circle of reference' needs to be read.<sup>576</sup>

If usurious art is discussed in the sexualized and reproductive terms of 'unnatural increase', Pound's ideas about Miller's healthy and uncontaminated thought process and 'hierarchy of values' can be reasonably connected to an opposing concept of 'natural increase'. Indeed, as we shall see in Section 3.3 'Miller's Inferno: A Poundian Economic Reading of *Tropic of Cancer*', Pound's belief that Miller stands strong against the 'destiny of the epoch - namely the monetary system' is inseparable from his admiration for Miller's approach to healthy sexual reproduction. Indeed, sex and economics are conflated in both writers' thinking. In his 1986 study *Language, Sexuality, Ideology in Ezra Pound's the 'Cantos'*, Jean-Michel Rabaté makes the link between Pound's animosity towards sexual puritanism and his identification of usury as the principal root of social evil. For Pound, Rabaté writes, 'The difference between surplus and interest bears ... heavily on sexual systems and moral codes'.<sup>577</sup> Rabaté goes on to quote Pound from his essay 'Date Line' (1934):

Opposing systems of European morality go back to the opposed temperaments of those who thought copulation was good for the crops, and the opposed temperaments of those who thought it was bad for the crops.<sup>578</sup>

'Anti-flesh' ideas and policies distort and damage human relations in much the same way as usurious economic systems, the existence of one implying the existence of the other. Indeed, in a 1921 interview with *The New Yorker* Pound described England's recent conversion to high interest rate credit controls as a direct result of her 'insensitization'. A lack of sensitivity to bodily pleasure not only causes 'dullness of mind', the reduction of 'intellecto' referred to in the 'Cavalcanti' essay, but a reduction

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<sup>576</sup> Ruthven, p. 153.

<sup>577</sup> Jean-Michelle Rabaté, *Language, Sexuality, Ideology in Ezra Pound's the 'Cantos'* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986), p. 215.

<sup>578</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Date Line', in *Make It New* (London, Faber and Faber, 1934), quoted in Rabaté, p. 215.

in economic vitality: 'I suppose the word sensitive gives an impression of femininity. And yet any scientist is anxious to have his instruments highly sensitized.'<sup>579</sup>

The notion of usury as 'unnatural increase' thus connects in crucial ways with the anti-asceticism discussed in Chapter Two. Usury is understood as an asexual mode of reproduction whereby money makes new money without the necessary and natural contribution of the labor and the goods it relates to. We shall see that the figuration of the relationship between money and goods in natural and unnatural sexual and reproductive terms informs Pound and Miller's shared interest in perpetual monetary circulation as a positive and purifying force. As Brian Soper puts it, Pound uses language in an attempt to liberate a stagnant monetary system - 'his word tries to re-articulate an [economic and moral] world powerless to move on account of its many compound fractures':

the opposition of light, of *chiarita*, to the excremental, vertiginous obscurity, the turgidness of *USURA*, is everywhere present, and is seen by Pound to be moving forward, in the form given it by literary expression, towards something simple and self-contained.<sup>580</sup>

By contrast to this idea, Miller's own interest in perpetual circulation emphasized waste and excess through profligacy – in the monetary and linguistic sense as well as the sense of *non-reproductive* sexual activity. This, we shall see, is the source of a fundamental difference between Pound and Miller and evidence of the ways in which Pound – by contrast with Bataille - misreads *Cancer* economically. Where Pound sees a direct correlation between the serious writer's use of words and an enlightened, sensible approach to monetary exchange, Miller's belief that money is contaminative to humanity leads him to seek ways of sabotaging its conventional purpose by spending irresponsibly, without consideration of value. In other words, where Pound wants to rationalize the monetary system to improve society, Miller will be seen to advocate its de-rationalisation in the interest of reflecting anarchical desire and safeguarding individual freedom.

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<sup>579</sup> Rabaté, p. 217.

<sup>580</sup> Soper, p. 244.

Pound's objection to usury is linked to his approval of the straightforward national and racial categories, mentioned earlier, that he believes he finds in *Cancer* – 'Miller's Americans are very American, his orientals, very oriental and the Russians, oh quite so ... the sense of the sphericity of the planets presides'.<sup>581</sup> The reference to 'Shylock' when he discusses usury in *Guide to Kulchur* points to a predictably racial dimension which also suggests that Pound's perception of Miller as a victim of the monetary system might be connected to the more sinister supposition that he upholds racially and nationally essentialist values. As Leon Surette, Alec Marsh and K.K Ruthven have noted, Pound became increasingly anti-Semitic in the 1920s and 30s as his fixation on the economic evil of usury intensified. In Surette's words, 'his anti-Semitism was motivated by a belief in a Jewish conspiracy.'<sup>582</sup> All three scholars trace his regression from the first sporadic comments about 'Jews and Jobbery' ('Salutation the Third') then 'Shylock, etc.' to the viciously anti-Semitic outbursts of his Radio Rome broadcasts during World War Two.<sup>583</sup> Having emigrated from Paris to Rapallo, Italy in 1924, Pound became a zealous supporter of Mussolini's fascist cause and volunteered in December 1941 to rally English and American support via internationally broadcast state radio. 'You let in the Jew and the Jew rotted your empire' he told the British government and their people on March 15<sup>th</sup> 1942, 'and you yourselves out-jewed the Jew'.<sup>584</sup> 'Your infamy is bound up with Judaea' he went on, 'you can not touch a sore or a shame in your empire but you find a Mond, a Sassoon, or a Goldsmid'.<sup>585</sup> Indeed, Pound consistently refers to usury as both a 'Semitic' and 'protestant' sin in his essays of the early 1930s, with the historical figureheads of both religions castigated for their acceptance and encouragement of it:

International usury is not entirely Jewish, but the evil done by the Jewish elements i.e international bleeding, is enough to explain hatred of Jewry ten times over. Nevertheless international usury contains more Calvinism,

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<sup>581</sup> 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 88.

<sup>582</sup> Surette, *Pound in Purgatory*, p. 239.

<sup>583</sup> 'Salutation the Third', p. 45. See my p. 112.

<sup>584</sup> Ezra Pound, *Certain radio speeches of Ezra Pound: from the recordings and transcriptions of his wartime broadcasts, Rome, 1941-1943* (Rotterdam : Cold Turkey Press, 1975), ed. by William Levy, p. 13.

<sup>585</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

protestant sectarianism, than Judaism. Philosophically, the two forms of this monetary gangrene are pretty much the same.<sup>586</sup>

Significantly, Pound alludes to the connection between usury and religion in the *Cancer* review by crediting Miller with successfully opposing 'the Protestant value-scale' and engendering a 'return toward ... catholicism' (88). As we shall see in the next chapter Miller, Pound and Bataille's approaches to Protestant morality and utilitarian economics all contain, in various forms, an opposition to Protestantism as the bulwark of a corruptive bourgeois value system. Despite his complicated textual relationship with both Protestantism and Judaism, however, Miller was not programmatically or economically anti-Semitic. He consistently caricatures Jewish friends like Michael Fraenkel and Max as 'neurotic' 'sufferers'. More disconcertingly, in *Capricorn* there is a brief moment in which he expresses a deeply unpleasant nostalgia for his early childhood in Williamsburg, New York before 'the invasion of the Jews' but he does not attempt to blame economic corruption on the Jewish race.<sup>587</sup> It nonetheless remains important to explore Pound and Miller's shared anxieties regarding the damaging misalignment of essential economic and social relations alongside these apparently anti-Semitic passages. As we will see in the following chapter, the nuances in Miller and Pound's writing on Judaism must be weighed against each other – in particular, Pound's consistent proclamations that usury is a 'Jewish' evil and Miller's desire to identify himself with and against 'the Jews' as a marginalized group.

Pound's anti-Semitic hunches developed it into a thoroughgoing, racist economic worldview - in 1933, two years before he wrote the *Cancer* review. In that year he published his first fully-fledged economic treatise, *The ABC of Economics*, followed over the next five years by the three collections of economic and political works mentioned earlier - *Social Credit: An Impact* and *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* in 1935 and *Guide to Kulchur* in 1938. It will be helpful at this stage to get an overview of the international political-economic conspiracy theory that Pound developed as well as the economic solution into which he tried to fit Miller.

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<sup>586</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Infamy of Taxes' (1938), quoted in Surette, *Pound in Purgatory*, p. 241.

<sup>587</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 196.

In *The ABC of Economics*, Pound claims that his 'duty' is now to 'think out a sane economics and to try to enforce it by that most violent of all means, the attempting to make people think.'<sup>588</sup> By 'sane economics' he means specifically a set of reforms advocated by Major C.H. Douglas, an untrained and unorthodox American economist whose theories were gaining popularity in the wake of the Wall Street Crash and whom he met in the offices of *The New Age*, a London-based literary and political periodical they both contributed to. Praising Douglas in his essay 'He Pulled His Weight', Pound writes 'the actual battle with ignorance, in the acute phase wherein I shared, began with Douglas's arrival' in London.<sup>589</sup> Indeed, throughout the 1920s and 30s Pound used his fame as a poet, literary critic and publicist to further Douglas' 'Social Credit' cause, corresponding with influential economists and politicians to illicit their support, and publishing various reviews and articles on Douglas, including a contribution to 1935's *The Social Credit Pamphlets*, a collection of pro-Douglas articles by the economist and his supporters. Tim Redman helpfully summarizes these concepts in his 1999 essay 'Pound's politics and economics':

The problem that Douglas attempted to remedy was that increases in productivity and the need for profit would lead to the eventual inability of a capitalist system to clear its markets; this inability led to dumping and layoffs, resulting in trade wars and depressions. To counter this problem, additional money had to be introduced into the system, and Douglas proposed to do this through the payment of an annual Social Credit dividend to all citizens.<sup>590</sup>

As Redman suggests, Douglas believed that the Western world economic model was in trouble because of the discrepancy between an exponentially high rate of production and an equally low rate of 'purchasing power' among its citizens.<sup>591</sup> The

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<sup>588</sup> Ezra Pound, *The ABC of Economics*, p. 61.

<sup>589</sup> Ezra Pound, 'He Pulled His Weight', in *Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose, Contributions to Periodicals*, Vol. 6, ed. by Lea Baechler, A. Walton Litz and James Longenbach (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), pp. 213-14, p. 213. Originally published in *New English Weekly*, VI. 5 (November, 1834).

<sup>590</sup> Tim Redman, 'Pound's politics and economics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 249-263, p. 253.

<sup>591</sup> C.H. Douglas, 'The Use of Money' in *The Social Credit Pamphleteer* (Stanley Nott, Ltd.: London, 1935), pp. 5-30, p. 14.

result was a state of 'overproduction' and 'under-consumption'.<sup>592</sup> Since goods were being produced regardless of peoples' ability to buy and consume them, Douglas claimed, it was inevitable that supply outweighed demand, leading to ever more frequent 'dumping' of excess product as well as job 'layoffs'. The consequence of this inverse and cyclical relationship between production and purchasing power, would lead to 'trade wars', and the only way in which the cycle could be disrupted was by rebalancing the relationship between production and purchasing power through a Social credit dividend to all citizens. Although the emphasis on commodities as a social driving force might immediately suggest the expansion of capitalism, in *Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot* William Chace points out that Douglas' theory is at root anti-capitalist, based on the belief that 'capitalist production, by its very nature, inevitably creates surplus.'<sup>593</sup>

Using the terminology and theorems presented by Douglas and other 'Social Credit Cranks' – a nickname given to Douglas' supporters by a skeptical mainstream press – Pound was able to connect the 'unnatural increase' of usurious banking to the over production and under consumption of goods on a worldwide scale. Where his discussions of *Ulysses* are built around abstract pronouncements on financial avarice and institutional abuses of power, the essays of the thirties follow Douglas' lead by engaging head-on with the nature of 'money', 'labor', 'credit' and 'interest' and the 'paradox between poverty and distress on the one hand and potential plenty on the other.'<sup>594</sup> In *Jefferson And Or Mussolini*, Pound paraphrases Douglas:

The way to solve the discrepancy between the goods on sale and the purchasing power of THE WHOLE PEOPLE, is by the issue of purchasing power DIRECTLY to the people, equitably and per person.<sup>595</sup>

The moral basis of Pound's Douglasite approach is helpfully illustrated by two of the economic tenets he sets out in *Social Credit: An Impact*: '1. Money is not a commodity; 2. Work is not a commodity.'<sup>596</sup> As in the Canto 46, 'With Usura', Pound deplores the

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<sup>592</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>593</sup> Chace, p. 26.

<sup>594</sup> Douglas, p. 30.

<sup>595</sup> Ezra Pound, *Jefferson And/Or Mussolini* (London: Stanley Nott, 1935), p. 23.

<sup>596</sup> Ezra Pound, *Social Credit: An Impact* (London: Stanley Nott, 1935), p. 8.

contamination of a fair and natural system of exchange, only this time he couches his argument in the language of market economics. By treating money and work as articles of commerce to be sold independently of the products they represent and produce, bankers devalue the ancient, and fair relationship between labour and goods. Indeed, it is the belief that money and work are independent commodities to be sold, rather than exchanged, that drives the 'stone cutter ... from his stone' and 'the weaver from his loom', since it removes skill, quality and true value from the work-production equation.<sup>597</sup> To focus on money and labour as means of making more money rather than feeding, clothing, sheltering, intellectually or sensually stimulating human beings, is to diminish and dilute the product, the craft that goes into its production and the human beings who make and use it. These developing concerns about usury and the disconnection of the worker from his work will be seen in the next chapter to constitute a bizarre alignment between Pound and Bataille, whose theories of bartering and exchange arise out of an opposite Marxist-inspired political agenda, and whose astute observations on 'la morale de Miller' both elucidate and complicate the latter's use of economic models in his writing.

Crucially, Pound links his belief that 'money is not a commodity' to artistic and literary processes by thinking in terms of wasted potential. Wherever the economic focus is on production for the sake of accumulation rather than real need, the quality of objects – and particularly artistic objects – falls correspondingly into decline. The economic and social 'paradox between poverty and distress on the one hand and potential plenty on the other' is reflected in the paradox between a diminished investment in artistry and craftsmanship and the concurrent increased material wealth of the age. As Surette puts it, 'Pound's point is that we can no longer afford ... fine things [beautiful cloth, stone, wool] even though the modern industrial world is far richer than the mediaeval craft world, which *could* afford them.'<sup>598</sup> Indeed, in contrast to the pre-usurious middle-ages, the twentieth century is blighted by a combination of unprecedented material plentitude and artistic poverty, in the connected senses of material support for artists and the quality of the work they

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<sup>597</sup> 'With Usura', p. 67.

<sup>598</sup> Surette, *Pound in Purgatory*, p. 26.

produce. Indeed, Pound saw it as an outrage, Surette writes, that 'the twentieth century had less money for the arts than the fifteenth.'<sup>599</sup> A production-centered economy driven by the buying and selling of money therefore sets the precedent for a society in which creativity is de-prioritized and diluted.

Douglas' 'Social Credit' theory provided Pound with a gratifying solution to this misalignment by proposing to reinstate the original promissory purpose of paper money. In its most basic components, Douglas writes in 'The Use of Money', the relationship between money and goods bartered resembles a 'ticket system'.<sup>600</sup> Like a ticket, a paper note of money should be thought of as a means of redeeming a product or experience that is equivalent to its value because of its quality and usefulness. This ticket should be valued for the goods and experiences it affords rather than coveted for its potential multiplying power. Indeed, according to Douglas: '[money] must be made to reflect the actual truth of the productive system and not attempt to control it. Finance must be made to follow industry and business and not control them.'<sup>601</sup>

In his review of Douglas' first book, Pound announces that the author's 'genius' lies in his demystification of some basic but vital facts, obscured over time by irresponsible orthodox economists. Douglas, Pound suggests, bravely faces down a system infected by a form of insanity so deeply institutionalized that it is not only tolerated but rationalized by the mainstream academic establishment. Social Credit theory unpacks and lays bare, Pound says, the basic and proper function of each element in an economy, pointing out where and how these have been corrupted and where and how they have the potential to be restored. Douglas understands 'the reason for growing food is to feed the people. The reason for weaving cloth is to clothe them. The function of a monetary system is to get the goods from where they are to the people that need them.'<sup>602</sup> Pound's support for Douglas' ideas thus arises

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<sup>599</sup> Ibid. p. 26

<sup>600</sup> Douglas, p. 30.

<sup>601</sup> Douglas, p. 30.

<sup>602</sup> Pound, *Social Credit: An Impact*, p. 22.



from the desire to restore a sense of basic functionality to an economic system that has lost sight of its original purpose

As section 3.3, 'Miller's Inferno: A Poundian Economic Reading of *Tropic of Cancer*', will show, Pound's disbelief and outrage at the unacknowledged madness of early twentieth-century capitalism is echoed not only in his review of *Cancer* but throughout the actual writing of *Cancer* and *Capricorn*. Although Miller advocates the individual's freedom from this system rather than the need to regulate and reform it, he shared Pound's belief that capitalism was a form of legitimized, institutionalized insanity. As he puts it in *Cancer*, 'though the earth be rotting with good things, there is no time to pluck the fruits' (188). Miller's use of prostitution on multiple levels likewise presents an alternative moral code whose economic implications, principally in relation to work and financial prudence as slavery, seems to confirm the absurdity of so-called 'normal' work, of labor for money alone and of the earning of money from money. Though Pound was inherently more programmatic in his approach, Miller's erratic invectives against capitalism and corrupt labour ethics are significant reasons for the affinity Pound feels with him.

An aspect of Pound's 1930s worldview that is more difficult to square with his interest in Miller is the connection he made between liberal democratic governments, international banking institutions and the companies that supplied weapons for war. Ruthven, Chace and Alec Marsh have all pointed out that, after T.E. Hulme and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska's deaths in the First World War, one of Pound's chief objectives was to uncover the economic and political reasons for its apparently purposeless carnage. As Chace writes, 'Social Credit ... offered ... an astonishingly straightforward explanation', enabling him to understand military conflict as a practice designed to preserve an international economic system that relied on the continual creation of debt to maintain momentum.<sup>603</sup> Alec Marsh also addresses this in his essay 'Politics', writing that after meeting Douglas 'Pound believed that wars

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<sup>603</sup> Chace, p. 24.

are made to create debt because under the perverse values of economic liberalism debt is equivalent to wealth'.<sup>604</sup>

Thus, having initially hinted at the connection between vested economic interests in government and the outbreak of war, Pound came to see it as a deliberate conspiracy between governments, banks and arms companies to sustain the existing system. As Ruthven notes, Pound wrote in 1944 that 'usurers provoke wars to impose monopolies in their own interests ... so that they can get the world by the throat'.<sup>605</sup> Indeed, seven years before – in 1937 - he refused to contribute to his friend Nancy Cunard's survey, *Authors Take Sides On the Spanish Civil War*, claiming that the war 'had occurred so that \$1 of petrol [could] be sold for \$5.' Just as in the First World War, he goes on, 'the kikes were financing both sides'.<sup>606</sup> For Pound, 'the network of [Jewish run] French banks and international munition sellers' are embroiled in an ongoing conspiracy to force European governments into conflict with one another: 'the creation of wars by competing nations demanding foreign outlets for their immobilized goods.'<sup>607</sup>

These ideas also catalyzed Pound's rejection of liberal democracy in favor of Mussolini's fascism. In *Jefferson And/Or Mussolini*, his pamphlet defending the Italian leader from liberal attack, Pound rounds on the British government for pandering to 'the unscrupulous bankers [and] a few gangs of munitions vendors'.<sup>608</sup> Thus he associates the 'insanity' of international monetary affairs with weak and hypocritical liberal democracies of England, France and America who refuse to stand up to international Jewish usurers. As Chace notes in *The Political Identities of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound*, Pound's essays between the late 1910s and the 1930s demonstrate 'an extreme revulsion against liberal democracy ... paralleled in few other writers of the century'.<sup>609</sup> Similarly, Michael North points out Pound's disgust, in 1938's *Guide to*

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<sup>604</sup> Marsh, p. 99.

<sup>605</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Gold and Work', in *Selected Prose*, ed. by Cookson, pp.,306-21, p. 310 (1941), quoted in Ruthven, p. 152.

<sup>606</sup> Pound, 'To Nancy Cunard', quoted in Ruthven, p. 152.

<sup>607</sup> Pound, quoted in Chace, p. 25.

<sup>608</sup> Ezra Pound, *Jefferson And/Or Mussolini*,

<sup>609</sup> Chace, xvii.

*Kulchur*, with what he saw as the contamination of British democracy by 'the running sore' of 'liberalism'.<sup>610</sup> In Mussolini's fascist government, conversely, he saw the best chance of facing down 'the kikes', installing a "'sane economic system" and avoiding military conflict. Indeed, as Alec Marsh explains, the great irony of Pound's support for the totalitarian Italian fascist state was that it was initially motivated by a naïvely idealistic 'anti-war' and anti-repressive sentiment. He saw Mussolini's absolute dictatorship, Marsh says, as the one hope Europe had of applying 'a check on the big lie that capitalism and political liberty were compatible'.<sup>611</sup>

In this scheme, the 'god-damn stink' Pound sees 'cooked up' in Joyce's *Ulysses* refers not only to corrupt language and banking but to the liberal democratic politicians who led Europe into the First World War; moreover, the positive solution he sees represented in Miller's *Cancer* is invariably tied into a vision of the future in which Mussolini's fascism protects the world from economic evil *and* military conflict.<sup>612</sup> Indeed, Pound writes in his essay 'Joyce' that 'If Armageddon has taught us anything, it should be to abominate the tellers of half-truths'.<sup>613</sup> He goes on to attack Lloyd George, who 'took the legislative power out of the hands of the legislators and left it for wranglers and pettifoggers, to be construed to the gang's greatest advantage'.<sup>614</sup> By the time Pound promotes Miller's 'hierarchy of values' in 'the present chaos', he has made the case for Mussolini as a 'constructive' alternative to the corrupt and ineffectual leaders of every other Western state. In *Jefferson And/Or Mussolini*, which affirms a kinship between Mussolini's dictatorship and the paternal agrarian politics of eighteenth-century American president Thomas Jefferson, he writes 'the problem of democracy is whether its alleged system, its *de jure* system, can still be handled by the men of good will; whether real issues as distinct from red herrings CAN be forced into the legislatures (House and Senate)'.<sup>615</sup> By contrast to

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<sup>610</sup> Michael North, *The Political Aesthetics of Yeats, Pound and Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 2.

<sup>611</sup> Marsh, p. 99.

<sup>612</sup> Pound, quoted in *Pound/Joyce*, ed. by Read, p. 267.

<sup>613</sup> 'Joyce', p. 415.

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.* p. 415.

<sup>615</sup> *Jefferson And/Or Mussolini*, pp. 103-04

this corrupt and irresponsible façade, the totalitarian state of 'modern Italy is a fact and not merely theory'.<sup>616</sup> 'Mussolini' 'has done something, *constructive or otherwise*. While the others have *merely talked*.'<sup>617</sup> As Leon Surette points out:

Among the features of Mussolini's fascism that appealed to Pound was its pretension to be the beginning of a new and wonderful era, the *era fascista* ... Pound thought Mussolini was his man of destiny. He believed that the past holds the key to a glorious future but that the key has been bent by stupidity and veniality. He thought that if we could identify and assemble those ideas suited to "go into action," if we could support the geniuses who produce those ideas, and if we could promulgate them to the world, we could probably generate a utopian future, a new age.<sup>618</sup>

Pound praises Miller as a heroic persona in similar terms to those he uses to praise Mussolini – a crossover that sheds new and important light on the potentially fascistic overtones in Miller's own writing. In the following section, Miller's writing will be assessed in the context of this binary model of economic, social and literary good and evil. In what ways does Miller genuinely offer Pound an alternative to what he sees as the contaminated, usurious literature of his age? In what ways does *Cancer* corroborate the Social Credit ideas promoted throughout Pound's economic essays of the 1930s? As we will see, Miller is fundamentally concerned with the individual rather than society's potential for change. In this sense, he both correlates with and diverges from Pound's beliefs about the 'natural' and 'unnatural' relations between word and thing, paper money and commodity, idea and action.

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<sup>616</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>618</sup> Surette, *The Birth of Modernism*, p. 68.

### 3.3 Miller's Inferno: A Poundian economic reading of *Tropic of Cancer*

'All this is scatological, eschatological and ecumenical. It is forbidden. *Verboten*. And so the Land of Fuck becomes ever more receding; it becomes mythological.' Henry Miller, *Capricorn*<sup>619</sup>

'I was one, a single entity in the midst of the greatest jamboree of wealth and happiness (statistical wealth, statistical happiness) but I never met a man who was truly wealthy or truly happy. At least I knew I was unhappy, unwealthy, out of whack and out of step. That was my only solace, my only joy.' Henry Miller, *Capricorn*<sup>620</sup>

If it is surprising that Pound identified 'a hierarchy of values' in Miller's work, it is even more surprising that he promotes him as a writer actively engaged with economics. There is, indeed, no mention in *Cancer* of 'usura', 'technocracy', 'economic computations' or any of the other 'dominant, cleaving issues' that Pound accuses Joyce of ignoring.<sup>621</sup> On the surface, it appears entirely incongruous for Pound to speak of Miller in this way, particularly as these economic criteria led Pound to excommunicate almost all the contemporaries he had previously professed to admire. Beyond Joyce and Lewis - 'put back in their proper cubby-holes' by Miller's writing - he chastised his friends and mentees Robert McAlmon and Ernest Hemingway, writing to McAlmon in 1934 that by 'not recognizing the economic factor you .... have limited yr. work'.<sup>622</sup> Indeed, Pound attacks McAlmon and Hemingway's choices of subject matter, claiming that "people too lazy to examine the facts are not intelligent enough to write interesting books (reduced to bulls [Hemmingway] and memoirs [McAlmon] depending on personalities)."<sup>623</sup>

It is also important to remember that Miller was aware of and bemused by Pound's interest in him as an 'economic' writer. Before reviewing *Cancer*, Pound wrote Miller a short letter extolling the novel's virtues but also querying why more was not made of 'the money issue': 'Though you realize the force of money AS destiny', Pound

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<sup>619</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 176

<sup>620</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>621</sup> Pound, *Pound/Joyce*, p. 256.

<sup>622</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256; 'Pound to McAlmon', in *Pound/Joyce*, p. 255, February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1934.

<sup>623</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

wrote, 'the one question you haven't asked yourself is: What IS money? who makes it/ how does it get that way?'.<sup>624</sup> Miller would later complain to Lawrence Durrell that James Laughlin, his publisher at New Directions between 1938 and 1950 and a sometime protégé of Pound's, 'had got word ... that he [Pound] would promote the book if I would swing the bat for his crazy social credit theories.'<sup>625</sup> Miller responded by producing a satirical economic treatise with Pound's exact suggestion as its title. *Money and How it Gets that Way* is a send-up of economic jargon and of a literary celebrity like Pound's attempt to involve himself in economics; the treatise is 'a burlesque' Miller puts it in a 1939 letter to his friend Gerhsam Legman, 'on the pedagogical style.'<sup>626</sup> While the book is deliberately nonsensical (Miller also called it 'a hilarious farce meaning absolutely nothing'), it gives a good indication of Miller's irreverence for a topic Pound treated with the utmost seriousness as well as revealing some of his genuine ideas on money that exist beneath the surface of his spoofing.<sup>627</sup> As we shall see over the following section, Miller vacillates between the assumption that the study of money is futile or 'idle' - '*Money is*', he writes in *Money and How it Gets that Way* 'and whatever form or shape it may assume it is never more nor less than *money*. To inquire therefore how it comes about that money has become what it is now is as idle as to inquire what makes evolution' - and various serious declarations about protestant, capitalist economic morality that suggest the need for radical reform.<sup>628</sup>

Indeed, despite Miller's misgivings and mockeries, there *are* ways in which *Cancer* can be read as an implicit critique of the economic system Pound despised. Not only does *Cancer* address these larger economic issues allegorically it also incorporates commodities, production and labor in complex ways. In this context, Georges

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<sup>624</sup> Gunther Stuhlmann (ed.), *Henry Miller: Letters To Anaïs Nin* (London: Shelden Press, 1979), p.162, December 4<sup>th</sup> 1934.

<sup>625</sup> *The Durrell-Miller Letters*, p. 69, April 5<sup>th</sup> 1937

<sup>626</sup> 'Henry Miller to Gerhsam Legman' (1939), quoted by James Decker, 'Money and How it Gets that Way', *Nexus: The International Henry Miller Journal*, 1 (2008).

<<http://cosmotc.blogspot.co.uk/2008/03/money-and-how-it-gets-that-way.html>> Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> January 2014, [para. 1 of 8].

<sup>627</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26

<sup>628</sup> *Money and How it Gets that Way* (Paris: Booster Publications, 1937), p. 14.

Bataille provides a philosophical bridge between Miller and Pound's approaches to capitalism since he reads Miller as a writer engaged in 'a search for moral values lost' for economic reasons that contradict but also correlate with Pound's.<sup>629</sup> Indeed, Bataille's essay 'La Morale de Miller' (1946) is part of a wider sociological comparison - between the 'natural' sacrificial economies of Aztec and indigenous North American societies and the 'unnatural' economic systems of modern western societies - that bears an incongruous but striking resemblance to Pound's economic theory. Written for 'Defense de Miller', a special issue of the Parisian periodical *Critique* devoted to defending Miller against impending obscenity charges, Bataille's essay will be read alongside some of his social anthropological and economic essays and longer works to illuminate Pound's interpretation of *Cancer* as an economically engaged work of literature. The fact that Pound categorized both Miller and Mussolini as uncommonly 'sane' men opens up some pressing questions as to Miller's ethical and economic approach as well as implying a certain *rationale* behind Miller's writing that also connects him to Bataille's economic and literary ideas.

Pound's identification of the 'economic factor' in *Cancer* resides, partly, in a reading of the narrative as an accurate reflection of the individual's subjective experience under the pressures of 'the monetary system'. 'No one man in a thousand' he writes in *The ABC of Economics* 'can be aroused to an interest in economics until he definitely suffers from the effects of an evil system'.<sup>630</sup> In his review of *Cancer*, Pound defines Miller as a writer of prospect because his perspective has been unclouded by his exposure to the fundamental economic evils of the period. As opposed to the current crop of writers who, he says in his letter to McAlmon, are busy 'fussing with in'nards which are merely the result of economic pressure', Miller reports truthfully on the direct impact of a usurious banking system, of the illogical and unjustifiable 'paradox between poverty and distress on the one hand and potential plenty on the other'.<sup>631</sup> Moreover, Miller is presented as an antidote to what Pound calls the 'damn

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<sup>629</sup> Bataille, 'La Morale de Miller', p. 1.

<sup>630</sup> *ABC of Economics*, p. 34.

<sup>631</sup> 'Pound to McAlmon', in *Pound/Joyce*, p. 255; Douglas, 'The Use of Money', p. 30.

rot' of 'psychology' and self-indulgent introspection.<sup>632</sup> Here is a writer who, enlightened by his social and economic degeneration, is able to identify the impact on the individual of the malevolent governmental, economic and industrial forces that have corrupted the world.

Thus Pound again posits Miller as a 'cure' but this time as an antidote to the decadent influence of psychoanalysis on literature. In a section of *Jefferson And/Or Mussolini* entitled 'Freud', Pound rails against literary art that follows the psychoanalytical path, dismissively claiming that it represents 'the flower of a deliquescent society going to pot.' 'The average human head', he goes on, 'is less in need of having something removed from it, than of having something inserted.'<sup>633</sup> This is a far cry from the 1922 review of *Ulysses* in which Pound praises Joyce for the psychoanalytical complexity in his depiction of Molly Bloom: 'her ultimate meditations are uncensored (bow to the psychoanalysis required at this point). The "censor" in the Freudian sense is removed'.<sup>634</sup>

Indeed, Joyce, Lewis, McAlmon and Hemingway are all criticized for producing introspective works that deal with the trivial anxieties of the ordinary human mind, indulging their own and their readers' childish desires for catharsis. Calling to mind his 1938 description of Joyce as a writer who 'answered his invocation to "spew up some Rabelais to define the age"', in 1922 Pound writes to American educator Felix Schelling that now 'it isn't enough to give the Rabelaisian guffaw'.<sup>635</sup> Art should instead operate towards an understanding of 'the facts', by which he means the great economic pressures that cause those anxieties in the first place. This attack on introspective, psychoanalytical literature – made through Pound's use of the term 'katharciser' [sic] as an insult for Joyce – implies that Miller is the originator of a new kind of confessional prose. Lampooning Joyce, caricaturing him as 'Jim drunk occupied with the crumb on his weskit', while at roughly the same time praising

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<sup>632</sup> 'Pound to McAlmon', in *Pound/Joyce*, p. 255.

<sup>633</sup> *Jefferson And/Or Mussolini*, p. 100.

<sup>634</sup> 'Ulysses', p. 407.

<sup>635</sup> 'To Felix Schelling', *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound*, July 8<sup>th</sup> 1922, p. 178.



Miller for his enlarged 'circle of reference', Pound suggests that *Cancer* represents a new explorative approach to subjective experience.<sup>636</sup>

Pound's shift in positions on the subject of literary catharsis reveals another paradox inherent in his support for Miller. Indeed, we saw in Chapter Two that Miller located his own means of catharsis in the irreverent transgression of societal taboos; specifically, the uninhibited expression of sexual obscenity. If, as Miller put it, *Cancer* represents an author 'coming out with it cold' in order to purge himself of harmful, repressive fears and anxieties,<sup>637</sup> then Pound's disdain for Joyce as 'katharciser', 'occupied with the crumb on his weskit' could apply to Miller as well. Why, then, does Pound read Miller's own inspection of himself as a truer, more productive form of catharsis?

In *Jefferson And/Or Mussolini*, Pound criticizes literature that limits itself to a diagnosis of the individual's suffering and stops short of seeking either cause or cure. If Joyce's 'foecal' analysis had served a useful purpose in its time, what is now required of confessional literature is something altogether more constructive - 'That which makes a man forget his bellyache (physical or psychic) is probably as healthy as concentration of his attention on the analysis of the products or educts of a stomach-pump.'<sup>638</sup> Thus Miller satisfies his desire for a literary figure who, in plumbing the depths of his everyday existence, not only proves the veniality of a usurious and 'unnatural' economy but prepares the way for a healthier life. Indeed, as mentioned in Section 3.1, the Miller of Pound's review passes what Chace, in *Political Identities in Ezra Pound*, describes as Pound's litmus test for the 1930s artist:

[For Pound] The test of man is his ability to endure the contemporary hell contrived by usurers and, moreover, to so describe its shape and feel that the preciseness of his description will serve the struggle of all others so imprisoned.<sup>639</sup>

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<sup>636</sup> *Pound/Joyce*, p. 254.

<sup>637</sup> 'An Interview with Henry Miller', *Writers at Work*, p. 153-54.

<sup>638</sup> *Jefferson And/Or Mussolini*, p. 101.

<sup>639</sup> Chace, p. 71.

Miller's 'honesty', according to Pound, arises from his position as a man who has 'no money' and whose 'major preoccupation is 'FOOD''.<sup>640</sup> Thus Pound not only categorizes Miller as virtuous for honestly representing his physical, stomachic suffering, he understands him as someone who reaffirms the core values and truths that occur at the 'nadir' of a personal inferno, here represented by 'the café international strata' (88). His hunger intensified at the center of the inferno, the lowest point of 'the low-life', Miller is able to identify and delineate a positive and instructive 'hierarchy of values' (88).

Thus Miller and Pound's shared ideas about the moral truth that is revealed by physical suffering and immediate instinctual desire also apply to the notion of hunger for food. As this chapter progresses, we shall see that Pound's location of Miller at the 'nadir' in *Cancer* connects to both of their more expansive interests in values that transcend the history of intellectual ideas and unite people viscerally across epochs. This – we shall see in Section 3.4 - is a crucial reason for their common interest in the problematic culturally essentialist ideas of Leo Frobenius and Oswald Spengler, the stomach acting as the organ in which human beings from every period have been able to discern a set of virtues and truths. As importantly, hunger also highlights a fundamental difference between Pound and Miller's representation of society and economy.<sup>641</sup> In contrast to Pound's situating of all literary, social and political evil in usury, Miller critiques economic relations in order to explore the metaphysical issue of what exactly constitutes humanity. In humanity's unhealthy relationship with desire and the perpetual, simultaneous need and inability to expend energy, lies the key to Miller's economics.

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<sup>640</sup> 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 88.

<sup>641</sup> Miller's representation of his immediate, day-to-day hunger – for food and sex – while he tramps the streets of Paris, was directly informed by his reading of Knut Hamsun. Hamsun's most successful book, entitled simply *Hunger*, is talked about by Miller in *The Books In My Life* as a major influence on his work – 'in the early stages of my career it was Knut Hamsun whom I idolized, whom I most desired to imitate' ('Blaise Cendrars', in *The Best of Henry Miller*. ed. by Durrell, pp. 327-353, p. 327. Originally published in *The Books of My Life* (New York: New Directions, 1952)). It was partly through Hamsun, that Miller explored the idea – dealt with in Chapter Two of this thesis - of physical hunger as a means of removing false and hypocritical questions of conscience and moral judgment from the experience of daily living.

It follows that, although Pound conspicuously neglects to support his claims regarding Miller's understanding of money, there *is* evidence in *Cancer* of an interest in modern systems of industry and commerce as 'unnatural' and of the desirability of more straightforward modes of exchange. Indeed, the 'shape and feel' of the 'hell contrived by usurers' in Pound's world can be traced in both the legitimate and illegitimate worlds of employment in *Cancer*. Pound's mission statement in *ABC of Economics*, to demystify the monetary system and return its various components to their basic functions, is epitomized in Miller's veneration of prostitution at the expense of more socially acceptable professions. Miller was enamored, as Caroline Blinder points out, with the often criminal social and economic life he observed in working-class cafes, identifying his own quest to escape the fixed conditions of a repressive economic system with a system he took to represent a freer way of living:

Miller ... took great pride in [his] local working-class cafes, and saw [his] own ability to move from high to low culture as a sign of independence from traditional economic pressures.<sup>642</sup>

It is through an analysis of his visits to these cafes, as well as Parisian working class bars and brothels, that Pound's Douglasite pronouncements on the corruption of societal relationships - between currency and goods, employees and their employment, men and women - can be traced.

Moreover, various essays by Georges Bataille – dealing with economics, fascism and, most importantly, Miller's moral code - will be used to clarify related links and points of departure between Pound and Miller. Pound and Bataille share an interest in anthropology that leads them towards curiously similar readings of Miller as a morally certain writer. Despite the fact that Bataille comes at these issues from a Marxist and social anthropological perspective and Pound, from a partly conservative, partly anti-ideological one, they also share a belief in the system of economics as a misaligned and non-operable entity in the 1930s. In his collection of essays *Visions of Excess* and his 1949 economic study *The Accursed Share*, Bataille performs a reading of Aztec and indigenous North American human sacrifice and the systems of expenditure that grew up around it; in particular 'Potlach', a North

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<sup>642</sup> Blinder, *Sexual Aesthetics*, p. 21.

American tribal custom that involved 'the solemn giving of considerable riches, offered by a chief to his rival for the purpose of humiliating, challenging and obligating him'.<sup>643</sup> Bataille is interested in the psychological forces that govern human behavior and the origins of economic activity in 'the biosphere' rather than rational analysis.<sup>644</sup> By looking more closely at Pound and Bataille's ideological differences, while pointing out areas of crossover, it is possible to place Miller in the wider context of radical responses to economic instability in the inter-war period and thus build a clearer picture of the economic, social and psychological 'inferno' Miller represents in *Cancer*.

Crucially, Bataille and Pound are united by their interest in usury as a symbol of Protestant corruption. Where Bataille reads Miller as celebrating waste and excess, Pound admires his moral code for its restoration of a natural balance and health. The intricacies of these two interpretations will be teased out to produce a more complex reading of Miller's approach to acquisition as another example of his contradictorily excessive and conservative drives. This also helps elucidate the tension between the aforementioned desire for and anxiety about expenditure – in both the sexual and monetary sense – most evident in his descriptions of prostitutes.

As we saw in Chapter Two, Miller posits the underworld inhabited by the pimps and prostitutes in *Cancer* as a more honest and liberated marketplace than the one in which he and his colleagues at *The Chicago Tribune* operate. In contrast to the reporters and editors at his office - compared to 'frogs dancing around like drunken squibs' - the prostitute Lucienne, who dines with her pimp lover at the cafe between her shifts, is depicted as powerful, dangerous and splendidly transcendent - 'a silver condor suspended over the sluggish tide of traffic ... sailing down the boulevard with her wings outstretched' (164-65). Unlike the tired, socially successful men who work frenetically all day, Lucienne is the mistress of her own destiny and transgressions. She is, Miller writes, 'no wage slave' (160).

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<sup>643</sup> Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share* (Zone Books: New York, 1988 (orig. ed.: 1949)), pp. 67-8.

<sup>644</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

Miller's belief that the transgression of taboo affirms the individual's humanity is rooted in a celebratory analysis of the illegal money that changes hands between the prostitutes, their pimps and clients on the Rue Lafayette. For Miller, this black market economy is representative of a fluid, positive counterforce to the stagnant and negative flow of legal tender from citizen to business, to bank to the stock market. The sullied, crumpled notes exchanged for sex symbolize a direct relationship between human work and reward:

Every bar is alive, throbbing, the dice loaded; the cashiers are perched like vultures on their high stools and the money they handle has a human stink to it. There is no equivalent in the Bank of France for the blood money that passes currency here, the money that glistens from human sweat, that passes like a forest fire from hand to hand and leaves behind it a smoke and stench. A man who can walk through the Fauberg Montmartre at night without panting or sweating, without a prayer or a curse on his lips, a man like that has no balls, and if he has, then he ought to be castrated. (163)

The money is vitalized by the fact that the goods it buys are animate and bodily, because it fulfills the natural, human desire for satisfaction of the flesh rather than material acquisition. Its 'human stink' substantiates it whereas the clean, untainted bank notes in the vaults of the Bank of France are disconnected from any live activity. More importantly, the currency that circulates in the Fauberg Montmartre directly participates in the universal life process through its facilitation of sexual activity.

The 'human sweat' that 'glistens' on these notes suggests sap on a leaf, a layer of moisture that gathers naturally and is caught tantalizingly in sunlight. By equating human bodily fluid with the organic excretions of the natural world, Miller creates an unsettling, pungent effect, calling to mind another episode in *Cancer* in which he and his wife lie together, post-coital and sated: 'The heavy bedroom. Breathing regularly through the gills, sap still oozing from between her legs' (27). The words 'sap' and 'oozing' imply the primordial origins of the sexual act and produce an image that is both abundant and repellent. Added to this, the image of the notes passing 'like a forest fire from hand to hand' is reminiscent of the universal charge that Miller remembers from his sexual encounters with Germaine:

All the men she's been with and now you, just you, and barges going by, masts and hulls, the whole damned current of life flowing through you, though her, through all the guys behind you and after you (51).

Miller's conception of the opposite, negative flow is illustrated in his recollection of a busy New York street in *Tropic of Capricorn*:

To walk in money through the night crowd, protected by money, lulled by money, dulled by money, the crowd itself a money, the breath money, no least single object anywhere that is not money, money, money everywhere and still not enough, and then no money or a little money or less money or more money, but money, always money, and if you have money or you don't have money it is the money that counts and money makes money, *but what makes money make money?* (108)

In contrast to the seedy, decrepit Parisian quartier, 'alive, throbbing with the dice loaded', the clean, wealthy and modern American setting is sterile and lifeless. Rather than an agent for human activity, marked and stained by the humans who use it, money here is an independent, omnipresent and dominant force. The vitality of the Parisian scene is partly sourced from a sense of menace, of imminent danger that is entirely missing here. Swaddled or 'lulled' by the money in their pockets and on show in the new and impressive buildings and lights around them, the Manhattan crowd is removed from the vital current of life that electrifies and sustains the prostitutes' district in *Cancer*. Indeed, while the experience of walking past the prostitutes in the Fauberg Montmartre induces perspiration and a panicked shortening of breath - 'panting ... sweating' - in New York a person's very breath is 'money', their quick and urgent emotions having been neutralized by the hyper-commercial atmosphere of the street.

Thus Miller shares Pound's horror at the dehumanizing power bestowed on money. In this respect, they both see it as an independent commodity with an allure that supersedes the goods it affords. Miller's improvisational riff, with its frenzied repetition of the word 'money', reads in part like a parody of the con artist salesman's spiel, in part the madman's soliloquy. 'It is the money that counts' not the 'object' it buys, the actual value of each object having been subsumed by its price tag - there is 'no least single object anywhere that is not money'. Again describing his job

at the newspaper, Miller posits the capitalist approach to money and labor as examples of a 'debauchery' of ideas:

What is ... strange is that the absence of any relationship between ideas and living causes us no anguish, no discomfort. We have become so adjusted that, if tomorrow we were ordered to walk on our hands, we would do so without the slightest protest. Provided, of course, that the paper came out as usual. And that we touched our pay regularly ... We have become coolies, white-collar coolies, silenced by a handful of rice each day. (158)

This separation 'between ideas and living' is equal to Pound's critique of the 'unnatural increase' of usury. Just as Miller, we remember, points out the futility of a thought or theory that has 'no sex, no vitality', Pound sees the accumulation of money from money as the result of a neutered impulse. In this way, both writers are interested in Capitalism as a symbolic and literal threat to the positive, sexual charge necessary for humanity's survival. They are in agreement that money - like ideas - enslaves people when it is disconnected from its first basic and natural principals, when it becomes a negative rather than positive force of energy.

Though Miller does not suggest anything like the specific reforms that Pound puts forward as a Social Creditist, they overlap in their understanding of the perpetual, active use of money as a way of demystifying and disempowering it. Increased circulation is at the heart of the idea of 'social credit' as something that should be regularly and equally allotted to all citizens. This relates interestingly to Pound's introduction to de Gourmont's *Philosophy of Love* - dealt with in Chapter Two of this study - in which he equates the movement of creative thought with the reproductive activity of sperm. 'Creative thought', we remember him saying, 'is an act like fecundation, like the male cast of the human seed'.<sup>645</sup> Discussing this eccentric metaphor in his study *Language, Sexuality, Ideology in Ezra Pound's the 'Cantos'*, Jean-Michelle Rabaté speculates that for Pound:

money becomes positive when it is fluid, when circulation is swift and easy; a liquidized money loses its bad smell, it detaches itself sufficiently from the

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<sup>645</sup> Pound, 'Introduction', in de Gourmont, *The Natural Philosophy of Love*, p. vii. See my p. 191.

anal gift in which it found its origin. The flow of magnetized money then figures the equivalent of sperm in its orgasmic and phallic dynamic.<sup>646</sup>

In other words, Pound sees the liquidized flow of money as representative of and symbiotic with a natural reproductive system of exchange and a natural reproductive system of thought. It is in line with this kind of thinking, then, that Miller perceives the micro economy of the red light district as 'alive, throbbing' because it exists independently of a vast, economic machine. As he puts it later on in the text, to 'put money into circulation – that's the principal thing' (197). Sex-trade currency, Miller claims, 'will never be taken out of circulation because there's nothing in the Banque de France to redeem it with' (168). By its illegality, it is forced into a positive perpetual motion and by the 'human sweat' and 'stink' it carries (both figuratively and literally), it has a fair, basic and vital value, maintaining contact with the activity it affords. In this way, Miller creates a stripped down version of the monetary system in which money enables consumption rather than conservation and accumulation and in which 'purchasing power' is situated amongst human beings rather than 'clogged up' in the machinery of capitalist market economics.

Thus, when Miller writes of Lucienne as a majestic bird 'suspended over the sluggish tide of traffic', it is in direct response to the frenzy of the established economic machinery. He daydreams of her, a symbol of individual liberty in a world driven crazy by money, while copy-editing the financial reports at the paper:

In between the rubber and silk markets and the Winnipeg grains there oozes a little of the fizz and sizzle of the Faubourg Montmartre. When the bonds go weak and spongy and the pivots balk and the volatiles effervesce, when the gain market slips and slides and the bulls commence to roar, when every fucking calamity, every ad, every sport item and fashion article, every boat arrival, every travelogue, every tug of gossip has been punctuated, checked, revised, pegged and wrung through the silver bracelets, when I hear the front page being hammered into whack and see the frogs dancing around like drunken squibs, I think of Lucienne sailing down the boulevard with her wings outstretched, a huge silver condor suspended over the sluggish tide of traffic. (164-5)

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<sup>646</sup> Rabaté, p. 268.



Miller's figuration of prostitutes as symbols of protest against mainstream economics is, as we saw in Chapter Two, part of a more pervasive attraction to the underside of bourgeois life. If the pimps and prostitutes exploit each other and their clients, at least they make no attempt to hide the fact. Interestingly, given the common association of organized crime with money laundering, Miller posits criminal money as unlaundered, a stained symbol of the pimps', prostitutes' and punters' moral transparency. It follows that the banking system itself can be read as an enormous, complex and convoluted laundering network. For Miller, criminal workers are liberated by their marginalisation since their transactions take place outside of the larger hypocrisies implicit in the international economic sphere.

The description of Lucienne 'suspended over the sluggish tide of traffic' suggests – perversely - that it is the very commodification of her body that has freed her from wage-slavery. The prostitute accepts, rather than obscures, the dehumanizing project represented by modern capitalist society, thereby paradoxically rendering her able to cope with its worst excesses. This relates to a point Sarah Garland makes in *Rhetoric and Excess*:

In writing about prostitutes and paid women Miller also shores up [his] tremendous feeling of immunity. Commodifying women neutralises them into objects of exchange with a calculable value (and for the procurer, a calculable degree of loss); all vulnerability is expunged.<sup>647</sup>

Just as he presents himself as immunized against neurosis by laughter, obscenity and sex, he imagines that Lucienne is safeguarded from the terrible psychological dangers of a corrupt economic system by her acceptance that she is a dehumanized component within it. Of course, Garland suggests that this commodification is a way for Miller to expunge his own feelings of vulnerability, an idea that is also applicable to Miller's canonization of Lucienne and Germaine. By imagining certain prostitutes as noble in their self-commodification, he is able to experience that imagined nobility and immunity vicariously.

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<sup>647</sup> Garland, *Rhetoric and Excess*, p. 50.

As with their common opposition to puritanical sexual codes, Pound and Miller's ideas about the corruption of modern capitalist relations are rooted in a profound antipathy towards Lutheran and Calvinist utilitarian morals and skewed definitions of 'wealth'. Indeed, in his *Cancer* review Pound suggests that Miller's strong 'hierarchy of values' is a welcome corrective to 'the grossness of the protestant value scale' (88). This attempt by Pound to ally himself with Miller on the issue of religious-economic evil is paradoxically echoed in Bataille, who himself reads Miller as an important opponent of the banal, petit bourgeois obsession with acquisition, conservation, and social and professional productiveness. All three writers locate the evil of capitalist economics in their Lutheran roots, preferring the pre-utilitarian moral positions of pagan and – in the cases of Bataille and Pound - Catholic societies.

In *Guide to Kulchur* (1938), Pound attributes the rise of usury and the cultural, moral corruption outlined earlier to Martin Luther's sixteenth-century founding of the Protestant Church. 'Putting usury on a pedestal', Pound writes in *Guide to Kulchur* 'in order to set avarice on high, the protestant centuries twisted all morality out of shape.'<sup>648</sup> By building a moral religious system based on the limited notion of the individual's will towards industry, he claims, Martin Luther created the conditions within which the 'semitic' practice of usury – banned for fifteen centuries by the Roman Catholic Church - could flourish. According to this scheme, Calvinism – which succeeded Lutheranism as the dominant branch of European Christianity in the 1600's – extended Martin Luther's legacy by legalizing usury:

The scale and proportion of evil, as delimited in Dante's hell (or the catholic hell) was obliterated by the Calvinist and Lutheran churches. I don't mean to say that these heretics cut off their ideas of damnation all at once, suddenly or consciously, I mean that the effect of Protestantism has been semitically to obliterate values, to efface grades and graduations.<sup>649</sup>

As this shows, and various scholars have pointed out, Pound consistently couches Lutheran and Calvinist corruption of Catholic values – economic and otherwise – in terms of Jewish contamination. Chace writes that 'just as feelings against usury ...

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<sup>648</sup> *Guide To Kulchur*, p. 247.

<sup>649</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185. Quoted in Chace, *The Political Identities of T.S. Eliot & Ezra Pound*, p. 78.

lead Pound immediately to feelings against Protestants, so feelings against Protestants lead him immediately to feelings against those who behave “semitically”.<sup>650</sup> Similarly, in his 2005 study *Ezra Pound and Confucius: Remaking Humanism in the Face of Modernity*, Feng Lan quotes Pound as saying that John Calvin was ‘responsible ... for reviving ‘the savage mythology of the Hebrews’.<sup>651</sup> Indeed, Lan goes on, ‘Pound entertained a groundless and yet strong conviction that Judaism was responsible for the degradation of Christianity starting with the Reformation’.<sup>652</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, Miller’s own reductive and racist comments about Jewish people require address in relation to Pound’s antipathy towards Judaism but they appear separately to the former’s ideas of social and economic morality. Moreover, Pound makes no specific reference to Judaism in his review of *Cancer*. For the purpose of this Poundian economic reading of *Cancer*, it will be productive to acknowledge Pound’s racist belief in the ‘semitic’ origins of Protestant economic immorality but focus for now primarily on the aversion to inhuman utilitarianism that Pound sees reflected in the text.

Pound believes that Protestantism’s promotion of work as an inherent virtue has resulted in an economic approach that excludes questions of humanity and morality. ‘The science of economics will not get far’, he warns, ‘until it grants the existence of will as a component: i.e will toward ... justice or fairness, desire for civilization, amenities etc...’<sup>653</sup> In this sense modern capitalism is blighted, Pound claims, by ‘overwork’ as much as ‘overproduction’, twin examples of the utilitarian loss of perspective on the fundamental functions of ‘money’, ‘goods’ and ‘labor’. Indeed, Pound advocates a move away from the incessant emphasis on labour by introducing a shorter working day, the provision of ‘two hours more per day to loaf, to think, to keep fit by exercising a different set of muscles [mental]’.<sup>654</sup>

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<sup>650</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>651</sup> Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose*, ed. by Cookson, p. 265. Quoted in Feng Lan, *Ezra Pound and Confucianism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 143.

<sup>652</sup> Lan, p. 143.

<sup>653</sup> *The ABC of Economics*, p. 35.

<sup>654</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

Miller's own objection to the protestant work ethic is more radical. Where Pound promotes a healthy balance between work and leisure, Miller subverts the moral paradigm to advocate 'play' instead of industry. These ideas are fundamental to Bataille's thoughts on *Cancer*, which are framed according to his aversion to protestant utilitarianism, but also to the French theorist's very particular redefinition of the concept of 'wealth'. Though not fixated on usury's totemic evil, Bataille nonetheless shares Pound's belief that it represents the limited and damaging bourgeois protestant value system of Martin Luther and Calvin. As he puts it in *The Accursed Share*:

Luther upheld the Church's traditional curse against usury and generally had the aversion for business that was inherent in the archaic conception of the economy. But Calvin advanced the doctrinal condemnation of loans at interest and generally recognized the morality of commerce. "What reason is there why income from business should not be larger than that from landowning? Whence do the merchant's profits come except from his own diligence and industry? ... from the first it was the religion of the commercial bourgeoisie."<sup>655</sup>

As a result of these Protestant developments, according to Bataille, 'wealth was deprived of meaning, apart from productive value', whereas 'contemplative idleness, giving to the poor and the splendor of ceremonies and churches' was relegated to the category of 'sin'.<sup>656</sup>

Crucially then, Bataille is another critic who seeks to establish Miller as an important figure against Protestantism's reductive and damaging idea of wealth as 'productive value'. He goes further than Pound, however, promoting Miller as an exemplar of 'contemplative idleness' and 'splendor'. Throughout 'La Morale de Miller', Bataille defines *Cancer's* moral raison d'être as the resistance to external bourgeois pressures to enter into 'the sphere of production, to prefer the utilitarian and profitable to sensual enjoyment.'<sup>657</sup> Indeed Bataille pits Miller – 'the child' with a full appreciation of the present and an equally full disregard for the future – against the world of social, domestic and economic productivity that an individual's parents 'are obliged

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<sup>655</sup> *The Accursed Share*, p. 122.

<sup>656</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122-3

<sup>657</sup> 'La Morale de Miller', p. 2.

to bring the child into'.<sup>658</sup> For Bataille Miller's position as semi-homeless vagabond artist symbolizes his desire for consumption and expenditure and his rejection of the capitalist impulse towards production and acquisition. In Miller's writing, Bataille argues, 'life's meaning is intrinsically linked to the negation of restraint', a philosophy that is 'dangerously inconvenient' because it refuses to comply with societal codes of 'work, merit and reward' and invariably leads to a life of poverty and social marginalisation.<sup>659</sup>

Signs of Miller's 'negation of restraint' and refusal of 'work, merit and reward' do indeed abound throughout his writing. As Bataille recognizes, the book that most clearly demonstrates his rebellion against expectations of industriousness and discipline is *Capricorn*. Because it describes Miller's life before the decision to separate himself from the conventional worlds of work and family, *Capricorn* offers explicit accounts of his hatred for the restraint they impose and his longing to desecrate and deny it. For Miller, his German immigrant family symbolized the utilitarian religious code of hard work, cleanliness and frugality:

Every wrong idea which has ever been expounded was theirs. Among them was the doctrine of cleanliness, to say nothing of righteousness. They were painfully clean. But inwardly they stank.<sup>660</sup>

Moving back to the family home as a young adult, Miller is dismissive of his mother's frustration with the fact that he sleeps all day rather than look for work. She would, he writes, fly into a 'Lutheran Rage' upon finding him in bed after noon.<sup>661</sup> Rather than admit to shame or self-loathing about his status as an adult subject to his mother's disapproval, or indeed attempt to understand her position in hindsight, Miller elevates the act of lying in bed to an important preliminary stage in the artistic process. His mother is rounded on for her stupid blindness to the importance of dreams and the imagination, her inability to understand that this act is of far greater

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<sup>658</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>659</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>660</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 11.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

significance than the act of seeking employment: 'Poor imbecile that she was, [she] thought I was lazy.'<sup>662</sup>

Bataille makes a positive connection between this attitude and the moral impunity experienced by children, equating Miller's rejection of labor as a virtuous activity not dissimilar to the child's inability to comprehend the proportions of the adult's moral world. Citing Miller's anecdotal story – again from *Capricorn* – about a rock-fight he and his cousin Gene were involved in as small boys, an episode that ended with the death of another small boy from a rival gang, Bataille posits Miller's lack of guilt about his actions as evidence of a vital moral truth understood in childhood, but quickly forgotten when the individual enters the corruptive sphere of work and responsibility:

It is not enough for Miller to simply confirm his innocence: he aggressively opposes it to the moral values of the adults. "The boy whom I saw drop dead", he says further on, "who lay there motionless, without making the slightest sound or whimper, the killing of that boy seems almost like a clean, healthy performance. The struggle for food, on the other hand, seems foul and degrading and when we stood in the presence of our parents we could never forgive them."<sup>663</sup>

As in the violent textual attacks on his friends, patrons and undeserving homeless people, Miller's refusal to regret or justify the boy's murder is deliberately, provocatively outrageous, and intended to emphasize the intensity of his opposition to the utilitarian value system. By forgiving himself for his part in an apparently unforgivable crime, he locates a deeper, more pernicious evil in the societal transfixion with the labor-effort-money ratio. Indeed, he posits the basic requirement of working to feed one's family - 'the struggle for food' - as a sinful act that taints the adult's experience of life. Describing the 'two big slices of sour rye with fresh butter and little sugar over it' he and his cousin receive from his Aunt Caroline when they return home from the rock fight,<sup>664</sup> he makes a distinction between the joy and, indeed, 'beauty' inherent in 'ungrateful' consumption and the corruption inherent in work and monetary exchange:

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<sup>662</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>663</sup> 'La Morale de Miller', p. 2.

<sup>664</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 115.

To give us that thick slice of bread each day the parents had to pay a heavy penalty. The worst penalty was that they became estranged from us. For, with each slice they fed us we became not only more indifferent to them, but we became more superior to them. In our ungratefulness was our strength and beauty. Not being devoted we were innocent of all crime.<sup>665</sup>

In the acquirement of economic responsibility, the individual becomes complicit in a production, accumulation and price obsessed system, losing the ability to savor the act of consumption: 'the taste goes out of the bread as it goes out of life [since] getting the bread becomes more important than the eating of it. Everything is calculated and has a price on it' (117).

By flagging up this scene, Bataille both highlights Miller's interest in consumption over production and emphasizes the predominance of irresponsibility and excess in the latter's thinking about work and money. As we shall see, Miller might share Pound's exasperation at the capitalist fixation on work - 'getting the bread becomes more important than the eating of it' - but his response to it embodies both the Poundian drive to control circulation and a conflicting Bataillian interest in uncontrolled and anarchic expenditure.

The key to this latter impulse lies in Bataille's metaphysical interpretation of economics. He reads the rock fight as Miller's revolutionary demonstration of the 'fatal' schism between vital and natural human instinct and the 'neutral ... tasteless' world in which we are expected to exist:

On one side lies the seduction of the immediate and on the other effort, merit and reward. It is fatal that our working world is from the very beginning so hostile to the young child: it tries its utmost to reduce immediate satisfaction, to subordinate life, make it neutral and uninteresting, tasteless.<sup>666</sup>

This desire for the excessive and 'the immediate' rather than 'effort, merit and reward', Bataille claims in *The Accursed Share*, is the natural result of excess energy in the 'biosphere', a surplus that humans feel a constant need to expend, or 'squander':

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<sup>665</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 117.

<sup>666</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

On the surface of the globe, for *living matter in general*, energy is always in excess; the question is always posed in terms of extravagance. The choice is limited to how the wealth is to be squandered.<sup>667</sup>

An individual like Miller – motivated by the ‘romantic protest against the bourgeois world’ – represents for Bataille one of many heterogeneous social elements opposed to the homogeneous forces imposed by the collective.<sup>668</sup> For Blinder, Bataille conceives of heterogeneous forces as ‘those processes that flagrantly violated the rational principles of a commodity and consumption driven society’.<sup>669</sup>

This theory has its roots in Bataille’s ethnological readings of pre-capitalist, non-western cultures, a fact that connects him to Pound in his economic critique and sheds light on the metaphysical implications of Miller’s sexual and economic ideas. As Blinder explains, designating capitalism as ‘homogeneous and therefore faulty [Bataille] sought to find models elsewhere in which the heterogeneous played a larger more active role.’ (212). Drawing on field work carried out by early twentieth century anthropologist Marcel Mauss, Bataille investigates the heterogeneous drive towards ‘sacrifice’ as a form of ritualistic ‘consumption’ in ‘primitive’ Aztec and North American cultures, concluding that this drive has been neglected over the course of western economic history in favor of the homogeneous desire for ‘production’.<sup>670</sup> In Aztec societies, Bataille writes, ‘consumption loomed just as large in their thinking as production does in ours. They were just as concerned about *sacrificing* as we are about *working*.’<sup>671</sup> He finds his evidence in the Aztec belief that human sacrifice was an essential function in the continuing existence of the world: ‘wars were created “so that there would be people whose hearts and blood could be taken so that the sun might eat.”’<sup>672</sup>

For Bataille the essence of ‘the social’, like the essence of every aspect of existence, resides in this unproductive and the glorious. He opposes the utilitarian basis of

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<sup>667</sup> *The Accursed Share*, p. 22.

<sup>668</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>669</sup> Blinder, *Sexual Aesthetics*, p. 208.

<sup>670</sup> *The Accursed Share*, p. 46.

<sup>671</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.



modern economics with the model of Aztec human sacrifice because it suggests extravagant expenditure, breaking the cycle of production, sale and consumption:

Destruction is the best means of negating a utilitarian relation between man and the animal or plant. The victim of the sacrifice cannot be consumed in the same way as a motor uses fuel. What the ritual has the virtue of rediscovering is the intimate participation of the sacrifice and the victim, to which a servile use had put an end.<sup>673</sup>

On these terms, Bataille suggests, payment is promoted from a means of stagnant exchange to a heroic and unifying spectacle – as in the case of ‘Potlach’, an ancient custom practiced by indigenous North Americans which involves ‘the solemn giving of considerable riches, offered by a chief to his rival for the purpose of humiliating, challenging and obligating him’. ‘Potlach’, Bataille goes on, ‘like commerce [is] a means of circulating wealth, but [it] excludes bargaining.’<sup>674</sup>

Significantly, like Pound, Bataille arrives at his conclusions via the belief that modern conceptions of ‘wealth’ are a protestant corruption of its true meaning.

Photosynthesis and growth, Bataille writes, are the natural processes on which pre-Christian societies based their economies:

The origin and essence of our wealth are given in the radiation of the sun, which dispenses energy – wealth – without any return. The sun gives without ever receiving ... In former times value was given to unproductive glory, whereas in our day it is measured in terms of production: Precedence is given to energy acquisition over energy expenditure. Glory itself is justified by the consequences of a glorious deed in the sphere of utility. But, dominated though it is by practical judgment and Christian morality, the archaic sensibility is still alive: In particular it reappears in the romantic protest against the bourgeois world; only in the classical conceptions of the economy does it lose its rights entirely.<sup>675</sup>

This has important implications for Pound’s statements on usury as a practice ‘contra natura’, a form of ‘increase’ at odds with the patterns and processes of growth in the natural world. Both theorists attack early twentieth-century capitalism for its absolute negation of natural and sacred metaphysical energies. Like Pound, Bataille

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<sup>673</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>674</sup> Ibid., p. 67-68.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid., pp. 28-29.

appropriates Miller in his quest to redefine the corrupt conception of wealth according to pure, pre-usurious origins. For both writers, protestant theology rejects Pagan and Catholic 'splendor' in preference for a rational but wholly inhuman system of monetary growth and expenditure. However, they differ in their notions of where those origins lie and what they mean, highlighting – in the process - the conflicting impulses towards excess and conservation within Miller's economic approach.

Where Pound is interested in bringing order to an unnatural and insane system of 'growth', Bataille disregards sanity and usefulness altogether, instead focusing on the metaphysical truth provided by the 'ceaseless prodigality' of the sun and the 'waste', 'glory' and 'excess' this generates. Despite his protestations against the Lutheran utilitarian enslavement to work and money, Pound's own economic ideas are motivated by the desire to make the monetary system *useful*. Indeed, his Douglasite beliefs lead him to demand a very controlled form of market economics that appears to contradict his aversion to the use-value basis of modern capitalism. Incongruously – given that Bataille came from a Marxist background and Pound in the 1930s was staunchly opposed to socialism – their economic differences can be usefully explained through Jean Baudrillard's 1998 comparison of Bataillian and orthodox Marxist theory:

The Marxist seeks a *good use* of economy. Marxism is therefore only a limited *petit bourgeois* critique, one more step in the banalization of life towards the 'good use' of the social! Bataille, to the contrary, sweeps away all this slave dialectic from an aristocratic point of view, that of the master struggling with his death.<sup>676</sup>

Pound - rather than Bataille - seeks to reform the economic system to make "good use' of the social'. Where Pound wants to sanitize a messy and manic situation masquerading as ordered and rational, Bataille denies the virtue in rationalizing monetary exchange, advocating instead a very physical and desire driven model of primitive economy built on the acceptance of chaotic and uncontrolled excess. If

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<sup>676</sup> Jean Baudrillard 'When Bataille Attacked the Metaphysical Principle of Economy', in *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Fred Botting & Scott Wilson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp.191-195, pp. 192-93.

Pound's enemies are usury and utilitarianism, Bataille's, according to Baudrillard, 'is utility, in its root. Rather than an apparently positive principle of capital: accumulation, investment, depreciation, etc. ... it is, on Bataille's account, a principle of powerlessness, an utter inability to expend.'<sup>677</sup>

If Pound understands the virtue in the 'well-being' afforded by the goods produced through work, Bataille sees the useful act of work itself as an impediment to man's existential fulfillment:

From the start, the introduction of *labor* into the world replaced intimacy, the depth of desire and its free outbreaks, with rational progression, where what matters is no longer the truth of the present moment, but rather, the subsequent results of *operations* ... Once the world of things was posited, man himself became one of the things of this world, at least for the time in which he labored.<sup>678</sup>

Thus, human beings are taken out of the present by labor, forced to behave as external objects of use rather than vital, active creatures animated by unproductive intimacy and desire. The act of work, by its incorporation of the individual in a useful productive system and towards a useful and productive end, prevents him or her from feeling and expressing their true 'desire' and from living in a way that is natural and human.

If Miller's interest in perpetual circulation as a way to connect money to human activity appears to correlate with elements of Pound's more 'use-value' economics, his rebellion against productivity is based on a Bataillian celebration of the sovereignty that arises from carelessly expending a surplus - sacrificing money, goods and libidinous energy. In this sense, Miller's negation of the 'the protestant value scale' can be read in his emphasis on the kind of 'ceaseless prodigality' alluded to in *The Accursed Share*. Indeed, as if following up on Bataille's solar analogy, in *Cancer* Miller posits capitalist servitude to 'the money rhythm, the love that comes over the radio' as 'joyless evidence' of the journey 'away from the sun' towards 'the chill idiocy of the moon' (109). The dominance of money and the commercialization

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<sup>677</sup> Baudrillard, p. 192.

<sup>678</sup> Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, p. 57.

of love represent a rhythm that is somber and cold rather than joyful and warm. If the sun provides endless heat to bask in, the lunar 'incandescence' of modern capitalism forces people into perpetual frenzy with no hope of genuine reward (109). 'The more we dance', he writes, 'the colder it gets' (109).

More importantly, Miller's approach to individuals and their money embodies the extravagance of generosity and expenditure implied by 'ceaseless prodigality', while at the same time suggesting the 'humiliating, challenging and obligating' functions Bataille refers to in his discussions of the 'potlach'.<sup>679</sup> 'When one spends what he has on himself', Miller writes in *Cancer*, 'when one has a thoroughly good time with his own money, people are apt to say "he does not know what to do with his money"'. For my part I don't see any better use to which one can put money' (225). In this vein, the act of squandering money – like the act of squandering libidinous energy in un-reproductive sexual acts - is presented aggressively throughout *Cancer* as virtuous and necessary, a healthy demonstration of 'wealth' that renders the giver morally superior to those who would conserve or grow it. He reserves particular disdain, for example, for 'misers', from his friend Boris who 'won't even eat a good meal every now and then' to an unnamed patron who has him to stay for a period and who lives in squalor despite having a good amount of cash stashed away in his drawer:

A man who has two thousand francs hidden away in a dirty sock and refuses to wear a clean shirt or smear a little butter over his bread ... such a man is not just ... a miser he's an imbecile. (21)

Indeed, the impulsive and irrational expenditure of money without return is celebrated by Miller as a heroic and sacrificial act, a mark of the individual's sanity – and, superiority - within a manic system devised by the collective.

He makes this point via the complicated extended metaphor of an unsuccessful threesome he engages in with his friend Van Norden and a prostitute they meet at the Dome cafe. It is a confusing passage in which Van Norden and the prostitute refuse to 'call it quits' despite the former's impotence (148); an impotence likened

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<sup>679</sup> Ibid., pp. 67-8.

both to the futile activity of 'a machine whose cogs have slipped' (148) and to the intransigence of two armies in 'a state of war' (146). 'There's fifteen francs somewhere' Miller writes:

which nobody gives a damn about any more and which nobody is going to get in the end anyhow, but the fifteen francs is like the primal cause of things and rather than listen to one's own voice, rather than walk out on the primal cause, one surrenders to the situation, one goes on butchering and butchering and the more cowardly one feels the more heroically does he behave. (147)

The only way in which the senselessness of the situation can be resolved, he continues, is for 'somebody ... to put his hand in the machine and let it be wrenched off ... if the cogs are to mesh again' (150). This act, he says has to be done selflessly 'without hope of reward, without concern over the fifteen francs' (150).

The myriad implications of Miller's comparison between sex and mechanized warfare will be explored later in this chapter in the light of Pound's anti-war ideas. However, in the context of Miller's approach to wealth, the episode expresses the individual's mania and desperation within an irrational and self-defeating economic system. The jilted cogs in the machine can only be re-meshed if the falsity of the 'primal cause' is recognized and the individual human being is willing to risk his or her own safety to put it right. In other words, the individual must give up his or her fixation on the intrinsic value of money and sacrifice him or herself, in Bataille's words, 'ceaselessly' in order to reconnect with the world. Like the threesome, a life led according to rational economic principals is a 'performance' which lacks the 'spark of passion' and therefore has 'no human significance'.

Concentration on monetary value leads directly to the 'inability to expend' sexually. Where Pound wants to liberate the capitalist economic system by orchestrating a higher rate of consumption, Miller recommends the circumvention of the inhumanity of the system through irresponsible, uncontrolled expenditure – the unrestrained satisfaction of one's appetites, sexual and otherwise. Where Pound believes in the possibility of achieving truth and beauty by redesigning economic relations so that they mirror the 'natural increase' of the world, Miller uses economic

relations to demonstrate a Bataillian perspective on existence, defined not by harmonious growth but by perpetual surplus.

Accordingly, one of the principal differences between Pound and Miller's approach to economics lies in their diverging opinions as to whether it is possible, even desirable to limit surplus energy and production – another reminder that Miller is less concerned with real-politic than Pound and more interested in how economics operate as a wider metaphor for desire. Both Pound and Miller believe that expenditure is by its nature more virtuous than production and accumulation, since it returns a positive charge to the monetary process. However, Pound wants to curtail production according to the real human potential for consumption, whereas Miller accepts overproduction and surplus as vital metaphysical facts of human existence.

Nonetheless, Miller is caught between a desire to counter the negative flow of sexuality and economics, through acts of heroism and glorious excess, and a more prosaic instinct to redirect it through observation and perverse acceptance. In the threesome scene, there is a tension between Miller's fascination at the passionless, mechanical reality of the sexual act itself and his idealistic longing for an awakening to the hopelessness of the proceedings. Though he emphasizes the importance of ceding control, of sacrificing the self without 'hope of reward', he is also transfixed by the performance in the bedroom and – by implication – the world of money and labor. In this sense, both writers harbor anxieties about Baudrillard's 'principle of powerlessness ...the utter inability to expend' at the root of utilitarianism.<sup>680</sup> Both are worried about the moral contamination this engenders in individuals and societies, even if they offer very different solutions. While Pound seeks to create a more natural system of economic growth, Miller suggests the restoration of relations in a manner that is parodical and anarchically Bataillian. As with his physical suffering – explored in Chapter Two – Miller's anxiety about sexual and economic expenditure is relieved by his willful and complete submergence in the sexual-economic system. As Garland suggested about Miller's commodification of women, Miller is

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<sup>680</sup> Baudrillard, p. 192.

'expunged of vulnerability' by his participation in a system of exchange and loss that fully and madly represents the economics of the time.

Moreover, where Pound's pronouncements on the social injustice of the economic system demonstrate a genuine concern about the 'paradox between poverty and distress on the one hand and potential plenty on the other' Miller's objection to the capitalist frenzy reveals a fascination with this paradox that understands it as both outrageously unjust and ripe for aesthetic manipulation:

Though the earth be rotting with good things, there is no time to pluck the fruits. The procession scrambles toward the exit sign and such a panic is there, such a sweat to escape, that the weak and helpless are trampled into the mud and their cries are unheard. (188)

As James Decker points out, 'an economy based on capital rather than on meeting basic needs seems preposterous to [Miller] ... individuals should not have to prostrate themselves in exchange for sustenance' (72) but he is nonetheless inspired and exhilarated by the insanity of the 'performance'.

Like Pound, – who, as well as supporting 'a shorter working day', states in *The ABC of Economics* that 'the minute I cook my own dinner or make the chair that I sit on I escape from the whole cycle of ... economics' – Miller advocates independence from the system as a means of escaping its distorted and repressive order.<sup>681</sup> Miller's solution, however, is based on the impulse to deregulate the system according to natural, anarchical human instincts and desires rather than regulate it on fair and practicable lines. Describing an encounter with a door-to-door life insurance salesman in *Capricorn*, he explains his decision to purchase a policy despite neither being able to afford it, nor feeling that he needs it: 'I'm a buyer not a seller. I like to see people looking happy – that's why I buy things.'<sup>682</sup> According to Miller, the apparently vital and unavoidable act of 'selling' – either goods or one's skills - of making money in order to afford food and shelter, is actually wholly avoidable:

I said to myself I will never again go to people under false pretenses [sic] ... I will never again sell anything, even if I have to starve. I am going home now

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<sup>681</sup> *The ABC of Economics*, p. 53.

<sup>682</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 148.

and I will sit down and really write about people. And if anybody knocks at my door to sell me something I will invite him in and say "why are you doing this?" And if he says it is because he has to make a living I will offer him what money I have and beg him once again to think what he is doing. I want to prevent as many men as possible from pretending that they have to do this or that because they must earn a living. *It is not true.* One can starve to death – it is much better.<sup>683</sup>

One form of madness – what Baudrillard calls the 'Puritan mania of business' (money earned is earned in order to be invested ... having value or meaning only in the endless wealth it entails) - is replaced by another transaction that Miller posits as healthy, human and sane. Here, Miller offers a consciously perverse and manic alternative to the rationalist mania of jobs and money.<sup>684</sup> Both Pound and Miller attack what Jean-Joseph Goux, in describing Bataille's philosophy, calls 'the parsimonious perspective of an ascetic bourgeoisie that only consents to spend what it expects in return', but Miller finds his alternative economic model in a type of expenditure that echoes Bataille's idea of "the general law of the economy", a way of using time, money and libidinous energy that appears 'nearly delirious to our [conventional, utilitarian] mind'.<sup>685</sup> Miller may echo Pound's dissatisfaction with the 'protestant value scale', yet he advocates change based on Bataille's rather than Pound's model; a change based, Goux continues, on a nostalgia for pre-protestant, pre-utilitarian eras in which glory was to be found not in the rational and fair growth and distribution of resources but in splendid feats of extravagance and sacrifice: 'the erection of the pyramids or the cathedrals, or of the sacrifice of thousands of herd animals in archaic holocausts.'<sup>686</sup>

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<sup>683</sup> Ibid., p. 280

<sup>684</sup> Baudrillard, p. 192.

<sup>685</sup> Jean-Joseph Goux, 'General Economics and Post-Modern Capitalism', in *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Botting & Wilson pp. 196-213, p. 200.

<sup>686</sup> Ibid., p. 200.



### 3.4 Frobenius, Spengler and the Apocalyptic 'Process': Cultural morphological intersections between Pound and Miller

'We do not quite know how we have come by these concepts of common decency, but one supposes it is our heritage from superior individuals of the past; that it is the treasure of tradition.'" Ezra Pound, 'Axiomata' (1921)<sup>687</sup>

'Why do ideas, why do great scientific discoveries often occur in different parts of the world at the same time? The same is true of the elements that go to make up a poem or a great novel or any work of art. They are already in the air, they have not been given voice, that's all. They need *the man, the interpreter*, to bring them forth.' Henry Miller, *Writers at Work* (1963)<sup>688</sup>

'From an almost accidental occasion of beginning, there has arisen the present work, which is put forward as the provisional expression of a new world-picture.' Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (1918)<sup>689</sup>

Miller's Bataillian interest in extravagant, profligate and apparently unproductive expenditure is starkly contradicted by his concomitant Poundian interest in the restoration of values that transcend historical periods. If Bataille's reading of Miller correctly highlights the latter's desire to squander rather than accumulate, to expend excess energy without considering utility, Miller's work is equally permeated by meta-historical, eschatological language and theory that suggests the Poundian desire to conserve and control certain fixed moral standards. As we have seen, Pound believes that Miller taps into unseen, ahistorical forces that constitute something like the cultural inheritance he discusses in his own essays about Douglas. Miller's exploration of 'excess', of the natural desire to expend surplus through the acting out of economically, sexually and artistically unacceptable urges will be seen in this chapter to conflict with his anxieties regarding a civilization in pre-determined 'decline'.

Pound's perception of Miller as having arrived at a sense of indisputable, ahistorical – even primitive – order, transcending the 'fret and stir' of contemporary 'chaos', are

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<sup>687</sup> 'Axiomata', p. 363.

<sup>688</sup> 'Henry Miller', *Writers at Work*, p. 145

<sup>689</sup> Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, transl. by Charles Francis Atkinson, 2 vols (London: George Allen & Uwin Ltd., 1934 [orig. ed.: 1918]), vol. 1, p. 50.

strongly connected to the term 'paideuma', itself appropriated by Pound from cultural anthropologist Leo Frobenius. As mentioned earlier, Pound took 'Paideuma', the title of Frobenius' seminal 1921 study, to mean 'the tangle or complex of the inrooted ideas' that define historical civilizations, using the term to formulate his own vision of new a economic, social and cultural rejuvenation.<sup>690</sup> As he puts it in *Guide to Kulchur*: 'When I said I wanted a new civilization, I think I cd. have used Frobenius' term'.<sup>691</sup> Pound excitedly made the connection between Frobenius' essentialist statements on culture and Douglas' concept of 'the increment association', fusing their apparently unrelated ideas to arrive at his own sweeping historical conclusions about the 'modality of civilizations'.<sup>692</sup> In turn, Frobenius' disciple Oswald Spengler – who helped him found the Munich Institute of Cultural Morphology in 1920 and espoused many of the same ethnographic and culturally physiognomic ideas – was greatly admired by Miller and his text *The Decline of the West* was an important influence on *Cancer's* eschatological tone and atmosphere. This connection between Pound and Miller's sources is vital to an understanding of Pound's notion of hierarchy and 'prospect' in Miller's work.

The initial basis of Pound's adherence to Frobenius was the latter's belief that by studying individual pieces of art it was possible to identify the 'vital spirit' or 'cultural total of achievement' of the society in which it was produced.<sup>693</sup> Explaining Frobenius' 'morphological' method in *Guide to Kulchur*, Pound cites an anecdote or 'yarn' about the archeologist - '[he] looked at two African pots and, observing their shapes and proportions, said: if you will go to a certain place and there digge, you will find traces of a civilization with such and such characteristics'.<sup>694</sup> Frobenius was interested in artistry as reliable and intricate proof of a culture's essence, from its generalities to its complexities. As he puts it in *The Voice of Africa*, his 1913 study of the ancient West African Yoruba civilization, 'I lay utmost stress upon the fact ... that

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<sup>690</sup> *Guide to Kulchur*, p. 57.

<sup>691</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>692</sup> *Ibid.* p. 59.

<sup>693</sup> Leo Frobenius, *The Voice of Africa* (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1968 (orig. ed.: 1913)), p. 324.

<sup>694</sup> *Guide to Kulchur*, p. 61

the territorial influence of specially Yoruban civilization retrogressed during the last few centuries exactly as its works of art lost their vitality'.<sup>695</sup>

The fundamental aim of Frobenius' anthropological work was to prove that certain essential characteristics lie deeply embedded in human beings according not to their environments but to the cultures from which they originate. He was engaged, Suzanne Marchand writes, in a 'quest to identify cultural differences as products of the soul, not of acquired refinements or skills' (1997).<sup>696</sup> This was, Marchand goes on, a search for 'the *real* physiognomy of culture',<sup>697</sup> motivated by the desire to prove that the impact a culture has on its surroundings – from its use of the land through farming and architecture to its production of objects of utility and art - is more important than the impact those surroundings have on it. In *The Voice of Africa*, Frobenius describes his methodology as:

A method of research founded on the constant examination of several characteristic indications of well-marked civilizations, both in their geographical distribution and transformation in separate provinces, rather than on the foreign influences to which they were subject ... I [have] no difficulty in concluding that most of the mutual relations of culture were proved in their birth, extension and change.<sup>698</sup>

Just as a human physiognomist would look at the contours of a face to discover the essential content of the person's soul, Frobenius studied artifacts and ruins to determine what he called 'the soul of the culture'.<sup>699</sup>

According to Marchand, Frobenius envisioned 'culture' as 'a third sphere, inextricably linked with both nature and *Geist* ['Soul' or 'spirit']'.<sup>700</sup> In this anthropological scheme, 'autonomous cultural wholes' were living 'organisms' and 'human beings were simply carrier objects of them'.<sup>701</sup> In other words, Frobenius is

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<sup>695</sup> *The Voice of Africa*, p. 324.

<sup>696</sup> Suzanne Marchand, 'Leo Frobenius and the Revolt against the West', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 32 (1997), 153-70 (p. 164).

<sup>697</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>698</sup> *The Voice of Africa*, p. 324.

<sup>699</sup> Marchand, p. 165.

<sup>700</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>701</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

interested in the cultural essence as the elusive force that drives and defines human life, a true and natural entity that expresses itself through human activity. It is for this reason that he regards art and artifacts as symptomatic of culture and morality.

Just as 'Social Credit' theory had helped Pound apply his ideas about usury to market economics, Frobenius' cultural morphology provided him with the social anthropological basis for his belief in the 'unnatural increase' that spreads from methods of banking to the moral values of a population and then to their artwork. In fact, *Guide to Kulchur*, which – we have seen - sets out many of his ideas on the 'disease' of usury, was written in direct response to Frobenius' *Paideuma*. As K.K. Ruthven puts it, 'from his reading of Leo Frobenius [Pound] derived the concept of *Kultersymptome*, which enabled him to see ... that 'art can be a symptom' and not merely ... an end in itself.'<sup>702</sup> If Frobenius applied *Kultersymptome* to the non-Western and pre-modern tribal cultures of West Africa, Pound used it to highlight the difference between the 'cultural total achievement' of European societies in pre-usurious and usurious periods. Quoting from a letter Pound wrote to T.S. Eliot in 1940, Leon Surette demonstrates that *Guide to Kulchur* was an attempt "to get on from where Frobenius left off, in that his Morphology was applied to savages and my interest is in civilizations at their *most*".<sup>703</sup>

Via Frobenius, Ruthven points out, Pound came to the conclusion that 'the kind of thought which distinguishes good from evil, down into the details of commerce rises into the quality of line in paintings and into the clear definition of the word written.'<sup>704</sup> In other words, by thinking about art as a serious reflection of the innate character of its culture rather than simply the individual who made it or the message it is *intended* to transmit, a critic is able to say something serious and significant about the essential moral quality of that culture. In this way Frobenius was responsible, as Tim Redman puts it in *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism*, for Pound's arrival at the 'new understanding of the notion of taste, [the] unity of the aesthetic and the economic',

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<sup>702</sup> Ruthven, p. 151.

<sup>703</sup> Pound, 'To T.S. Eliot', *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound*, ed. by Paige, p. 336, February 1<sup>st</sup> 1940. Quoted in Surette, *The Birth of Modernism*, p. 63.

<sup>704</sup> Ruthven, p. 155.

that we have seen throughout his essays.<sup>705</sup> In this sense, cultural morphology helped Pound develop what Ruthven calls 'usurocriticism' - mentioned earlier in Section 3.2 - his method of art criticism that uses a novel, poem, painting or sculpture from any given age to discern not only whether usury existed in that culture, but the exact extent of its presence and dominance, to 'tell the bank-rate and component of tolerance for usury in any epoch by the quality of line in painting'.<sup>706</sup>

It was also through Frobenius that Pound began to think about writers like Miller as correctors of social and economic as well as aesthetic evils. He uses the concept of 'paideuma' to consolidate and develop his own theories – suggested in his earlier literary essays and throughout the *Cantos* – of a small group of artists who understood 'the process biological, social, economic now going on, enveloping you as an individual, in a social order' and able to resurrect of a true 'vital spirit'.<sup>707</sup> Indeed, in *Guide to Kulchur* Pound explicitly identifies his own hopes for the future of western civilization with Frobenius' search for a superior 'paideuma' to take mankind forward: 'When I said I wanted a new civilization, I think I could have used Frobenius' term'.<sup>708</sup>

As well as *kultursymptome*, Pound's conception of a 'new civilization' or 'new era' depends on Frobenius' theory of *Kulterkreisn*, or 'cultural circles' that emanate from certain pure civilizations and manifest themselves in civilizations from different epochs and continents. Frobenius explains this position in *The Voice of Africa*:

I draw my courage from the constant effects observable in the swing of the pendulum of universal history, always responsive to the laws which govern the surface of the globe. I think we are entitled to select material evidence from analogous events in more recent periods for the desired comprehension of occurrences in the ages behind them.<sup>709</sup>

An example of this, Merchand notes, is set of commonalities Frobenius identified between the 'paideumae' of Germany in the 1920s and the ancient civilization of the

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<sup>705</sup> Redman, p. 85.

<sup>706</sup> 'To Carlo Izzo', *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound*, p. 303, January 8<sup>th</sup> 1938.

<sup>707</sup> *Guide to Kulchur*, p. 59.

<sup>708</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>709</sup> *The Voice of Africa*, p. 344.

West African civilizations he studied at that time. They shared, he claimed 'a wide open spaces mentality (*Weitenghful*)' that was stronger and more significant than their many differences.<sup>710</sup> He originally gleaned this from his examination of artifacts produced by the Yoruba tribe, believing the similarities between art found in West Africa and Ancient Europe proved that 'the culture of Yoruba is the crystallization of that mighty stream of Western civilization which, in its Eur-African form, flowed from Europe into Africa.'<sup>711</sup>

Pound commandeers the language of 'cultural circles' for his own reading of history and civilization, claiming in *Guide to Kulchur* that 'what we know we know by ripples and spirals eddying out from us and from our own time'.<sup>712</sup> According to William Harmon in his study *Time in Ezra Pound's Work*, 'the idea of the paideuma is ... enlarged [by Pound] to comprehend world civilization that transcends time and space'.<sup>713</sup> In line with his Douglasite notion of 'cultural heritage' and the 'increment of association', Pound envisions a 'new civilization' based on knowledge intuitively detected through mysterious ancestral channels, an idea that he had hinted at earlier in his 1921 essay 'Axiomata':

We do not quite know how we have come by these concepts of common decency, but one supposes it is our heritage from superior individuals of the past; that it is the treasure of tradition.<sup>714</sup>

This also allows Pound to rethink the course of civilizations and cultures in a manner that eschews standard empirical facts – 'ideas, facts, notions that you can look up in a phonebook or library' - in favor of powerful, primal 'ideas which are in one's stomach or liver'.<sup>715</sup> According to this new approach, historical or 'chronological' knowledge can only hinder an intuited understanding of 'the process':

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<sup>710</sup> Merchand, p. 165.

<sup>711</sup> *The Voice of Africa*, p. 348

<sup>712</sup> *Guide to Kulchur*, p. 59.

<sup>713</sup> William Harmon, *Time in Ezra Pound's Work* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, c1977), p. 43.

<sup>714</sup> 'Axiomata', p. 363.

<sup>715</sup> *Guide to Kulchur*, p. 57.

It does not matter whether you load up your memory with the chronological sequence of what has happened, or names of protagonists, or authors of books, or generals and leading political spouters, so long as you understand the process now going on.<sup>716</sup>

In these cultural morphological terms, Miller's descent into the economic and social hell of his epoch is simply another way to *feel* and *understand* 'the process now going on'. Indeed there are allusions to the 'paideuma' of Frobenius' anthropological scheme throughout Pound's interpretation of Miller's Paris, in particular when Pound asks the reader to look beyond the false surface conception of Miller as an 'obscene' writer to discover the substance of a 'hierarchy of values', of 'good and evil' beneath the apparent purposelessness of his bohemian expatriate existence. More importantly, Pound implies that Miller transmits a penetrative understanding of the economic problem despite his apparent ignorance of social creditist economics.

The intuitive awareness Pound ascribes to Miller is directly reminiscent of his praise for Frobenius:

The value of Leo Frobenius to civilization is not for the rightness or wrongness of this opinion or that opinion but for the kind of thinking he does ... He has in especial seen and marked out a kind of knowing, the difference between knowledge that has to be acquired by particular effort and knowing that is in people, "in the air". He has accepted the value of such a record. His archeology is not retrospective, it is immediate.<sup>717</sup>

For Pound, Frobenius' 'kind of thinking' demonstrates that the true cultural inheritance of western society resides not in the practical, learnt facts of a common chronological history but in an essential spirit that connects us to our ancestors. Moreover, the realization and celebration of these elusive connections is the only possible means of understanding the 'immediate' evils of the present and finding a way of moving civilization forward into the future.

This notion of elusive, cross-epochal and physically felt knowledge is echoed throughout Miller's writings. On one of the many occasions in *Cancer* when he questions the adequacy of abstract ideology, he writes that 'ideas cannot exist alone

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<sup>716</sup> Ibid., pp. 51-2

<sup>717</sup> Ibid., pp. 56-57.

in the vacuum of the mind. Ideas are related to living: live ideas, kidney ideas, intestinal ideas' (243). Elsewhere, in *Max and White Phagocytes*, he recalls a conversation with Boris on the subject of "'the living word.'" saying 'it comes forth with the breath, just the simple act of opening the mouth'.<sup>718</sup> In line with Pound's instruction to move beyond the cerebral triviality of 'the rightness or wrongness of this opinion or that opinion', Miller indicates that a vital truth resides resolutely and essentially in our actual physical beings rather than the abstract frameworks of logic and argument.

Similarly, in *Capricorn* Miller presents himself as attuned to certain primitive truths:

Any primitive man would have understood me, any man of archaic epochs would have understood me: only those about me, that is to say, a continent of a hundred million people, failed to understand my language.<sup>719</sup>

Like Pound, he expresses his desire to move away from the periphery of cold, rational and futureless modernity towards the positively charged and instinctively known values of the past. Indeed, both writers appropriate the language of cultural morphology in an attempt to resolve complicated relationships with their own 'epoch', idealizing aspects of past civilizations to figure them as touchstones for ethical and aesthetical progress in the present.

While Pound consults Frobenius for coordinates in this journey, Miller looks to Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, a sprawling cultural morphological account of Europe's meta-history that he discovered while he was struggling to find his voice in New York. Reading Spengler, Miller writes in *Plexus*, he was made aware of 'a freshly recreated world in which one may 'participate' with one's ancestors, live again the Spring, the Fall, the Summer, even the Winter, of man's history'.<sup>720</sup> 'Spengler's triumph', he continues, is 'to have made Past and Future live in the

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<sup>718</sup> 'Max', p. 146.

<sup>719</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 261.

<sup>720</sup> *Plexus*, p. 459.



Present. One is again at the center of the universe, warmed by solar fires and not at the periphery fighting off vertigo'.<sup>721</sup>

Published in 1918 to enormous success and controversy, *The Decline of the West* diagnoses the terminal and inevitable decline of European civilization on the basis of a similar culturally determinist logic and language to Frobenius'. Like Frobenius, Spengler compares the essential cultural spirits of different societies in different epochs, arriving at his assertions about the future of the West through a reading of each civilization's 'true' ancestral roots. He claims, like Frobenius and Pound, to have struck upon a method that illuminates diffuse and wide-ranging problems of history, culture, politics, aesthetics and economics. History functions, he proclaims, according to '*great groups of morphological relations*, each one of which symbolically represents a particular sort of mankind in the whole picture of world-history'.<sup>722</sup> Indeed, this process represents 'a solution derived from one single principle that though discoverable had never been discovered', the 'provisional expression' indeed, 'of a new world-picture'.<sup>723</sup>

Following Frobenius' lead, Spengler views the history of human life according to cultural wholes that are driven by essential and immutable qualities and that rise and fall according to pre-determined and inevitable cycles. Where Frobenius uses the seasons to loosely categorize these cycles and link them across civilizations, Spengler develops a meticulous scheme of "'contemporary" spiritual epochs' with precise reference to the seasons, drawing up a chart that posits four major civilizations in history (Indian, Classical, Arabian and Western) and claims that each has undergone comparable periods of Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter in their lifetimes.<sup>724</sup> Western civilization, the most recent civilization, experienced its 'Spring' in medieval

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<sup>721</sup> Ibid., p. 459.

<sup>722</sup> Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, p. 47. Spengler goes on to define these morphological relations in wider-reaching terms than Frobenius. His is a search, he writes, to show the connections between 'political and mathematical aspects of the same Culture, between religious and technical conceptions, between mathematics, music and sculpture, between economics and cognition-forms' (Spengler, p. 47).

<sup>723</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

times, its 'Summer' in the Renaissance, its 'Autumn' in the eighteenth century and is currently undergoing its final 'Winter' phase, begun in the nineteenth century and defined as a period of 'science, utility and prosperity'.<sup>725</sup>

By the late 1910s, when Spengler was writing the book, he believed that winter period was entering its final stages of decline, characterized by a sense of complete alienation and despair among Europe and America's predominantly urban-dwelling citizens, an exhaustion of artistic and philosophical possibilities and a shift in the direction of cultural energies from artistic and philosophical innovation toward technological advancement. The decline of the west, Spengler asserts, is happening as a result of the ineluctable natural law that 'civilizations ... are a conclusion, the thing-become succeeding the thing-becoming, death following life, rigidity following expansion, intellectual age and the stone-built, petrifying world-city following mother earth ... They are an end, irrevocable, yet by inward necessity reached again and again.'<sup>726</sup>

Beyond Miller's testimonies to Spengler's 'triumph', the narrative tone, tropes and imagery he uses to describe his life in Paris all bear distinct signs of his reading of this seasonal chart. His presentation of himself as a lone, uniquely resilient individual 'alive' within a decaying western megalopolis echoes Spengler's vision of the anti-heroic 'late city man' who accepts and adapts to the facts of decline.

"Everything depends on our seeing our own position, our *destiny*, clearly', Spengler writes, 'on our realizing that though we may lie to ourselves about it we cannot evade it'. 'He who does not acknowledge this in his heart,' he goes on 'ceases to be counted among the men of his generation.'<sup>727</sup> In other words, the modern man who opens his eyes to the process of cultural death that is occurring throughout western society is able to capture the 'the very soul of his time'.<sup>728</sup>

Along with its consistent pronouncements about a world and society in decay, *Cancer* is permeated by Miller's attempts to ordain himself as a man 'of his

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<sup>725</sup> Ibid., 'Table of Contemporary Spiritual Epochs', p. xxxii.

<sup>726</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>727</sup> Ibid., p. 44

<sup>728</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

generation' who 'does ... acknowledge' the death of civilization 'in his heart'. 'The world is rotting away, dying piecemeal', he claims earlier on in the book, 'and nobody has the nerve to put a bomb under its ass' (33). 'I feel the whole world beneath me' he writes, picking up the theme again towards the end 'a world tottering and crumbling, a world used up and polished like a leper's skull' (248). In his most conclusive statement of self-ordination he exclaims:

In the four hundred years since the last devouring soul appeared, the last man to know the meaning of ecstasy, there has been a constant and steady decline of man in art, in thought, in action. The world is pooped out: there isn't a dry fart left. (250)

While drawing on the Spenglerian tenet that individual self-liberation occurs through the acceptance of intuitive feelings about what is culturally possible, he also posits a particular vision of the artist as singularly equipped to embrace and record the decline of the west. His hyperbolic descriptions of his aims in *Cancer* are very much in line with Spengler's mission statement in *The Decline of the West* to show 'the coming generations ... what is possible – and therefore necessary – and what is excluded from the inward potentialities of their time'<sup>729</sup> Like Spengler, Miller claims to have arrived at a worldview that liberates others, in contrast to ordinary works of history and literature that have 'incited, depressed and confounded but could not free'.<sup>730</sup> Indeed, this is the premise for Miller's definition of *Cancer* as 'the last book':

It is to be a new Bible – *The Last Book*. All those who have anything to say will say it here – *anonymously*. We will exhaust the age. After us not another book – not for a generation, at least. Heretofore we had been digging in the dark, with nothing but instinct to guide us. Now we shall have a vassal in which to pour the vital fluid, a bomb which, when we throw it, will set off the world. We shall put into it enough to give the writers of tomorrow their plots, their dramas, their poems, their myths, their sciences. The world will be able to feed on it for a thousand years to come. It is colossal in its pretentiousness. (33)

As we saw in Chapter Two Miller was influenced by Breton's Surrealist manifestos in his antagonism towards 'Art'. However, this paradoxical offering of his own book as evidence that books themselves have lost their purpose very clearly arises out of

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<sup>729</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>730</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

Spengler's consciously self-defeating and provocative model. Like Spengler, who consigns history to the rubbish heap while writing a historical-cultural text, Miller is a writer – and a writer of fiction only half-disguised as reality – who proclaims and celebrates the death of 'Literature'.

It is significant that Miller signposts Spengler's influence by reference to his literary and personal relationship with Boris, the fictional pseudonym for his friend, Michael Fraenkel. An amateur philosopher and fellow American expatriate, Frankel inspired Miller to incorporate Spengler's principal themes in his work. Although Fraenkel's tone suggests an eagerness to be acknowledged that puts his reliability into question, his philosophical influence is evident from the opening page of *Cancer* onwards. Immediately before Miller declares himself 'the happiest man alive', he gives a 'summary' of Boris' philosophy:

Boris ... is a weather prophet. The weather will continue bad, he says. There will be more calamities, more death, more despair. Not the slightest indication of change anywhere. The cancer of time is eating us away. Our heroes have killed themselves, or are killing themselves ... We must get in step, a lock step, toward the prison of death. There is no escape. The weather will not change. (3)

Through what he and Fraenkel termed the 'Festival of Death', the principle of reveling in prophecies of natural disaster, death and despair, Miller projects himself not only as happy but spiritually 'alive'. By contrast, the majority of the urban western population are 'dead but don't know it'. The inferno he envisions in *Cancer* is built on his and Fraenkel's conception of the 'dead multitudes' of people who refuse to understand the truth expounded in *The Decline of the West*, who are spiritually and psychologically decomposing as a result of wider historical forces, yet unable to perceive this reality.

As I have already noted and will examine in detail in the next section, Miller's relationship with Fraenkel's ideas is complicated by his tendency to satirize and mock them. Indeed, he uses the character of Boris to portray Fraenkel as 'nutty', a comically morbid dilettante whose philosophy amounts to 'all that palavar about life and death and things happening so fast' (147). Yet the 'death theme' also appears in

earnest throughout the novel, in his essays and in his correspondence with Fraenkel.

According to Sarah Garland in 'The Dearest of Cemeteries':

Miller ... found Fraenkel's identification of the outer ferment with an inner spiritual Armageddon compelling, and Fraenkel's subsequent farcical appearance in the published version of *Cancer* as the neurotic and louse-ridden Boris gives a diminished sense of the exchange of ideas.<sup>731</sup>

In his essay 'The Genesis of *Tropic of Cancer*', Fraenkel describes the perspective he and Miller shared:

We were at the end of an age, a whole culture; a way of life, an historical past, was coming to a close: we were caught up in a process, a cyclical or organic process, and a process spends itself, completes and fulfills itself, *resolves*. We simply had to face and accept The Death, squarely and resolutely, take it inside, as it were ... live it out.<sup>732</sup>

Crucially, for Miller, Spengler and Fraenkel's language primarily provide a way of thinking about his role as an artist. As Garland puts it, Miller's discussions with Fraenkel helped him find a way to connect the conception of his own 'inner spiritual Armageddon' with the 'outer ferment'. In other words, he uses the notion of the world heading towards its inevitable destruction and rebirth to give gravitas to his own failings. Moreover, he applies Spengler's scheme to his contemporaries. Like Pound, Miller not only separates the producers of 'dead' art from those who are 'alive' by their willingness to embrace the extraordinarily calamitous times in which they live, but places Joyce amongst the former and himself amongst the latter group. Indeed, in his essay 'The Universe of Death' Miller echoes Pound's pronouncements

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<sup>731</sup> Garland, 'The Dearest of Cemeteries', p. 208.

<sup>732</sup> Fraenkel, 'The Genesis of *Tropic of Cancer*', pp. 53-54.

TABLE I. "CONTEMPORARY" SPIRITUAL EPOCHS

	INDIAN (from 1500)	CLASSICAL (from 1100)	ARABIAN (from 0.)	WESTERN (from 900)
<b>SPRING.</b> (Rural-intuitive. Great creations of the newly-awakened dream-heavy Soul. Super-personal unity and fulness)	<b>I. BIRTH OF A MYTH OF THE GRAND STYLE, EXPRESSING A NEW GOD-FEELING. WORLD-FEAR. WORLD-LONGING</b>			
	1500-1200 Vedic religion  Aryan hero-tales	1100-800 Hellenic-Italian "Demeter" religion of the people  Homer  Heracles and Theseus legends	0-300 Primitive Christianity (Mandaeans, Marcion, Gnosis, Syncretism (Mithras, Baal)) Gospels. Apocalypses  Christian, Mazdaist and pagan legends	900-1200 German Catholicism Edda (Baldr) Bernard of Clairvaux, Joachim of Floris, Francis of Assisi Popular Epos (Siegfried)  Western legends of the Saints
	<b>II. EARLIEST MYSTICAL-METAPHYSICAL SHAPING OF THE NEW WORLD-OUTLOOK. ZENITH OF SCHOLASTICISM</b>			
	Preserved in oldest parts of the Vedas	Oldest (oral) Orphic, Etruscan discipline  After-effect; Hesiod, Cosmogonies	Origen (d. 254), Plotinus (d. 269), Mani (d. 276), Iamblichus (d. 330)  Avesta, Talmud. Patristic literature	Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), Duns Scotus (d. 1308), Dante (d. 1312) and Eckhardt (d. 1329) Mysticism. Scholasticism
<b>SUMMER.</b> (Ripening consciousness. Earliest urban and critical stirrings)	<b>III. REFORMATION: INTERNAL POPULAR OPPOSITION TO THE GREAT SPRINGTIME FORMS</b>			
	Brahmanas. Oldest parts of Upanishads (10th and 9th Centuries)	Orphic movement. Dionysiac religion. "Numa" religion (7th Century)	Augustine (d. 430), Nestorians (about 430), Monophysites (about 450), Mazdak (about 500)	Nicolaus Cusanus (d. 1464), John Hus (d. 1308), Savonarola, Karlstadt, Luther, Calvin (d. 1564)
	<b>IV. BEGINNING OF A PURELY PHILOSOPHICAL FORM OF THE WORLD-FEELING. OPPOSITION OF IDEALISTIC AND REALISTIC SYSTEMS</b>			
	Preserved in Upanishads	The great Pre-Socratics (6th and 5th Centuries)	Byzantine, Jewish, Syrian, Coptic and Persian literature of 6th and 7th Centuries	Galileo, Bacon, Descartes, Bruno, Boehme, Leibniz. 16th and 17th Centuries
	<b>V. FORMATION OF A NEW MATHEMATIC CONCEPTION OF NUMBER AS COPY AND CONTENT OF WORLD-FORM</b>			
	(lost)	Number as magnitude (proportion) Geometry. Arithmetic Pythagoreans (from 540)	The indefinite number (Algebra)  (development not yet investigated)	Number as Function (analysis)  Descartes, Pascal, Fermat (ca. 1630) Newton and Leibniz (ca. 1670)
	<b>VI. PURITANISM. RATIONALISTIC-MYSTIC IMPOVERISHMENT OF RELIGION</b>			
	(lost)	Pythagorean society (from 540)	Mohammed (622) Paulicians and Iconoclasts (from 650)	English Puritans (from 1620) French Jansenists (from 1640) Port Royal
<b>AUTUMN.</b> (Intelligence of the City. Zenith of strict intellectual creativeness)	<b>VII. "ENLIGHTENMENT." BELIEF IN ALMIGHTINESS OF REASON. CULT OF "NATURE." "RATIONAL" RELIGION</b>			
	Sutras; Sankhya; Buddha; later Upanishads	Sophists of the 5th Century  Socrates (d. 399) Democritus (d. ca. 360)	Mutazilites Sufism Nazzam, Alkindi (about 830)	English Rationalists (Locke) French Encyclopaedists (Voltaire) Rousseau
	<b>VIII. ZENITH OF MATHEMATICAL THOUGHT. ELUCIDATION OF THE FORM-WORLD OF NUMBERS</b>			
	(lost)  (Zero as number)	Archytas (d. 365) Plato (d. 346) (Conic Sections)	(not investigated)  (Theory of number. Spherical Trigonometry)	Euler (d. 1763), Lagrange (d. 1813), Laplace (d. 1827) (The Infinitesimal problem)
	<b>IX. THE GREAT CONCLUSIVE SYSTEMS</b>			
	<i>Idealism</i> Yoga, Vedanta <i>Epistemology</i> Valcashaika <i>Logic</i> Nyaya	Plato (d. 346)  Aristotle (d. 322)	Alfarabi (d. 950)  Avicenna (d. ca. 1000)	Goethe  Kant  (Schelling Hegel Fichte)
<b>WINTER.</b> (Dawn of Megalopolitan Civilization. Extinction of spiritual creative force. Life itself becomes problematical. Ethical-practical tendencies of an irreligious and unmetaphysical cosmopolitanism)	<b>X. MATERIALISTIC WORLD-OUTLOOK. CULT OF SCIENCE, UTILITY AND PROSPERITY</b>			
	Sankhya, Tscharvaka (Lokuyata)	Cynics, Cyrenaics Last Sophists (Pyrrhon)	Communitic, atheistic, Epicurean sects of Abbassid times. "Brethren of Sincerity"	Bentham, Comte, Darwin Spencer, Stirner, Marx Feuerbach
	<b>XI. ETHICAL-SOCIAL IDEALS OF LIFE. EPOCH OF "UNMATHEMATICAL PHILOSOPHY." SKEPSIS</b>			
	Tendencies in Buddha's time	Hellenism Epicurus (d. 270) Zeno (d. 265)	Movements in Islam	Schopenhauer, Nietzsche Socialism, Anarchism Hebbel, Wagner, Ibsen
	<b>XII. INNER COMPLETION OF THE MATHEMATICAL FORM-WORLD. THE CONCLUDING THOUGHT</b>			
	(lost)	Euclid, Apollonius (about 300) Archimedes (about 250)	Alchwarizmi (800) Ibn Kurra (850) Alkarchi, Albiruni (10th Century)	Gauss (d. 1855) Cauchy (d. 1857) Riemann (d. 1866)
	<b>XIII. DEGRADATION OF ABSTRACT THINKING INTO PROFESSIONAL LECTURE-ROOM PHILOSOPHY. COMPENDIUM LITERATURE</b>			
	The "Six Classical Systems"	Academy, Peripatos, Stoics, Epicureans	Schools of Baghdad and Basra	Kantians. "Logicisms" and "Psychologisms"
	<b>XIV. SPREAD OF A FINAL WORLD-SENTIMENT</b>			
	Indian Buddhism	Hellenistic-Roman Stoicism from 200	Practical fatalism in Islam after 1000	Ethical Socialism from 1900

Oswald Spengler. Table of 'Contemporary Spiritual Epochs', *The Decline of the West*, transl. by Charles Francis Atkinson, 2 vols (London: George Allen & Uwin Ltd., 1980, 1918), vol I

on Joyce saying that he appears 'so ridden with disease that [his] works resemble the disease itself', a writer of 'surrender' in contrast with those writers of the future who effect change by a 'vital sense of life'.<sup>733</sup>

In this sense, Miller promotes himself in Poundian terms, as an artist whose approach offers resolution by confronting the decay of the society he inhabits. He understands the all-pervasive presence of the 'death process' in modern life and of the importance of perceiving and combatting it through one's own sense of life:

Death is the automaton which rules the world of activity ... death from the roots, isolating men, making them bitter and fearful and lonely, giving them fruitless energy, filling them with a will which can only say No!<sup>734</sup>

Miller's analysis of Joyce is another example of the Poundian quest for a return to the 'center'. In a 1932 letter to Emil Schnellock, Miller presages certain ideas about artistic life and death, pitting Joyce against Spengler by claiming:

Joyce ... has lost his charm for me. I see him as a broken vomit, a precious sewer, a medieval stew [but] Spengler emerges biggest and best of all still ... There is great music, great literature, great ideas.<sup>735</sup>

Joyce becomes for Miller – as for Pound – a symbol of the 'sickness' of the times, a writer whose work accurately represents the 'sterility, onanism, logomachy' of the urban citizenry but is emphatically unable to offer the requisite 'cure'.<sup>736</sup> Thus Miller's interest in cultural morphological ideas, in a 'process' that operates throughout the world, are remarkably similar to Pound's 'retrospect' and 'prospect'. For Pound and Miller, Joyce's work runs counter to instinct, to a positive libidinous flow of energy ('sterility, onanism') and the potential for a move away from the disease of its age ('logomachy').

Similar criticisms come up throughout Miller's philosophical correspondence with Fraenkel, a series of letters compiled for a project dealing with 'The Death Theme' they called *Hamlet* (1933). After receiving Frankel's reply to one of his letters – in

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<sup>733</sup> 'The Universe of Death', pp. 215 & 222.

<sup>734</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 264.

<sup>735</sup> *Letters to Emil*, p. 74, February 16<sup>th</sup> 1931,

<sup>736</sup> 'The Universe of Death', p. 208.

which he dismisses Miller's approach as 'a vast and horrible distortion, a horribly twisted and tortuous and endless gob, a nightmare born of fear and hatred and words, words, and more words' - Miller scathingly accused his friend of standing 'eternally in the position of a diagnostician' rather than curer.<sup>737</sup> 'It is your job', he goes on 'to discover everywhere traces of the disease.'<sup>738</sup> According to Miller, like Joyce Fraenkel is infected with 'the disease' of his age and therefore will never be able to provide constructive solutions. Unlike Miller, Frankel is powerless to escape the doomed, insanely logical system in which 'the treadmill stretches away to infinitude, the hatches are closed down tight, logic runs rampant, with bloody cleaver flashing.'<sup>739</sup>

In this sense, the Spengler-fanatic Miller accuses his fellow-fanatic Fraenkel of misunderstanding a key tenet from *The Decline of the West*, namely Spengler's promotion of 'Culture-morale ... that which a man has' over 'Civilization-morale ... that which he looks for.' While 'the one is too deep to be exhaustible by logical means,' he goes on, 'the other is a *function* of logic.'<sup>740</sup> Fraenkel might ruminate on the death of western civilization, on his own sense that he is emotionally dead, but he is powerless to effect change in himself or the outside world because he cannot break 'the death rhythm' of cold, meticulous thought; he cannot detect the vital sense of life that will allow him to be reborn. In this way, Miller lumps Fraenkel in with the masses of emotionally stunted neurotics he describes so dismissively in *Capricorn*:

Every one who has not fully accepted life, who is not incrementing life, is helping to fill the world with death. To make the simplest gesture with the hand can convey the utmost sense of life; a word spoken with the whole being can give life.<sup>741</sup>

Miller defines this cure for the 'death process' through his analysis of various artists, but most importantly through the life and work of D.H. Lawrence. Lawrence, he

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<sup>737</sup> Henry Miller & Michael Fraenkel, *Hamlet: The Michael Fraenkel – Henry Miller Correspondence*, pp. 303, 336.

<sup>738</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336.

<sup>739</sup> *Cancer*, p. 183.

<sup>740</sup> Spengler, p. 354

<sup>741</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 262.



writes in 'The Universe of Death', produces work of 'vitality' by 'seizing anew the sense of death ... and reacting creatively to it'.<sup>742</sup> As outlined in Chapter Two, Miller's capacity for rebirth is paradoxically manifested in the refusal to struggle against the hopelessness of a desperate situation. By this, Miller means that Lawrence, like Spengler, is a serious artist who engages with and expresses the fundamental core values that originate in the 'soul' rather than 'the sick reality of the mind'.<sup>743</sup> Echoing Bergson, who claims that 'we are at ease only in the discontinuous, the immobile, in the dead. *The intellect is characterized by a natural inability to comprehend life*', Miller posits Lawrence as a writer who struggles to move beyond the comfortable, 'dead' bounds of logical thought.<sup>744</sup> He is, Miller says, superior to Joyce - 'blind in the pineal eye' - or the Surrealists - 'merely the reflection of the death process' - because he produces an ecstatic vision that transcends the intellectual.<sup>745</sup> Thus, like Pound, Miller's own notion of 'the prospect' in the 1930s has to do with a shift in aesthetic as well as moral purpose, from the mere representation of the psychological and spiritual disease of modern Western civilization to the reaffirmation of core human values through a direct engagement with the 'disease' itself. In this way Miller echoes Pound's rhetoric of the true artist as an ethically and aesthetically restorative figure, 'reacting creatively' and rebelliously against the popular currents of the day in order to find some sort of resolution to an infernal and decaying age; an age that Miller summarized emphatically in his study of Rimbaud, *The Time of the Assassins*:

The spell of millennium which ... today is tantalizingly more imminent than ever before, has been replaced by the thrall of utter annihilation. In the whirlpool of coming darkness and chaos .... the poets of today are withdrawing, embalming themselves in a cryptic language which grows ever more and more unintelligible. And as they back out one by one, the countries which gave them birth plunge resolutely toward their doom.<sup>746</sup>

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<sup>742</sup> 'The Universe of Death', pp. 108-9.

<sup>743</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>744</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 182

<sup>745</sup> 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere'

<sup>746</sup> *The Time of the Assassins*, p. ix.

### 3.5 'The Last Book': the 'perceptual' vs. the 'historical' apocalypse

Despite shared positions on diagnosis and cure, on the role of the artist in a newly defined future, one of the crucial differences between Miller and Pound lies precisely in how they think about art as a restorative and revolutionary medium. It is paramount, for instance, that the forces dictating the inferno Miller creates in *Cancer* are internal and personal rather than external and cultural. Where Pound uses the language of impending death, destruction and renewal to express the omnipresent and omnipotent evils of a corrupt system, Miller employs it in the service of a narrower and more introspective project. His concept of Paris as hell comes from his intensive engagement with and delineation of his own suffering. As such, the economic and social misalignments Miller highlights are always posited as the wider consequences of individual perceptual misalignments, the result of the individual human being's inability to understand the self and to recreate the world according to this new understanding. If Miller recognizes his inferno as representative of the disharmony 'in the air', proposing 'live ideas, kidney ideas, intestinal ideas' as a vital corrective, he also thinks about suffering and joy as states that are controlled by the individual, thus crucially deviating from Pound's principal of universally felt world processes that the individual must contend with.<sup>747</sup>

Miller's notion that he was writing 'the last book' - at the end of one age and the dawn of another - works according to an idea of revolution that is starkly at odds with Pound's. Miller's use of apocalyptic language and ideology will be seen in this final chapter to have been motivated by what Ihab Hassan, in his study 1967 *The Literature of Silence*, calls 'the alteration of consciousness ... the constant hope of Miller throughout his apocalyptic harangues.'<sup>748</sup> While Pound's prophecies are grounded in his serious attempts to apply the logic of cultural morphology to the past, present and future, Miller's own pronouncements celebrate the madness of the writers who have influenced him and the style he has adopted. It will be seen that the unparalleled truth Miller identifies in delirious modes of discourse was the real

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<sup>747</sup> *Cancer*, p. 243.

<sup>748</sup> Ihab Hassan *The Literature of Silence* (New York: Knopf, 1967), p. 7.

basis of his interest in Spengler and his own wild and consciously self-contradictory notion that he was writing a 'last book' for a defunct epoch. Moreover, this aspect of Miller's project will identify him – again according to Hassan's terms - as a harbinger of the more 'schismatic' modernisms that appeared after World War Two.<sup>749</sup> In this way, Miller incorporates brutal and regressive elements that connect him to an early Poundian apocalyptic aesthetic, but in the opposite cause of self-liberation and progress.

In a passage towards the end of *Cancer* where Miller looks back on his six years of struggle in the city, he explains his belief in the individual's responsibility for the world he or she perceives: 'I have learned what every madman in Paris discovers sooner or later; that there are no ready-made infernos for the tormented' (159).

Echoing his attack, in his study of Rimbaud, on 'the little man' for wanting 'peace and harmony ... ready-made, like a suit of manufactured clothes', Miller dismisses the idea of a universally experienced hell as reductive; a myopic negation of the power a person has over his or her subjective experience of the world.<sup>750</sup>

Fundamentally, the statement represents an extension of Miller's theory of suffering as a means of asserting individual sovereignty. The freedom he feels as an economically and socially marginalized figure arises from his choice to live that way, his own creation of the suffering he experiences, and, crucially, his aliveness to each minute detail of his self-created misery. While Pound views Miller's descent to the 'low-life' as aesthetically and ethically productive because it accurately renders the individual's experience in a corrupt world, Miller understands the experience primarily as a means of ownership over his existence and the basis of a spiritual and creative rebirth.

To this end, Miller constantly struggles to fend off what he considers limiting external judgments on his personal experience. Describing his Paris ordeal from the hard-fought, relatively comfortable position of a published writer with a small

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<sup>749</sup> Hassan, p. 7.

<sup>750</sup> *The Time of the Assassins*, p. 31. See my p. 109.

income and professional reputation, he imagines and resolutely rejects standard, mundane responses to his time as a down-and-out:

That was something to go through – and come out *singing*. Luck! Well, call it that if you like. Call it luck if it makes you feel any better. Only I happen to know differently. Happens it happened to me – *and I know*.<sup>751</sup>

What he believes he knows ‘differently’ is that existential and artistic rejuvenation occurs when the urge to transcend the ‘living death’ of modern urban existence transforms into a genuine commitment. As he puts it in his study of Rimbaud:

Repeatedly we have been warned [by prophetic poets like Rimbaud] that unless the desire for a new life becomes a living conviction for each and every one of us, earthly existence will never be more than a Purgatory or a Hell.<sup>752</sup>

The individual has a responsibility, Miller implies, to live out his or her own suffering and to understand it as an expression of his or her self. In this context, Rimbaud’s poetic exploration of his torments are, for Miller, the equivalent of the religious epiphanies that inspire the Christian or the Buddhist’s faith:

Is there not something just as *miraculous* about Rimbaud’s appearance on this earth as there was in the awakening of Guatama, or in Christ’s acceptance of the Cross, or in Joan of Arc’s incredible mission of deliverance?<sup>753</sup>

Miller’s appropriation of Spengler’s language and epochal scheme is useful in so far as it provides the palate with which to express this suffering and this personal, quasi-religious perceptual revolution. In contrast to Frobenius’ methodological and social anthropological influence on Pound, Spengler (and, to a lesser extent Fraenkel) equip Miller with the eschatological linguistic means to communicate his ordeal and therefore affirm his significance as an artist and individual. Indeed, in *Cancer* Miller uses Spengler’s idea of the modern city in decline to reify his suffering in Paris:

[This is] a Paris which has never existed except by virtue of my loneliness ... This Paris, to which I alone hold the key ... a Paris that has to be lived, that has to be experienced each day in a thousand different forms of torture, a Paris that grows inside you like a cancer, grows and grows until you are eaten away by it. (187)

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<sup>751</sup> ‘Max’, p. 157.

<sup>752</sup> *The Time of the Assassins*, p. xi.

<sup>753</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

The cancer in the streets corresponds to the cancer inside him. Rather than the human expression of external, cultural decay – as Frobenius and Pound suggest – his own internal loneliness produces the external disease of the city. In this way Miller is able to make sense of what Garland called his ‘inner armageddeon’, using the chaotic mess of emotions he experiences as a rejected and dejected down-and-out to make sense of the physical and atmospheric urban decay of his surroundings. In ‘The Genesis of *Tropic of Cancer*’ Fraenkel describes their ‘death theme’ as having provided ‘the meaning of a whole lifetime of drift and flux, of inchoate thoughts, feelings, emotions, ideas, moods ... a whole world of inner chaos’.<sup>754</sup> Indeed, like Bergson’s theory of the multiplicity of existence, eschatological language allows Miller to draw the sting out of his suffering by positing it as part of a larger sense of inevitable and unchangeable chaos. Similarly, Spengler allows him to mythologize his failure in New York and his journey across the Atlantic, an idea that is evidenced in Miller’s attempt to insert himself into an esteemed lineage of famously troubled expatriate artists in Paris:

As I ruminated, it began to grow clear to me, the mystery of the pilgrimage, the flight, which the poet makes over the face of the earth and then, as if he had been ordained to re-enact a lost drama, the heroic descent to the very bowels of the earth. (187)

Indeed, he uses the Dantean image of a pilgrimage into hell to legitimize and empower himself in the self-appointed role of revolutionary writer.

Despite his attraction to cultural morphology and eschatology, Miller ultimately negates Spengler, Frobenius and Pound’s premises of a ‘world-picture’ that can be applied to all human beings and all history since his explicit focus is his own ordination, his own ‘drama’ and ‘descent’, not the historical or meta-historical forces that drive these. Through this, he also implicitly denies the theories he so enthusiastically celebrates throughout *Cancer*, privileging the creative will and actions of the individual above the mysterious epochal and cultural ‘spirit’ of Spengler or the ‘Paideuma’ of Pound and Frobenius’ writing.

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<sup>754</sup> Fraenkel, ‘The Genesis of *Tropic of Cancer*’, p. 59.

As mentioned earlier, Bruce Comens' study, *Apocalypse and After: Modern Strategy and Postmodern Tactics in Pound, Williams and Zukofsky* sets out some useful categories for an understanding of the apocalyptic. According to Comens, modernist writers who use apocalyptic imagery fall into the post-Romantic 'visionary tradition' - interested in providing 'a sudden, apocalyptic liberation by changing the way people perceive' - or the 'historical apocalyptic' tradition, urgently preparing the way for an apocalyptic social, political or cultural revolution.<sup>755</sup> The first camp, Comens claims, insist that 'it is only our perceptual inability that condemns us to live in a "fallen" world, for the (visionary) *real* world exists now, ahistorically' and that 'a perceptual revolution' in which 'the ordinary world dissolves in favor of a new, visionary reality ... can occur at any moment'; the second believe that a 'literal' apocalypse and millennial dawn will take place when certain dates, people and forces are in alignment.<sup>756</sup>

Comens writes that Pound's eschatological scheme was 'originally based on a "visionary apocalyptic"' but became 'increasingly distorted under the urgent pressures of the "historical apocalyptic"'.<sup>757</sup> Miller's belief in the individual's control over his or her perceptual rebirth, however, places him firmly in the former tradition. Pound's use of Frobenius' 'cultural circles' to talk about physical instinctual 'knowledge of the process now going on', indeed his search for artists to help usher in the new 'paideuma' very clearly emphasize 'historical' change, whereas Miller's appropriation of Spengler's decaying Europe is primarily aesthetic - based on the harnessing of imagery to transform his own emotions and perceptions and induce the same kind of transformation in others.<sup>758</sup> Miller might 'react creatively' to 'the death process', but he does so for the purpose of furnishing his own personal Paris.

Indeed, by framing his experience eschatologically, portentously making of it 'a heroic descent to the very bowels of the earth ... a bloody struggle to liberate himself', by using Spengler's language of civilization and evolution, Miller plays

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<sup>755</sup> Comens, p. 38.

<sup>756</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>757</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>758</sup> *Guide to Kulchur*, pp. 51-52.

around with rhetoric that Pound uses in political and historical earnest, and he does so to create a distinctly literary persona. Spengler and Frankel enable him to present himself as simultaneously destroyed and recreated, defeated and liberated as an expatriate artist and human being. Lifting language almost directly from *The Decline of the West*, the American Miller envisions Paris as 'an eternal city', one of 'the cradles of civilization', and also a 'charnel house', one of the 'putrid sinks of the world', to explain his rebirth as a New World writer in the Old World of Paris (186). Spengler's coordinates allow Miller to contrast the fetid but historically fertile atmosphere of his present in Europe - 'saturated with the past' (317) - with the 'cold, glittering, malign' atmosphere of his past in New York (74).

Nonetheless, Miller also displays a healthy skepticism regarding Spengler, as evident in his reactions to Boris (Fraenkel) in *Cancer*. Describing a long letter Boris sends him about Spengler and 'The Death Theme', Miller writes that 'it sounds nutty to me, all this palaver about life and death and things happening so fast. Nothing is happening that I can see, except the usual calamities on the front page' (172). At another stage, he says of Boris' Spenglerian theories 'sometimes I would glance at a volume furtively, to check up on these wild ideas which he imputed to them - but the connection was frail, tenuous' (173). Like Pound's attempt to get him to 'swing the bat' for Social Credit, Fraenkel's appeal for a serious philosophical alliance is dismissed and mocked as the product of an insane and isolated mind.

These important differences between Pound and Miller's apocalypics are also elucidated by the non-intellectual nature of the latter's inter-textual allusions to Spengler. As part of his chapter-long homage to *The Decline of the West* in *Plexus*, Miller claims Spengler's language acted as an 'elixir' on he and his friends when they first discovered it in New York; it is, he says, a rare text that struck a deep chord of recognition in him:

If critics and scholars were interested in the Spenglerian view of things it was not at all in the way we were. For them it was but another bone to gnaw at. A juicier bone than usual, perhaps, but a bone nevertheless. To us it was life, the

elixir of life. We got drunk on it every time we met. And of course we developed our own mutual 'morphological' sign language.<sup>759</sup>

By presenting Spengler's prose as a means of intoxication, work to be imbibed rather than pored over for historical or cultural truths, Miller demonstrates both his attraction to the non-rational, cultural theories of the period and his awareness of the risks they carry. Indeed, he implies an instinctive spiritual affinity with the language and tone of *The Decline of the West* rather than an intellectual connection to its ideas, a profound and fanatical relationship more akin to a religious experience than the reading of a historical, sociological or anthropological text. The "'morphological' sign language' he gleans from Spengler is a means of play, then, rather than intellectual argument. Indeed, in the same riff, he admits: 'passionate as I was about Spengler, the truth of his utterances never seemed so important to me as the wonderful play of his thought.'<sup>760</sup>

As we have seen, Miller talks with a similar sense of intoxicated awe about both Henri Bergson and Pound. Pound's *Cantos*, we remember, sounded to Miller like 'stuff I say to myself all day long', a work of 'I could swallow down like homebrew'. In *Capricorn*, he describes discovering Bergson's *Creative Evolution* and feeling like 'a man going through the rites of initiation', a process that involves consumption rather than cerebral understanding:

My understanding of the meaning of the book is that the book itself disappears from sight, that it is chewed alive, digested and incorporated into the system as flesh and blood which in turn creates new spirit and reshapes the world.<sup>761</sup>

In her study *The Secret Violence of Henry Miller*, Katy Masuga argues that this disinterest in reading as an intellectual exercise is part of Miller's wider distinction between 'language' and 'words' and his impulse to luxuriate in rather than analyse what he finds on the written page:

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<sup>759</sup> *Plexus*, p. 452.

<sup>760</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 453.

<sup>761</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 201.



Ever surrounding himself in metaphor, in language, in playful nuance, Miller writes, "Between the covers of the giant lexicon, amid ablatives and gerundives, I curled up and fell fast asleep."<sup>762</sup>

Indeed, as he puts it *The Time of the Assassins*, 'From childhood I was in love with the sound of words, with their magic, their power of enchantment.'<sup>763</sup> In line with his interpretation of Spengler's particular talent, the eschatological mode in Miller's own work is simultaneously vital and frivolous. It functions as the thematic and rhetorical framework for the artist's descent and liberation, but is never presented as a school of thought that he engages with intellectually. Accordingly, Miller was also keenly aware that Spengler's radical historical ideas might soon probably appear dated. After waxing lyrically to Emil Schnellock about Spengler's brilliance, he checks himself - 'Will I be obliged to retract this two years hence?' - before dismissing the relevance of contemplating his longevity - 'Well, anyway ... for the time being ... big man!'.<sup>764</sup> Crucially, as well as sending up Michael Fraenkel via the character 'Boris', he refuses to treat their *Hamlet* project as a serious philosophical exchange, telling Fraenkel after reading yet another long treatise on the 'inner death', 'this is all horseshit with no holy water to redeem it'.<sup>765</sup>

In this way Miller occupies an esoteric position within the anti-intellectualism and anti-humanism defined earlier in this study through Pound and Hulme. In one sense he is absolutely representative of the wave of readers and writers who found cultural morphology seductive at this time, a demographic described by Marchand in her study of Frobenius:

In an era of increasingly bitter assaults on bookishness and useless (especially humanistic) learning, Frobenius's intuitive approach and exotic expertise won him new admirers.<sup>766</sup>

In another sense, he conspicuously locates the value of these texts, or rather his enjoyment of them, in the spuriousness and impossibility of the theories they

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<sup>762</sup> Masuga, p. 4.

<sup>763</sup> *The Time of the Assassins*, p. 18.

<sup>764</sup> *Letters to Emil*, p. 74, February 16<sup>th</sup> 1931.

<sup>765</sup> *Hamlet: The Michael Fraenkel – Henry Miller Correspondence*, p. 56.

<sup>766</sup> Marchand, p. 166.

propagate. Just as he proudly announces that his own argument is 'horseshit', Miller appropriates Spengler and Fraenkel's eschatological approaches precisely because they do not stand up under serious academic analysis. When Miller tells Emil Schnellock that he 'will be obliged to retract' his support for Spengler 'two years hence', he does so with the purpose of complimenting Spengler. It is not clear in this context whether he is suggesting that the author of *The Decline of the West* is intellectually or politically suspect, but what is clear is that he sees its fallibility as positive. Indeed, another letter to Schnellock, reveals a similar ambivalence in regard to Fraenkel's world vision: 'he sounds crazy sometimes, and no doubt is, but it's magnificent, lucid insanity – the kind that builds up new worlds'.<sup>767</sup>

As well as emphasizing the re-creative process that Spengler and Fraenkel inspire in him – indeed, the delirious clarity discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis - these statements underline Miller's attraction to fanaticism and zealotry. By reacting enthusiastically to the 'crazy' theories of eschatological writers, the anti-religious Miller adheres to Spengler, Fraenkel and Bergson's pronouncements with the blind faith of a disciple. And yet, Miller makes it clear that he recognizes the excessiveness, irrationality and self-gratifying nature of his faith, acknowledging what Garland terms 'the repercussions to the self' that come with secular appropriations of prophetic language.<sup>768</sup>

Indeed, Miller's quasi-religious tone is determined not to mutate into anxiety and contaminate his 'incurable optimism'. Yet, mischievously, Miller also expounds some external philosophical, literary and anthropological texts as gospel truths. His conversion to Bergson's cause, for example, is so evangelical in its nature that he refuses to converse with anyone who does not or can not understand *Creative Evolution*:

You meet a friend on the street by chance, one whom you haven't seen for several weeks, and he has become an absolute stranger to you. You give him a few signals from your new perch and if he doesn't cotton you pass him up – *for good*. It's exactly like mopping up a battlefield: all those who are

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<sup>767</sup> *Letters to Emil*, p. 104.

<sup>768</sup> 'The Dearest of Cemeteries', p. 102.

hopelessly disabled and agonizing you dispatch with one swift bow of your club ... You seek out new fields of operation, new specimens of the human race whom you patiently instruct and equip with the new symbols ... You try everybody and everything within range, provided they are ignorant of the revelation.<sup>769</sup>

Indeed, at a later point in *Capricorn* Miller claims that he took to reading 'this new bible' to the workers at his father's tailor shop 'in the way that Paul must have talked to the disciples'.<sup>770</sup>

Masuga flags up a similar dialectic between didacticism and a knowing awareness of absurdity in Miller's own writing, claiming that he 'joyfully exploits' the 'underlying dynamic of the text as a false or impossible picture of the world or of himself as a human being'.<sup>771</sup> Miller, Masuga claims, draws the reader's attention to his own pretensions, 'broadcasting the seditious, minor quality of his writing' through words that 'break down (under the weight of the major language) but somehow simultaneously swell and spill over (in a minorization of the major language)'.<sup>772</sup>

Citing Miller's clumsy robbery of a passage from Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* in *Cancer*, she goes on to imply that Miller deliberately marks himself out as 'tasteless and contradictory'.<sup>773</sup> Indeed, halfway through 'Wisdom of the Heart', his 1939 essay on 'the art of living', he exclaims 'this is the Apocalyptic Era when all things will be made manifest to us' before playfully asserting 'I am not dippy'.<sup>774</sup> As Rod

Rosenquist puts it in *Modernism, the Market and the New*:

The man who prophesied the end of all literature hoped, by building his novel around an invented persona bearing his own name, to write one 'last book', and thereby position his name within an enduring, if ultimately degraded, literary history.<sup>775</sup>

In other words, by his apparently total self-belief Miller demands to be taken seriously, but he also warns that what he is saying is implausible; a paradox that

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<sup>769</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 200.

<sup>770</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>771</sup> *The Secret Violence of Henry Miller*, p. 19.

<sup>772</sup> Masuga, p. 73.

<sup>773</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>774</sup> 'Wisdom of the Heart', p. 91.

<sup>775</sup> Rosenquist p. 114.

functions as a vital source of pleasure for the reader. Like the author himself in his readings of Spengler, Bergson and Fraenkel, Miller's readers are invited to fall under the spell of a narrator who is fired up with absolute self-belief but who also admits that nothing he says can truly be trusted.

Although Miller feels an attraction to Spengler's symbols and the 'new worlds' built up by Fraenkel, it is significant that he retains a firm and practical resistance to their serious application as political, social or economic theory. In contrast to Pound, who is heavily invested in the real anthropological implications of Frobenius' African studies – and who, his friend W.B. Yeats recalls, was enchanted by 'the idea that cultures (including arts and sciences) arise out of races, express those races as if they were fruit and leaves in a preordained order and perish with them' Miller's praise for Spengler was accompanied by a distrust of his 'dialectic materialism ... race logic, or quantum', theories he dismisses as 'crazy' in a letter to Fraenkel.<sup>776</sup>

According to Garland, Miller's writings about reading suggest 'that what's inside a book might matter less than the sense of having connected with ... a person and a voice'.<sup>777</sup> After quoting the narrator in *Cancer* on the eighteenth century French writer Papini, Garland goes on to say:

It doesn't matter to Miller whether Papini is 'a chauvinist, a little Christer, or a nearsighted pedant' – or a fascist, we might add -- Papini, as a failure is 'marvelous' because of the incredible mad charisma of his first person narration.<sup>778</sup>

This corroborates the possibility that Miller could have been interested in Spengler's cultural morphology without feeling any affiliation with his racially essentialist theories. Further corroboration comes from the fact that Miller dismisses 'race logic' elsewhere in *Cancer* – lampooning the preposterous notion that average skull size indicates racial evolutionary development (158). That said, Pound's enthusiasm for Miller as a writer with an essentialist understanding of nationality ('Miller's

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<sup>776</sup> W.B Yeats, 'Letter to Sturge Moore', quoted in Noel Stock, *The Life of Ezra Pound* (Oxford: Routledge, 1970), p. 52; Miller, *Hamlet: The Michael Fraenkel – Henry Miller Correspondence*, p. 56.

<sup>777</sup> Garland, 'The Dearest of Cemeteries', p. 205.

<sup>778</sup> Garland, 'Dearest of Cemeteries', p. 205.

Americans and very American, his Russians quite so')<sup>779</sup> and of hierarchy, indeed as a man who appreciates 'the process we are now going through', seems to be confirmed by their common interest in culturally essentialist writers like Spengler and Frobenius.

Beyond Yeats' comments, Pound's descriptions of Frobenius demonstrate that his interest in 'paideuma', 'kultursymptome' and 'kultur' was in part motivated by the answers the latter purported to offer on race. Contributing to *Negro*, an anthology compiled by his associate Nancy Cunard and intended to raise awareness of African-American culture in the 1940s, Pound addresses 'the Afro-American intelligenzia and ... the Negro millionaires etc., that are rumored to flourish in Harlem', telling them they should be grateful to Frobenius since he is the one man 'who has shown their race its true charter of nobility'.<sup>780</sup> Through his examination of artifacts, weapons and ruins in West Africa, Pound claims, Frobenius has managed to uncover the 'essential soul' not only of the West African Yorubian race, but the entire African continent. In this sense Pound adopts what Marchand calls a wholly 'orientalized' view of his contemporary Africans'.<sup>781</sup> It is a view that is usefully summed up in *The Voice of Africa*:

Yoruban civilization must, in its present form, be unhesitatingly declared to be essentially African ... It is as much an integral part of, as deeply rooted in, the body and soul of the Yorubans themselves as the terracottas are part and parcel of the homogeneous soil of Yorubaland. Here is a state of culture which has been realized in flesh and blood, drawing the breath of life from its aboriginal form.<sup>782</sup>

As we have seen, Miller's discussions of Spengler, nationality, culture and destiny regularly echo Pound's Frobenian orientalist idea about an elusive but powerful virtue in the ancient civilizations of non-Western nations. Through his reading of *The Decline of the West*, Miller convinced himself that, where the people of his own time and continent did not comprehend or appreciate his artistic voice, 'any man of

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<sup>779</sup> 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 88.

<sup>780</sup> 'Ezra Pound, 'Leo Frobenius', in *Negro: An Anthology*, ed. and collected by Nancy Cunard (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1934, 1970), p. 393.

<sup>781</sup> Marchand, p. 16.

<sup>782</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

archaic epochs would have understood me.<sup>783</sup> Indeed, Miller's representation of himself as a marginal individual depends on this connection between artistic, social and mental degeneration and a productive 'primitive' spirit, native to 'magic' practicing, non-western cultures:

when you drive a man almost crazy and when, to his own surprise perhaps, he finds that he still has some resistance, some powers of his own, then you are apt to find such a man acting very much like a primitive being. Such a man is apt not only to become stubborn and dogged, but superstitious, a believer in magic and a practiser of magic.<sup>784</sup>

This kind of association – between himself as a rejected, mad artist and the 'primitive' and exotic cultural spirits of faraway lands – abounds throughout Miller's writing. In the *Hamlet* correspondence and various other essays and letters, for example, he identifies himself as a 'Chinaman', because he believes that he embodies essential Chinese qualities: 'The fundamental, changeless, rock-bottom man, immortal, unscathed by catastrophes'.<sup>785</sup> He also uses Judaism and his Jewish characters in *Cancer* and *Capricorn* for the same self-affirmative purpose, identifying a capacity for suffering as a principal Jewish characteristic and believing that his own suffering makes him somehow Jewish in spirit. Moreover, these hunches of racial affinity are consolidated in Miller's mind by his sense of Spengerian determinism. Western civilization is fixed on one course and he – as a rare figure who understands its impending doom – has freed himself to communicate with the 'primitive' spirits of past epochs.

Clearly this appropriation of racial otherness for the purpose of self-affirmation calls to mind the deeply suspect Primitivist paradigm that Pound suggests in his article for the 'Negro' anthology. Miller makes use of cultural morphological imaginative links to think about himself as a 'noble savage', transcendent of corrupt, civilized modernity and plugged in to a certain 'magic' that is unavailable to the rest of his subservient twentieth-century race. It is the kind of anti-modern approach – also

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<sup>783</sup> *Capricorn*, p.261.

<sup>784</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>785</sup> *Hamlet: The Michael Fraenkel – Henry Miller Correspondence*, p. 90.

abundantly evident in the anti-bourgeois and anti-utilitarian ideas detailed in Chapter 3.3 of this thesis - that connects quite easily with Frobenius.

Miller's perceptual revolution depends upon distinctly essentialist imagery, in terms not only of race but gender and sexuality too. As we have seen, he describes his spiritual and ethical bond with Germaine and Lucienne, the virtuous prostitutes in *Cancer*, in similarly essentialist terms: Germaine 'functioned superbly' in her 'circumscribed' world because 'she glows down there where a woman should'; Lucienne soars like a 'condor' above the wage slaves of Paris because she is tuned in to the essential frequency of her sexuality, her gender and her humanity.<sup>786</sup> Indeed, both prostitutes are compared favorably to the ladylike Claude, whose primness goes fundamentally against the grain of her natural role as 'whore'. In his gut, Miller says, he feels a sort of 'inexpressible rebellion' against Claude's deviation from her essential self.

In a world Pound believes is contaminated by the 'smearing of difference', Miller's solid grasp of fixed cultural, gender and sexual distinctions marks him out above his contemporaries as a truth-telling artist and human being. It is also the case, however, that - unlike Pound - Miller abhors the use of these figurative coordinates for the condemnation or veneration of entire cultures or races. Pound's address to black Americans, though intended to celebrate 'their noble charter', is based on a binary understanding of racial virtue and corruption that assumes his capacity, as a white Western man of letters, to judge the relative worth of a complete racial history. Far more sinisterly, his attacks on the Jewish race for its part in the bank-government-arms dealer conspiracy resulted in the First World War - attacks which escalated dramatically in the 1930s and 40s and culminated in his racist condemnation of 'the kikes' and their 'jewsocracy' - suggest his wholesale ideological application of Frobenius' cultural physiognomy.

Miller, on the other hand, is fundamentally opposed to racial discrimination and persecution, particularly in their institutional forms. Although he often uses what was offensively racist language (words like 'nigger' and 'kike' come up frequently in

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<sup>786</sup> *Cancer*, p. 52. See my Section 2.3; *Cancer*, p. 164-65. See my p. 248.

his prose), he views racial inequality as another example of the pernicious collective subjugating the individual. Indeed, in *Capricorn* he describes his shock, outrage and sadness at witnessing the social and psychological after-effects of slavery while travelling across America in search of work:

I passed the imaginary line which divides the North from the South. I wasn't aware of it until a darkie came along driving a team; when he gets alongside of me he stands up in his seat and doffs his hat most respectfully. He had snow-white hair and a face of great dignity. That made me feel horrible: it made me realize there are still slaves. This man had to tip his hat to me – because I was of the white race. Whereas I should have tipped my hat to him! I should have saluted him as a survivor of all the vile tortures the white men have inflicted on the black.<sup>787</sup>

This passage contains something of the paradox at the heart of Miller's approach to race and culture. While he is instinctively opposed to the reality of slavery, and of one race's sense of entitlement over another, he also envisions the black man he encounters as a symbol of his race, imbuing him with a 'face of great dignity' despite the 'vile tortures' that all black Americans have endured. Essentialist ideas of cultural virtue and evil are again used to assert the importance of individual freedom, and particularly to mark himself out as an individual who has broken away from the collective and therefore recognizes the full magnitude of its crime:

I should have tipped my cap first, to let him know that I am not a part of this system, that I am begging forgiveness for all my white brethren who are too ignorant and cruel to make an honest overt gesture.<sup>788</sup>

The language of cultural essentialism – connected to the language of eschatology – thus allows Miller to consolidate and reify his position on the margins of conventional society. It gives him the linguistic and imaginative coordinates to present himself as 'sane' and 'healthy' for being on the outside rather than at the

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<sup>787</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 281.

<sup>788</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281. Miller romanticises ancient dynasties in the cause of his anti-imperialist message throughout his writings on America. Later in *Capricorn*, for example, he exclaims passionately that 'No greater humiliation, it seems to me, was meted out to any man than to Montezuma; no race was ever more ruthlessly wiped out than the American Indian; no land was ever raped in the foul and bloody way that California was raped by the gold-diggers. I blush to think of our origins – our hands are steeped in blood and crime' (*Capricorn*, p. 261).



epicenters first of American then of French civilization. Indeed, as he puts it in *Plexus*, when he first reads Spengler's announcement that 'THE END OF THE WORLD IS IN SIGHT!' – an announcement, importantly, that he describes as 'imaginary' – he experiences 'a strange kind of peace ... the peace of a man who was able to reconcile himself with the condition of the world *in thought*'.<sup>789</sup> Thus, in stark contrast to the elitist authority implied by Pound's reading of Frobenius, Miller presents Spengler not only as a writer who intoxicates with his use of language but a figure of reassurance to marginalized, alienated spirits who have lost their way in the divisive modernity of the twentieth century urban landscape. Indeed, Miller's 'last book' is imagined as a sacred sanctuary for the mentally and materially dispossessed, 'a cathedral, a veritable cathedral, in the building of which everybody will assist who has lost his identity' (33).

Like El Greco and Anaïs Nin, indeed like Germaine – who, in their different ways Miller believed had created their 'own worlds ... inside the whale' – Miller understands his 'last book' as a last-ditch imaginative response to the madness of contemporary existence. Indeed, it is akin to the process Caroline Blinder identifies when she analyses Miller's discussions of Sigmund Freud: 'Miller's primary interest in Freud', Blinder writes, was 'as a case-study for what alternatives man constructs when faced with a world gone mad'.<sup>790</sup> Blinder goes on to quote Miller on Freud in 'Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere': 'He created a fiction ... Which helped, not to adjust him to the world, but to adjust the world to his own imaginings'.<sup>791</sup>

In his brash and brazen mission statement to write the world's 'last book', Miller fits Frank Kermode's description of later modernist artists. As mentioned in my introduction to this chapter, Kermode believed that writers like Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and Norman Mailer lacked 'a skepticism and a refined traditionalism [that had] held in check what threatened to be a bad case of literary primitivism' amongst their early modernist predecessors. Ironically, however, Miller's refusal to engage

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<sup>789</sup> *Plexus*, p. 455.

<sup>790</sup> Blinder, *Sexual Aesthetics*, p. 53

<sup>791</sup> Miller, 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere', pp. 168-69. Quoted in Blinder. *Sexual Aesthetics*, p. 53.

intellectually with eschatological influences works as its own check on his potential for the worst excesses of 'literary primitivism'. Where Pound stitches diffuse and often highly suspect theories together to prove his own intuited hunches about the world, Miller feeds off the language of these writers, expressing his own essential ethical and aesthetical truths through the writing out of his experience. His methods necessitate the discovery and revelation of the 'primitivism' and absurdity the eschatological mode carries with it; indeed, his methods also require that he admit his own inconsistencies and hypocrisies.

This is in part what Leslie Fielder refers to in his 1969 essay 'Cross the Border/Close the Gap':

We have ... entered quite another time, apocalyptic, anti-rational, blatantly romantic and sentimental; an age dedicated to misology and prophetic irresponsibility; one distrustful of self-protective irony and too-great self-awareness.<sup>792</sup>

Miller preempts the changes Fielder identifies; changes which go some way towards explaining the early categorizations of *Cancer* as a niche homage to a bygone literary age. Orwell, Rahv and Wilson all recognize the everyday, defeated and apocalyptic tropes of Joyce, Pound and Eliot's narrative modes in *Cancer*, even as Orwell, we saw, judges Miller to be a harbinger of a new, inevitably bleak – perhaps even Spenglerian - future. Yet Miller represents more than both of these categories. His work 'crosses the gap' between the early modernists and the later 'more schismatic' practitioners that would come after the Second World War. In effect, he playfully incorporates the aesthetics of Pound's early modernism to announce a new, hyperbolic and un-academic approach that effectively consigns the earlier movement to history. Indeed, as early as 1934, Miller uses Poundian modernist tropes and ideas to suggest the death of that movement; a death that was officially announced by Fielder – amongst others - thirty years later:

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<sup>792</sup> Leslie Fiedler, 'Cross the Border – Close the Gap', *Playboy*, 16 (December 1969), p. 24. Quoted in Leon Lewis, *Henry Miller- the Major Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), p. 10.

The kind of literature which had arrogated to itself the name modern (with the presumption that it represented the ultimate advance in sensibility and form, that beyond it newness was not possible), and whose moment of triumph lasted from the point just before world war i until just after world war ii, is *dead*, i.e., belongs to history not actuality. In the field of the novel, this means that the age of Proust, Mann, and Joyce is over; just as in verse that of T.S. Eliot, Paul Valery, Montale and Seferis is done with.<sup>793</sup>

Going back to Richard Sheppard's comment – quoted in the introduction to this Chapter - about the concealed and marginalized presence of 'complex, interrelated and deeply disturbing manifestations of modernity' in certain modernist texts, we may then begin to rethink Miller.<sup>794</sup> While it is possible to think about the eschatological, indeed the culturally morphological and culturally essentialist currents in Miller as expressions of a Poundian conservatism, they are dramatically at odds with his main moral purposes.<sup>795</sup> If Pound's celebration of Miller suggests his detection of these currents and his recognition that they were using some of the same coordinates, what he categorically fails to understand is Miller's refusal to incorporate any influence, indeed express any feeling or thought without the implicit warning that it might all in fact be 'horseshit'.<sup>796</sup>

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<sup>793</sup> Leslie Fiedler 'Cross the border – Close the Gap' in *The Collected Essays of Leslie Fiedler* (New York: Stein and Day, 1971), pp. 403-516, p. 461.

<sup>794</sup> Sheppard, *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism*, p. 7.

<sup>795</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>796</sup> *Hamlet: The Michael Fraenkel – Henry Miller Correspondence*, p. 56

## Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have attempted to define a set of radical aesthetics that are common to Pound and Miller and are based on complex and contradictory impulses; most crucially towards acknowledgement of the multiplicity of existence and the instinctive and often aggressive defense of particular, inarguably pure aesthetic and political values. As a result, works by both writers embody fundamental and fascinating oppositions between the socially progressive and retrogressive, the creative and destructive, and - in terms of the politics of art - the avant and the rear gardes. Pound's triumphant championing of Miller facilitates – amongst other things – an understanding of the tension in the latter's work between the desire for perceptual and emotional liberation and problematically essentialist attitudes towards what constitutes individual and group identity. These inherent contradictions – easily and often misunderstood as signs of moral hypocrisy or intellectual deficiency – are crystalized in the context of Pound's early twentieth century reaction against abstraction, propaganda and sentimentality in art and politics. Indeed, Miller's articulation of these contradictions is the basis for Pound's expression of moral solidarity in his review of *Cancer*. It is also the main reason for his immediately surprising and intriguing promotion of Miller, in 1935, as the future of Anglo-American letters.

In the process of analyzing these crossovers, it has become equally clear that Pound and Miller represent two very different versions of the avant-garde. The slippage between a retrograde, conservative and at times fascist mode of rhetoric and its opposite – faith in the progressive, democratizing force of art – is a hallmark of the inter-war period in which their aesthetics coincide, but Miller's alertness to that dialectic differentiates him from Pound in crucial ways. This, I have argued, places Miller in a unique intermediary position between Pound's version of high Anglo-American modernism in the 1910s, 20s and 30s and post-Second World War avant-garde writing. In my attempt to make sense of Pound's praise for Miller, I have shown that the two writers' shared many of the same anxieties about the state of art and society in the first thirty years of the twentieth century – connected to wider

anxieties that permeated the artistic milieu of Europe at this time – and held a common belief in the capacity of literature to improve both. While they identified many of the same aesthetic evils, however, they understood literature’s role in very different ways. Where Miller focused on the writer’s responsibility to liberate him or her self and the reader through emotionally and perceptually truthful expression, Pound promoted the precise delineation of subjective experience as a way to realign and reaffirm essential metaphysical relations in the objective world.

In Miller, Pound sees exactly what he wants from a writer at this time – namely, a sensitivity to the complex, contradictory emotions and competing aesthetic impressions that make up subjective experience and a willingness to use this as a way of countering ‘the poppy-cock ... emotional slither [and] rhetorical din’ of Victorian and Edwardian literature.<sup>797</sup> Consequently, they share a pluralistic and democratic vision of honest artistic creation that rejects aesthetic and ideological oversimplification. Intriguingly, their desire for a world that acknowledges what Pound calls the ‘full gamut of values’ and Miller the ‘multiplicity of things’ is also what causes both writers to veer into morally absolutist as well as nationally, racially and sexually essentialist territory.<sup>798</sup> Both end up in paradoxical positions of absolute tolerance and intolerance because they believe in a creative and moral purity that arises when the individual confronts the chaos of his or her subjective experience, acknowledging the collapse of beautiful into ugly, right into wrong, obscene into appropriate.

Crucially, Pound’s unlikely interest in Miller makes it easier to understand the discrepancy between the latter’s optimistic faith in the universal capacity for spiritual, psychological and social progress and his assertions of gender, national, racial and vocational polarities. As we saw in Section 2.4, ‘Attraction of the Blemish: sexual aesthetics in Pound and Miller’, included in his vision of a world in which individuals free themselves of societal restrictions is instinctive reaction against

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<sup>797</sup> ‘A Retrospect’, p. 3. See my p. 29.

<sup>798</sup> ‘Review of *Tropic of Cancer*’, p. 87; *Cancer*, p. 138.

Claude, the prostitute who has 'no right to be sitting there like a lady'.<sup>799</sup> A highly sensitive writer whose dedication to exploring the complexity of human experience led him towards suspect totalitarian beliefs, Pound illuminates a related paradox at the center of Miller's moral code: that he was motivated by radically humanistic and universalist impulses - towards unconditional tolerance and compassion, individual self-autonomy and sexual and spiritual freedom - but expressed and explored these using deliberately brutal and ostensibly anti-humanist language. By reading between the lines of Pound's apparently straightforward misappropriation, it has been possible to make sense of the retrograde elements in Miller's work in relation to, rather than isolation from, his wider moral project.

Through Pound and his literary ally T.E. Hulme, it has also been possible to put this paradox in the context of deeper political problems surrounding Henri Bergson's influence on literature in the early twentieth century. Like Hulme, Miller embodied a Bergsonian skepticism about the effectiveness of the intellect to capture subjective experience while at the same time using Bergson's philosophy to predict 'the break up' of 'the humanist attitude' and its replacement by a set of 'absolute values'.<sup>800</sup> In Miller, as in Hulme and Pound, fascination with the multiplicity of experience results in the contradictory philosophical idea that an indisputable truth exists beyond the limiting structures of intellectual and ideological reasoning. Pound and Miller regard adherence to doctrine - religious, political, social and artistic - as dangerously inhibitive of individual and collective life, positing instinctive taste or 'gout' (in Pound's terminology) as a more truthful and virtuous alternative. Consequently they are similarly intolerant of people - and especially artists - who are unfaithful to their physical instincts, the principal driving force of existence. As we have seen, for Pound 'belief is a cramp, a paralysis, an atrophy of the mind in certain positions'; for Miller man is 'debauched by [cerebral] ideas' but liberated by 'live ideas, kidney ideas, intestinal ideas'.<sup>801</sup>

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<sup>799</sup> *Cancer*, p. 53. See my p. 194.

<sup>800</sup> Hulme, 'Modern Art and its Philosophy', p. 78. See my p. 127.

<sup>801</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Axiomata' 1921, p. 260; *Cancer*, p. 243. See my pp. 172, 282.

In this sense, Miller inherits Pound's Anglo-American modernist desire to return from the uncertain, intellectual periphery of modernity to an ahistorical, instinctively felt moral center. According to both writers' aesthetics, a person's moral judgments and a writer's creative output are purer when they originate physically rather than intellectually or ideologically. They disagree fundamentally, however, on the level of control the artist should apply to these instincts. Where Pound invokes Confucius to recommend fashioning 'harmonious lines' from 'the inarticulate heart's tone', Miller performatively channels that inarticulacy for creative and existentially liberating ends.<sup>802</sup> Pound's faith in a unique symmetry to be rendered from conflicting thoughts and feelings therefore runs counter to Miller's belief in a natural sense of order that arises from the acceptance and unmitigated expression of internal chaos. For Miller, chaos constitutes a person's indisputable truth and is therefore the basis of honest work - the foundations for the 'human document', as he calls *Cancer*, rather than 'literature' or 'a book in the ordinary sense of the word'.<sup>803</sup> Indeed, reading Bergson's *Creative Evolution* Miller feels validated in his dismissal of the need to create order from chaos: 'I have no fear or illusions about disorder ... The labyrinth is my happy hunting ground and the deeper I burrow into the maze the more oriented I become'.<sup>804</sup>

Thus Miller uses Bergson to identify apparent inarticulacy as a hallmark of truthfulness – the artist's true self expressed in the torrent of his or her thoughts before any attempt is made to sort through and express them with precision. He is categorically uninterested in what Marshall McLuhan describes as Pound's 'seeking out of those qualities and techniques in a writer which lead to the economical rendering of complex actualities'.<sup>805</sup> In line with this, Miller describes and desires a perceptual revolution through which he is emotionally and creatively unburdened by confessing everything that is contradictory, ugly and therefore deemed unacceptable, even inexpressible. This is the philosophical grounding for Miller's

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<sup>802</sup> 'Ta Hsio: The Great Digest', p. 31.

<sup>803</sup> 'Un Être Étoilique', p. 288. See my p. 141.

<sup>804</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 201

<sup>805</sup> Marshall McLuhan, p. 170. See my p. 31.

problematic and often shockingly brutal impulses – addressed in Chapter Two of this study - towards debasement, prejudice and cruelty. His attacks on the derelict Max in *Max and the White Phagocytes* and the cuckolded playwright Sylvester in *Cancer* are deliberate attempts to get the ‘poison out of [his] system’, cleansing himself of hatred, neurosis and violence so that he can achieve a state of mind that is ‘sane’ and serves both as the material and the optimum conditions for the production of pure, uncontrived art.<sup>806</sup>

Crucially, and again in line with anti-humanist, conservative interpretations of Bergson, this examination and acceptance of the self and the world in their ‘hideous’, imperfect forms, also leads Miller to oppose the positive humanist tenet that social and cultural systems should be organized on the basis of equality and inherent goodness.<sup>807</sup> A great deal of his confessional writing embodies a cynicism – rife in the works of Pound and T.E. Hulme in the interwar period - about the possibility of political and social progress within the restrictive parameters of the contemporary humanistic paradigm. This is the aggressive narcissism Miller exhibits when he tells Sylvester to ‘fuck your pluralistic universe’ and ‘fuck you two ways of looking at things’.<sup>808</sup> Pound and Miller share an enemy, not only in sentimentality but the idealism of groups and ‘-isms’; established literary and political coteries they accuse of propagating unrealistic myths about humanity.<sup>809</sup> Accordingly, both writers sanctify the role of the especial individual in opposition to the dilutive mediocrity of the collective. In their different ways, they dismiss social, political universalism and philosophical pluralism as dangerous detractions from the sovereign truth the artist finds in subjective experience. Just as Pound sees art as a means of asserting ‘that all men do not desire the same things’, Miller rails against the dilution of ‘personal,

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<sup>806</sup> Henry Miller, ‘My Aims and Intentions,’ p. 155. See my p. 187.

<sup>807</sup> *Cancer*, p. 102. See my p. 172.

<sup>808</sup> *Cancer*, p. 65. See my p. 107.

<sup>809</sup> ‘An Interview with Henry Miller’, in *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, p. 151. See my p. 17.



religious' individual freedom by collectively imposed concepts of 'liberty and justice ... idle words signifying nobody knows precisely what.'<sup>810</sup>

However, Miller and Pound's readings of society, culture, politics and economics are also fundamentally affected by their disagreements over the use of the 'chaos' and disharmony of subjective experience.<sup>811</sup> Pound's interpretation of *Cancer's* moral universe as 'eminently fair' and constructed on a 'hierarchy of values' is possible because Miller takes up many of Pound's early modernistic aesthetic and ethical positions – particularly in regard to artistic mediocrity and collective bourgeois codes of behavior - but it overlooks his deeper humanistic purposes and solutions.<sup>812</sup> Miller might fiercely and systematically refuse the moral logic of social consciousness and day-to-day compassion but he strives to replace these with a utopian scheme in which people have 'no feeling of class, caste, color or country ... no need of possessions, no use for money, no archaic prejudices about the sanctity of the home or marriage'.<sup>813</sup> He might couch his solutions in totalising and intolerant terms but he is nonetheless zealously, compassionately opposed to the political and social injustice wrought on the poorest and most marginalized by modern capitalist economics – a 'crazy system of exploitation' built on a 'pitiful, ignominious spiritual shambles'.<sup>814</sup> While demonstrating his faith in certain universal values, Miller adhered to the humanist worldview that T.E. Hulme attacked, consistently agreeing with the notion that 'life is the source and measure of all values, and that man is fundamentally good'.<sup>815</sup>

By confessing to chaotic, brutal feelings, to feelings of 'inexpressible rebellion' against particular individuals and groups, Miller intended to expose and – as Lawrence Durrell puts it – 'do away with' a more pernicious form of brutality that

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<sup>810</sup> 'An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere', p. 153. See my p. 154.

<sup>811</sup> *Cancer*, p. 10

<sup>812</sup> 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer*', p. 88.

<sup>813</sup> Henry Miller, 'Of Art and the Future', p. 232. See my p. 130.

<sup>814</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>815</sup> Hulme, 'A Notebook,' p. 444. See my p. 104, 130.

exists beneath the impulse towards collectively sanctioned sentiment.<sup>816</sup> Where Pound is attracted to Miller's rejection of standardized moral positions on poverty and sex, he fails to understand that this is part of the latter's project to rethink reductive binary approaches to suffering in a way that acknowledges its true disorder and complexity.

In this sense Miller succeed, where Pound fails, in his professed aim to find a purer aesthetic that moves literature beyond abstract and generalizing ideology. Partly in accordance with the radical social theories of Georges Bataille, Miller makes himself the narcissistic, monstrous expounder of unacceptable ideas on human misery in order to break through the barrier between observer and sufferer, arriving at a more truthful means of communion and communication. Pound's own anti-ideological rhetoric, however, is contradicted by the expressly totalitarian ideological purpose behind his narcissism. He decrees that artists should be sensitive to the infinite array of internal and external 'tonalities' in the world, following Henry James and James Joyce's examples in representing 'variegations of dialect' of thoughts and values.<sup>817</sup> Indeed, he presents this approach as a vital means of promoting understanding and 'communication' between people, a way of truthfully asserting difference to repair the obfuscating damage caused by universalist and humanist idealism, yet his theories on writing inevitably collapse into partisan fascist conjecture that condemns difference as venal and contaminated.<sup>818</sup> Pound's aesthetic aim to counter 'the smearing of difference' and produce art that accounts for intellectual, ideological, religious and racial nuance ultimately produces a political system of thought that categorizes essential characteristics as virtuous or evil.<sup>819</sup>

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<sup>816</sup> *Cancer*, p. 53. See my p. 190; Durrell quoted in Woolf, 'Beyond Ideology: Kate Millet and the Case for Henry Miller', p. 176. See my p. 125.

<sup>817</sup> 'Joyce', p. 412; 'Ulysses', p. 404. See my Section 1.2.

<sup>818</sup> 'Henry James', p. 298.

<sup>819</sup> It is worth re-stressing that these are conclusions about Pound's non-fiction prose writing, not his poems. In his poetry the desire for subtle aesthetic discrimination is also undermined by the tendency towards totalising language but the collapse of one into the other is less extreme. An analysis of Pound's creative output in relation to Miller's deserves more space than a study of this nature can afford.

As we saw in Chapter One, this is part of a deeper, extreme and irresolvable contradiction that undermines Pound's work as a literary essayist. Having begun his career promoting the 'natural colors and shapes' in poems by William Carlos Williams and H.D, who refused the 'emotional slither' and 'rhetorical din' of the status quo, he gradually developed a perspective that excluded all incompatible values or aesthetical nuances. He wanted art and literature to reflect the complexity of existence by operating from its own sacred sphere, separate from reductive ideological jingoism and cliché, but he also wanted it to reflect the wider political and social landscape in equally reductive ways. His opposition to the dangers of mixing ideology and art therefore had its own virulently ideological agenda built into it.

Miller's esoteric response to the turning on of 'the brutal tap' – as Wyndham Lewis described the trend towards anti-humanism in the inter-war period – and his arrival at a contrasting and profoundly compassionate approach to the individual and society, designates him a unique and elusive position in the lineage of twentieth century avant-garde writing.<sup>820</sup> He is correctly identified by Blinder, Jahshan and Mayne as an inheritor of a mode of European avant-garde aesthetics aimed at what Richard Sheppard calls 'the reintegration of art and life, with "life" understood as the everyday mass culture, the material world and the energies of the body'.<sup>821</sup> As shown throughout this study, Miller's hopes that *Cancer* should represent 'a human document' rather than a piece of 'literature', indeed his admiration for artists like Artaud Rimbaud who 'brought art closer to life', demonstrate his place within a Romantic tradition self-consciously focused on the primacy of the artist's subjective experience and imagination.<sup>822</sup> Yet the anxiety he shares with Pound about the abstractness of modern values in art and society and his desire for an ethically fixed center to remedy this situates him within a contradictorily high modernist literary mode. While attempting to embody 'mass culture, the material world and the energies of the body' in his art, Miller also explores an aesthetic based on the longing

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<sup>820</sup> Lewis, *The Caliph's Design*, p. 268. See my p. 105.

<sup>821</sup> Richard Sheppard, *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism*

<sup>822</sup> *Time of the Assassins*, p. 6

to escape the ideological and aesthetical restrictions of modern life; an aesthetic, Peter Bürger claims, that is common to Pound, Joyce and Eliot and that 'separates art from life and beauty from sentimentality.'<sup>823</sup>

As we have seen, Miller's drive towards true 'beauty' as opposed to 'sentimentality', is motivated by his struggle to make sense of his position as an alienated individual and artist, but is also predicated on the instinct to marginalize ways of thinking and behaving that he considers undesirable. Despite the fundamental differences, delineated in Chapter Three, between Miller and Pound's approaches to the essentialism of Oswald Spengler and Leo Frobenius' cultural morphological projects, it is important to understand that the rhetoric Miller uses in his quest for self-liberation also reveals a totalising, elitist condemnation of the ignorant, unenlightened majority; the masses who, unable to recognize the role of instinct and appetite in their lives, end up privileging intellectual and moral obedience to exteriorly imposed standards of behavior over their own stomachic, sexual and spiritual fulfillment. In this sense, there is a narrowing of the gap implied by Miller's quest for his own 'perceptual' apocalyptic dawn and Pound's invocation of a 'literal', 'historical' revolution. Miller's attack on sentimentality and repressive bourgeois taboos thus combines forward-thinking compassion with a deep-seated intolerance for the automatons who reject his path towards self-liberation.

In this context, the hyperbole and parody that Sarah Garland recognizes in Miller's infatuation with Spengler and cyclical world meta-history in fact hides a genuine, problematic and Poundian urge to rid humanity of veniality and ignorance. Despite his awareness that his and Fraenkel's 'Festival of Death' is farcical, the project is also permeated by a very real sense of what Miller – when comparing the 'ladylike' prostitute Claude to the 'whore from the cradle' Germaine – calls an 'inexpressible rebellion' against false, self-denying individuals (52). Indeed, in place of the limited conception of sympathy critiqued in *Max and the White Phagocytes*, he envisions an improved approach to suffering that is founded on the Bergsonian premise of

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<sup>823</sup> Peter Bürger quoted by Richard Sheppard in *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), p. 6.

existence as infinitely various and interpenetrating, with contrasting elements that are all equally justifiable, but he presents this in terms of a fanatical *religious conversion*:

You live there for a while, at the apex of clarity, and you see things with the naked eye and everything looks good, *is* good. It's almost like getting religion – only so much better, so much more sane.<sup>824</sup>

By reading Miller's radical approach to subjective experience, sexuality and the role of the artist in the light of Pound's transition from literary critic to social-economic conspiracy theorist, I have attempted to show the importance of absolutism, brutality and intolerance to an aesthetic and ideological project whose principal aim was creative and existential freedom. It is not possible to understand Miller's works of the 1930s, I argue, without an appreciation of two widely neglected factors: firstly that his battle against the standard progressive moral thinking of his day was itself inspired by a profound socially conscious moral purposes; second that his own perceptual revolution was informed and facilitated, not simply jeopardized by apparently incongruous retrogressive impulses. In twentieth-century readings, Miller's essentialism was too often seen as either dominant at the expense of his more complex purposes – in the cases of Kate Millet's 1969 feminist attack and Salman Rushdie's 'Outside the Whale' (1984) - or conspicuous by its convenient absence – in the cases of Lawrence Durrell, Karl Shapiro, Wallace Fowlie and Charles Glicksberg, who concentrated on his sexual and spiritual enlightenment without fully testing his 'poison'.<sup>825</sup>

In line with twenty-first-century studies by Caroline Blinder, James Decker and Sarah Garland I have attempted to understand the violence of Miller's language as a strategic element in his metaphysical, perceptual and aesthetic revolution rather than a potential blight on his character and artistic reputation. Following Blinder and Garland's example I have rejected the tendency to condemn or venerate Miller on grounds of political correctness, and analysed Miller's course attacks on marginalized, vulnerable people – homeless men, female sex workers, and wage-

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<sup>824</sup> *Letters to Anaïs Nin*, p. 159, May 24<sup>th</sup> 1933. See my pp. 81, 176.

<sup>825</sup> Miller, 'My Aims and Intentions,' p. 155

slaves within a corporate news organization - in the context of suspect anti-ideological currents in the artistic milieu of pre-Second World War Europe War.

As Garland, Katy Masuga, Paul Jahshan and Jane Nelson recognize, this dissonance between progressive ideals and callous language produces paradoxically pleasurable and painful feelings in the reader that are vital to Miller's project. Indeed, Miller designs his texts so that complicity with his positive theories on human potential is mingled with rapprochement for the pettiness of his prejudices. Moreover, enjoying the attractive elements of his narrative personality, the serious reader must confront his or her complicity in Miller's unpleasant, contradictorily callous dismissals of people based on visceral repulsion rather than reasonable humane evaluations. As Anaïs Nin suggested, the dichotomy of unconditional tolerance and harsh brutality in Miller's work forces the reader to confess the unacceptable and seemingly inexpressible impulses he or she ordinarily suppresses to make way for socially acceptable modes of kindness and compassion.<sup>826</sup> In other words, Miller makes himself equally venerable and reproachable to force his reader to explore the same contradictions in him or herself.

These deliberately induced tensions are an indication of what Ihab Hassan, in *The Literature of Silence*, calls 'the dualism' at the heart of Miller's aesthetic.<sup>827</sup> The marriage of 'Prophecy and Obscenity' Hassan writes, 'gives [Miller's] work its particular energy and tang', again pointing to the fact that *Cancer* uses eschatology for aesthetic purposes, in contrast to Pound's essays which incorporate it as part of a serious political manifesto.<sup>828</sup> In place of the singular, forceful violence of Pound's prophetic pronouncements, Miller provocatively emphasizes the sexual in ways he knows will be dismissed as obscene to pave the way for existential, artistic and social enlightenment. He believes there is a fundamental truth that we must locate in an embodied form in order to attain happiness, locating a means for progress in radical irreverence and imagining a brave new world that will come into being if people can

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<sup>826</sup> *The Diary of Anaïs Nin*, p. 15. Nin, we remember, writes 'his own savage self-confessions demand the same of others.' See my p. 121.

<sup>827</sup> Hassan, p. 52.

<sup>828</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

only accept that the impulses that contemporary morality designates as taboo are in fact natural and vital functions of existence.

Though Pound and Miller are equally invested in a search for alternative virtuous ways of living and creating art – indeed, equally opposed to the ‘stupidity’ of reductive moral squeamishness and panic – Miller paradoxically luxuriates in linguistic, behavioral and sexual impurity in order to attain and communicate a state of purity, whereas Pound offers a straightforward attack on ‘anti-flesh’ doctrines. Pound views asceticism as another poisonously dogmatic influence on the natural relations between thought and thing since it denies the role of physical sensation in the intellectual process – ‘after asceticism, that is anti-flesh’ he writes, ‘we get the asceticism that is anti-intelligence, that praises stupidity as ‘simplicity’, the cult of *naivete*’.<sup>829</sup> Pound is against ‘idiotic asceticism and a belief that the body is evil’ a ‘masochistic and hell-breeding belief [that] is always accompanied by bad and niggled sculpture’.<sup>830</sup> While both ridicule the puerility of condemning sensual enjoyment as naughty or wicked, Miller follows the Marquis de Sade in celebrating vice as an integral counterpoint to virtue, rejoicing in the liberating sensations induced by performing pleasurable acts that are considered sinful. Crucially, Pound’s own invectives against puritanical ideas about sex are couched in terms that suggest a return to a pure, classical model whereby physical sensation becomes a means of transcending earthly reality. As we saw in his poem ‘Salutation the Third’, where he does engage deliberately in a form of linguistic vice - through profanities such as ‘you slut-bellied obstructionists’ - it is for serious, aggressive and punitive purposes; a means of decorating the hell to which he consigns his enemies, rather than Miller’s playful manipulation of the reader’s desires and sensibilities.<sup>831</sup>

Thus, for all his statements on the correspondence between beauty and disgust and the limited morality of the ascetics, Pound’s prophecies are grounded in a desire to identify and punish genuine vice, demonstrating a form of earnest dogmatism that is anathema to Miller. As we have seen, Pound’s is a narrative viewpoint that

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<sup>829</sup> ‘Cavalcanti’, p. 154. See my p. 186.

<sup>830</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150. See my p. 186.

<sup>831</sup> Ezra Pound, ‘Salutation the Third’, p. 45. See my p. 112.

contradicts itself but does not consciously shift ground or 'play' with the reader like Miller's: his condemnations do not have Miller's sharp, sour-sweet 'tang'; his predictions are 'the word'; he believes the current world process can be replaced with another, purer 'Paideuma'. For Pound, the artist must use language succinctly to realign relations in the world according to a dogmatic notion of purity. This purity is both linguistic - relating to the purpose of communication itself - and political - having to do with economics and how the world is put together in a societal sense. For Miller, on the other hand, communication is invariably tainted by politics and internal schisms, a situation that the individual must accept rather than fight if he or she is to achieve any amount of personal happiness. While Miller believes – as he puts it in *Max and the White Phagocytes* - that the world is 'terrifying but good', Pound believes the terror can be made good if the right alignments are put in place.<sup>832</sup>

As a consequence, Pound's treatment of his enemies is loaded with clearly targeted hatred in a way that Miller's is expressly not. Pound identifies specific enemies as the irresponsible guardians of language, idea and morality, characterizing them as unforgivable oppressors: Lloyd George's cabinet members who compose ill-defined and 'sloppy' laws and policies;<sup>833</sup> the journalists who feed the public false information according to the vested interests of businesses; amateurish authors who represent weak imitations of human emotion in their books. He presents these as the malignantly self-interested or stupid upholders of an infected system and condemns the faceless general public – who blindly and without complaint, accept distorted and muddled laws, policies, newspaper and literary reports – as their unwitting but nonetheless culpable foot soldiers. By contrast, Miller's aggression is aimed at the bourgeois codes that keep the self-autonomous individual down. He is withering about mediocre people who adhere to harmful ideas on art, sex and suffering but less personal and specific in his attacks on his oppressors.

Miller imbued high modernism's portentous and aggressive narcissism with a self-awareness that protected it against accusations of totalitarian excess, thus making

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<sup>832</sup> 'Max', p. 132.

<sup>833</sup> 'Joyce', p. 415. See my p. 235.



him acceptable to post-Second World War avant-garde critics and readers in a way that Pound was expressly not. If Miller was banned in the 1930s, 40s and 50s for his graphic language, he was treated as an important forerunner of later modernisms precisely because he balanced his zealotry with the obscenity and irreverence that Hassan flags up. As Sydney Finkelstein puts it in his 1967 study, 'Alienation and Rebellion to Nowhere,' Miller strikes a note that would resound in the 1960s, and not only in literature but also in painting and music, as in the derisive joking of "pop art" and "indeterminate" music.<sup>834</sup> Indeed, writing in 1963 Kingsley Widmer places Miller's apocalyptic posturing about *Cancer* being 'the last book' in the context of a dominant American artistic attitude after 1945: 'the artist sacrifices his future to the impact of the moment, and the underlying thought is, if the world has no future, why worry about the future of an art work?'.<sup>835</sup> In this way, Pound is profoundly hindered by his ideology because he refuses – where Miller embraces - the playful and parodic. His radicalized rhetoric falls behind Miller's in the history of twentieth century avant-garde literature chiefly because of his programmatic anti-Semitism and affiliation with Mussolini's fascism but also because of its outmodedness against a backdrop of a new kind of rebellion, partly exemplified by Miller.

If Miller fits Comens' category of a 'visionary' apocalyptic writer, interested in a 'perceptual' revolution rather than an actual one, he also preempts what Hassan describes as the dominant apocalyptic aesthetic after 1944 – that of the immediate and simultaneous destruction and re-creation of the world that the individual perceives:

Apocalypse is *now*! The term recovers its original sense, which is literally revelation; vision penetrates the perplexities of the moment to the heart of light. In current parlance ... the alteration of consciousness .... Traces of it may be recognized in the psychedelic experiments of Alpert and Leary, in the poetry of Ginsberg, in the Reichian view of orgasm advertised by Mailer ... The alteration of consciousness is also the constant hope of Miller throughout his apocalyptic harangues.<sup>836</sup>

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<sup>834</sup> Sydney Finkelstein, 'Alienation and Rebellion to Nowhere,' in *Existentialism and Alienation in American Literature* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), p. 122.

<sup>835</sup> Kingsley Widmer, in *Three Decades of Criticism*, ed. by Mitchell, pp. 113-120, p. 100.

<sup>836</sup> Hassan, p. 7. See my p. 282.

*Tropic of Cancer*'s relationship with the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s has also been suggested by various critics, including Widmer who writes that 'in the post-World War Two decades, he served as somewhat of a cynosure for the bohemian and the marginal, an old hero for such writers as the later bohemian Beats.'<sup>837</sup> Most recently James Decker and Miller's biographer's Jay Martin and Mary Dearborn have described the reverence shown him by key Beat and post-Beat figures like Kerouac and Kenneth Rexroth. Nonetheless, there remains room for further studies in this area. In particular, Miller's influence on Norman Mailer's Kierkegaardian 'philosophy of Hip' merits greater attention than it has so far received.

Miller experimented with the high tones of eschatology not only to draw attention to the futility of literature in that age but of art that predicts 'the end'. He envisions Spengler's style and mission as perversely and gloriously self-defeating: 'When I think of Spengler and of his terrible pronouncements, I thank god that style, style in the grand manner is done for'.<sup>838</sup> Although he is paraphrasing Spengler's suggestions about the exhaustion of artistic possibilities in early twentieth century Europe, he also implies that *The Decline of the West* gives him the absurd impression of a 'grand ... style' cannibalizing itself. As Leon Lewis writes, explaining Hassan's angle on Miller, the latter strives for 'a form of negative transcendence of an absurd universe.'<sup>839</sup>

Of course, Pound cannot see the possibility that 'grand style' might be exhausted any more than he can understand that the theories he sets his stall by will be proved disastrously incorrect by history and the evolution of ideas. Because he is completely submerged in his own idiosyncratic 'grand style', he suffers from a crucial blind spot to the outlandishness and irrationality of his positions. If we can, like Hassan, invoke 'the common parlance' of the '60's critics and writers who venerated Miller, Pound is not hip to the absurdities and ironies inherent in his eschatological, cultural morphological and economic world vision.

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<sup>837</sup> Widmer, p. 100.

<sup>838</sup> *Cancer*, p. 14.

<sup>839</sup> Leon Lewis, *Henry Miller- The Major Writings*, p. 11.

While Miller is aware of the delirious conditions that cultivate his eschatological language and ideas, acknowledging and playing on the fact that his writing presents him as a 'monomaniac', Pound occupies an altogether different ideological and psychological territory in this respect.<sup>840</sup> Miller does not delude himself that his prophetic pronouncements are the answer to the world's social, economic and political problems, lampooning Pound and Fraenkel for their self-importance and arrogance and admitting that he has become entangled in their web of 'impossible theories', but Pound is singularly unable to entertain the notion that his arguments might contain flaws.<sup>841</sup>

Nonetheless, Miller's willingness to admit the absurdity of his response to this 'absurd universe' also turns out to be a default mode that cannot entirely mask his more dangerous thoughts on social, economic and political issues. Miller's animosity towards bourgeois capitalist values incorporates elements of Pound's 'use-value' desire for increased monetary circulation alongside a willfully irrational emphasis on excess and prodigality. The link between Miller and Bataille is therefore telling in more ways than one. Not only does it invoke a landscape in which the radical voice, rather than coming from a right wing perspective, is married to a more anthropological reading of the human psyche, it allows for a critique of western economics that surpasses partisan politics. Moreover, Miller is unexpectedly adamant about the need to return certain societal relations – jilted by a corrupt moral and monetary system – to their original and natural positions. Thus Miller's metaphysical revolt questions the adequacy of notions like 'usefulness' and 'productivity', suggesting consciously manic and excessive solutions to an insolvably manic situation, but at the same time engages in an ostensibly logical critique of utilitarianism and capitalism.

Miller's slippage between radically anarchic and conservative impulses is related to an equally significant dichotomy between the twin desires to consolidate and lose control. As we have seen, his progressive use of Poundian brutality to get beyond

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<sup>840</sup> *Capricorn*, p. 263.

<sup>841</sup> *Cancer*, p. 186. See my p. 196.

false and weak sentiment is fundamentally motivated by the desire to break away from controlled systems of intellect, ideology and morality, but it also protects certain absolute positions in all three spheres. In this way, Miller exemplifies the anti-humanist as well as humanist possibilities in Bergson's philosophy, since his rebellion against ideology in favour of intuition is intended to advance an understanding of the self and an honest and inclusive approach to humanity even as it leads to an aggressive, totalising and dogmatic rhetoric.

Despite Miller's attraction to anarchy, Pound's enthusiastic exclamation that 'the sphericity of the planets presides' in *Tropic of Cancer* indicates a firm belief in a natural and indisputable cosmological order that permeates Miller's project. In this light, the use of brutality to pave the way for compassion appears partly disingenuous. Indeed, in Miller's scheme of human relations, a healthy cosmological order is preserved when people abide by certain 'natural' ways of being. Though he is expressly parodic in his use of 'the death theme' and even the racial stereotypes of his Jewish friends, Miller's search for a pre-modern 'fulcrum' also nonetheless leads him towards potentially ambiguous but suspect essentialist positions. Miller might mock Pound's attempt to coopt him for his 'crazy social credit theories' but his presentation of himself as a truth-telling, innovative writer depends on the Poundian supposition that he is bravely asserting indisputable differences. Indeed, he envisions resilience and 'incurable health' as the special preserve of people who are able to understand their essential qualities, a theory that inevitably implies weakness and impurity in those who deny those qualities.<sup>842</sup>

This anomaly returns us, finally, to the chief paradox at the heart of both their aesthetics; namely, that anarchic liberation serves as the starting point for Miller and Pound's quests to create pure, harmonious and virtuous art. Miller's objection to the application of structure to existence cannot ultimately be sustained, meaning that he inevitably ends up applying his own restrictive parameters to the complex disorder he is attempting to embrace and represent. Though he is more successful than Pound at getting beyond the limits of false ethical positions, he cannot resist the urge to

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<sup>842</sup> *Cancer*, p. 52. See my pp. 155-61.

seize control of that chaos for his own ideological purposes. Miller's crucial aim, to embody the subjective self in a work of art – in all its chaotic, glorious and 'hideous' contradiction – is invariably compromised by the force of his feelings against standardized 'beauty', 'ideas' and modernity. In attempting to break the spell of sentimentality and ethical idealism and to express the complexities of individual experience unmediated by convention, he in fact falls under his own sometimes equally reductive spell. It is an irony that is well illustrated by Anaïs Nin's recollection of the reaction Miller's wife June had on reading the manuscript of *Cancer*: 'He says I live in delusions, but it is he, it is he who does not see me, or anyone, as I am, as they are. He makes everything ugly.'<sup>843</sup>

In line with this, the anarchic starting point has often alienated readers from both Pound and Miller's aims. The quest for a truthful, uncontrived mode of literary expression is evident and articulated throughout their works but it is frequently overlooked because of the rhetorical gestures both writers succumb to. Like Miller's search for a more honest approach to suffering, for redefinitions of sympathy and empathy, Pound's desire for art that represents subjective experience honestly, naturally and 'without moralizing' gets lost in the aggressive fervor of his language and politics. By conflating aesthetics with politics and delivering his message about art sonorously and portentously, indeed by the frenzy and essentialism of his attacks on the 'such half master slime as the weakminded' Virginia Woolf or the slushy abstract writings of 'Wells-Shaw-Bennett ersatz', Pound distracts his readers from the basic search for serious and truth-telling works of literature.<sup>844</sup>

Henry Miller - categorized for so long as amoral and apolitical or unwittingly counter-revolutionary - in fact produced a narrative voice that is profoundly moral and political. Incongruously but undeniably, the universe he creates in his semi-autobiographical novels of the 1930s correlates with Ezra Pound's esoteric vision of the world at that time, functioning within often deliriously yet distinctly defined aesthetic and moral boundaries. Miller's syncretic appropriation of early modernist

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<sup>843</sup> *The Diary of Anaïs Nin*, p. 34. See my p. 192.

<sup>844</sup> Gottesman, 'Introduction', *Critical Essays*, ed. by Gottesman, p. ix. See my p. 52.

tropes and ideas demonstrates both his strong attraction and irreverent circumspection to them, making him fascinatingly reflective of the anxieties and ambiguities that permeated Anglo-American avant-garde literature in the inter-war period. Significantly, my study has followed Richard Sheppard's definition of modernism 'not as the "artistic emanations" of a "sensitivity" but as a complex range of responses to a complex set of problems by a variety of people in different but related historical situations'. With this as my basis, 'it [has been] possible to see deep, non-reductive affinities between artists and intellectuals ... who have little in common on the surface.'<sup>845</sup>

Pound's affinity with Miller highlights the importance of brutalizing, retrograde elements to the latter's aesthetics but it also illuminates some of the progressive elements of Pound's aesthetic that are obscured by his essentialist rhetoric and fascist politics. While it is clear that they represent different versions of the avant-garde in their attitudes towards the anarchic emotional and creative forces that both believe drive human existence, these differences are by no means stable and it is precisely this instability that represents the value of Miller to present day studies of the twentieth-century avant-garde. In his struggle to liberate himself perceptually, to use writing to record and further his creative and existential resurrection, Miller is fascinatingly indicative of the slippage between avant-garde aesthetics and radically conservative language that was a hallmark of inter-war modernist writing. As importantly, Pound's surprising use of Miller to demonstrate a new kind of modernism sheds light on the Poundian origins of elements in Miller's writing that mark him out as a forerunner of later, post-Second World War avant-garde aesthetics.

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<sup>845</sup> Sheppard, p. 7.

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