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- 1 The last two decades have proven relatively quiet concerning biographical advancements on American author Henry Miller. Such being the case, Arthur Hoyle's recent publication serves as a welcome addition in reviving interest in Miller. Biographies on Miller published in the 1980s and 90s have provided select additional material to Jay Martin's 1978 definitive work, and after these publications a long spell between biographies has ensued. As Hoyle notes, Miller still languishes behind other prominent writers of the 20th Century in canonical recognition and at the same time is almost completely ignored in the university classroom. With this new publication, Hoyle differentiates his work from prior biographies by adding an essential periodization through an in-depth foray into Miller's 20 years in Big Sur, California. *The Unknown Henry Miller* juxtaposes the private realm—both the emotional and the business-minded—of the author, while correspondingly enmeshing illustrative passages from Miller's published texts. Additionally, extensive archival research and fresh interviews with Miller's two children and former wife, Lepska, have helped elucidate the daily routine within the Big Sur environs. The picture conveyed through Hoyle's biography reveals a man far more complex than merely a controversial author; instead, Hoyle uncovers the inner workings of Miller's attempt to achieve the human ideals on which he had spent so many decades writing.

- 2 The first three chapters of Author Hoyle's *The Unknown Henry Miller* move rapidly through Miller's early life, purveying the background in which he established his literary voice and then revealing the currents that eventually brought him to the cliffs of Big Sur at the age of 53. The pace of these early chapters glosses over the importance of Miller's younger years and how the events taking place would later impact both life choices as well as the novels he published; as Hoyle notes, there is no particular need to revisit material covered in the prior biographies and published letters. Hoyle thereby avoids the pitfall of redundancy. These initial chapters highlight Miller's relationships with individuals who would help to carry him into and through the Big Sur years and who would also put him in contact with collectors and interested financial supporters. From unfruitful writing efforts in New York City to groundbreaking prose composed in Paris with *Tropic of Cancer* (1932), Miller's writing style grew to display "his deep antagonism toward his American roots," Hoyle observes, while demonstrating "his complete psychological disengagement from the cultural reality around him in order to explore, through language, his inner self" (15-16). These early desires to transcend both environmental as well as traditional (and thereby restricted) formats of literature would follow Miller throughout his artistic journey.

Miller spent roughly 10 years living in Paris with only a few short trips back to the United States before returning and journeying across his home country. With the dawning of the Second World War, he was forced out of Paris and was invited by Lawrence Durrell, a lifelong friend, to visit Greece. Hoyle states that it is in Greece, with its majestic "external landscape" and Miller's intellectual connection with the great thinker, George Katsimbali—the character behind *The Colossus of Maroussi* (1941)—that Miller developed his desire for a more natural environment, moving away from identifying himself as a self-professed man of the city (33). After his Grecian escapade, he returned to the United States in 1940; yet it would still be nearly four years of transient life around America before he settled in Big Sur. Those four years of struggle, Hoyle relates, found Miller dependent on friends such as Caresse Crosby and Anaïs Nin for financial support. Hoyle's extensive research begins to show itself at this point as numerous smaller details, often passed over by prior biographers, are explored, giving more attention to the individuals who influenced Miller's trajectory to literary fame. Hoyle's early chapters also explore how Miller was able to utilize his extensive correspondences, with friends in Hollywood, for instance, in order to secure lodgings and small writing jobs. By the end of 1943, Miller was ready to settle somewhere and get to work on his magnum opus, *The Rosy Crucifixion*.

- 4 The first year in Big Sur was a busy period for Miller in terms of his efforts to expand his American audience. He chose to locate himself in a remote pocket of the Western world, quite diverse from the Parisian hive of activity that flourished around the Villa Seurat, his home while

in France. By penning thousands of letters to his intellectual friends, Miller sustained his literary environment. The transition to Big Sur provided Miller the isolation for which he seemed to be longing, as he related to Anais Nin: “I am completely out of the world there. The stores are 35 miles away. I have no car. Depend on the mailman to bring food—mail twice a week. Precisely what I want” (72). Part of Miller’s daily life meant trying to get his work published; Hoyle provides extensive details on the publication activities between Miller and his acolytes, including James Laughlin of New Directions. Hoyle documents these early days on the California coast, tracing the publication-related friendships with Bern Porter, George Leite, and Judson Crews, avenues through which Miller saw a broad spectrum of his work published. Many of these ventures, however, especially those under Bern Porter’s name, proved to be counterproductive in terms of generating a profit. Porter, Leite and Crews would help Miller to reach out to a new group of readers (82), but, as in the case of Leite—who would have received negative treatment in *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch* if the sections had not been deleted (220)—the ventures tended to end bitterly. Hoyle is adept at traversing the often scattered publication routes that Miller pursued, and the fourth and fifth chapters examine the growing reputation Miller acquired.

The ease with which Hoyle’s biographic narrative flows is due to two techniques: first, he establishes the milieu surrounding Miller’s daily life, which is reinforced through quoting letters and integrating archive material; second, Hoyle draws from Miller’s narratives, citing liberally from the texts that were composed at Big Sur. Indeed, a number of powerful essay collections and semi-autobiographical novels were penned during the Big Sur period, and Hoyle is able to draw from the narratives a representation of Miller’s current perspective on life, even though, in some instances, the narratives were set 30 years before. In other instances, Hoyle surveys less-known pieces in *Sunday After the War* (1944) and *Murder the Murderer* (1944), a small pamphlet on the human responsibility to deny war, thereby incorporating Miller’s perspective on the state of modern man. In doing so, we are able to correlate Miller’s new isolated living environment—harboring psychological implications for Miller—with the various polemics in the articles, collections and pamphlets being published, or republished (through American sources).

As Hoyle relates, however, Miller was isolated in Big Sur in a way that would affect his emotional state; regardless of his literary efforts, Miller lacked female companionship. In Chapter 6, Hoyle begins elaborating on the more personal side of Miller: the unknown, seemingly emotionally dependent man. Up to this point, Hoyle’s attention has been predominantly given over to the writing and subsequent publication tactics Miller had pursued. Hoyle now moves to describe Miller’s new life with his wife, Janina Martha Lepska, whom he had met in New York while visiting his mother and furthering his publication avenues. With Lepska, Miller had two children, Valentine

and Tony. Raising children and living on the rural coastline proved a monumental task for Lepska, with Miller intently busy publishing various essays. During this period, Miller continued to struggle to make ends meet, with sales of his various books, such as *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945), failing to sell well due to poor reviews. Newly married, Miller, for a time, seemed content in Big Sur, remarking to Wallace Fowlie in 1945 that “‘it does begin to seem as tho’ I’d found ‘home’ at last’” (qtd. in Hoyle 121). Chapter 6 recounts the years from 1944 to the beginning of 1947, and Hoyle goes to great lengths to provide details for readers seeking a more meticulous account of Miller’s private life. What becomes clear in Hoyle’s depiction of the multifarious events taking place in the Miller household is that life for Lepska was strenuous, to say the least, and Miller was oblivious to the needs of his wife.

- 7 Chapter 7 covers one of the most famous visitors into Miller’s Big Sur life: Conrad Moricand, Miller’s friend from Paris who was in desperate need of assistance. Moricand moved to Big Sur at Miller’s request in December 1947; through a series of misfortunes that followed him from Europe, he came to stand as Miller’s most memorable friend-turned-enemy. Hoyle notes that a good portion of this incident is a summation of Miller’s own retelling of the Moricand fiasco in *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch* (1955), selectively reprinted in *A Devil in Paradise* (1956), as well as assimilating Karl Orend’s *The Brotherhood of Fools & Simpletons* (2005), which delves into the depths of the Miller/Moricand relationship and in which we learn that the latter considered the former an “artless ingénue” (Orend 208). Hoyle supplements information concerning the incident through interviews with Lepska, who provided fresh insight, even pinpointing what Miller considered to be Moricand’s ultimate transgression, the mistreatment of Miller’s beloved daughter, Valentine (135).
- 8 Perhaps Miller’s greatest literary achievement during the Big Sur stage was the start and completion of *The Rosy Crucifixion* trilogy. Published over the course of several years in Paris and Denmark (1949, 1952, 1959), the work chronicles his life in New York City, nearly 30 years before. In Chapter 8, Hoyle devotes several pages to examining the first work, *Sexus*, by exploring sections of the book that address what many Americans at the time of publication felt Miller represented: a pornographer. In dealing with these passages, Hoyle lays the background for Miller’s major preoccupation in the latter half of the 1950s with the legal battles he had in demonstrating the literary merit of his works in an attempt to declassify them as pornography. Hoyle moves through the narratives of *The Rosy Crucifixion* and then explains various measures the publishers employed to convince judges of the value of Miller’s work. He also evinces interesting correlations between *Sexus* and the now unhappy marriage stemming from the years of Miller’s neglect of Lepska. By 1952, the Millers had divorced, escaping

from what Miller had referred to as a “‘bad situation’” (177), but leaving Miller despondent over the breakup of his family.

- 9 In Chapter 9, covering the years 1952-58, Hoyle relates that Miller remarried for the fourth time to Eve McClure; reestablished connections with his mother, sister and his second wife June Mansfield; completed *The Rosy Crucifixion* and, as Hoyle observes, “had gone mainstream” (212). In order to avoid rehashing prior material, Hoyle only includes specific details about Miller’s geographical movements and personal interactions. Two important publications also appeared wherein Miller was the sole focus of the work. Hoyle extensively examines these books, including Alfred Perlès’s *My Friend Henry Miller* (1956) and Sydney Omarr’s *Henry Miller, His World of Urania* (1959), and discusses their public impact for Miller. Specifically, Perlès’s memoir negatively portrayed some of the individuals in Miller’s past, not the least of which was Michael Fraenkel, who had corresponded with Miller for the *Hamlet* letters and whose friendship had now completely collapsed (198). Hoyle moves, at times painstakingly, through each of these years, drawing from a variety of letters to add vitality to what could easily turn into a list of events unfolding during this period.
- 10 The next two chapters of the biography convey a sense of an aging Miller, a man growing tired of legal battles and financial struggles. Chapter 10 follows Miller through return trips to Europe for extensive travel. Before leaving for Europe in 1960, Miller published *Nexus*, the final volume of *The Rosy Crucifixion*; in the novel, a much younger Miller is looking to embark for Paris, with, as he writes in *Nexus*, envisioning Europe’s “long chain of history that binds humanity together” (245). The older Miller, Hoyle conveys, was less keen on revisiting Europe, instead setting higher hopes on Japan and the rest of Asia. Upon the conclusion of *The Rosy Crucifixion*, Miller completed no large publications at Big Sur; therefore, Hoyle’s focus in the rest of Chapter 10 and Chapter 11 detail elements of the legal battle for *Tropic of Cancer* concerning the pornographic nature of the novel as well as the subsequent rise to fame that, in some cases, plagued the writer. Extensive details delineate the avenues through which Miller acquired his newfound wealth; Hoyle also uses significant space to explain how Miller dispensed with his money, as he provided several beneficiaries with monthly checks for various reasons. For instance, Miller sent over \$60,000 to an ex-lover to help fund a floundering publication house. As Hoyle approaches the end of Miller’s time in Big Sur before moving to Pacific Palisades in 1961, he concludes with the drastic and irrevocable changes brought on by Miller’s new status as a celebrity.
- 11 Hoyle’s extensive research has also included efforts to determine Miller’s current status in America. Supplemental material included in the appendix includes Hoyle’s personal report on a rather interesting email survey concerning the teaching of Henry Miller in universities across the United States. The outcome of the survey reveals that out of

196 universities contacted, only 28 had recently taught select works by Miller (325). These results strongly suggest that Miller is still considered an outlying American author and not “teachable” within the context of the university classroom. Hoyle’s intention for including this survey reveals his discontent concerning Miller’s status in America. Indeed, quoting from Karl Orend’s 2004 article examining Miller in the university classroom, Hoyle highlights Orend’s judgment that Miller is considered a European writer rather than an American writer (328), perhaps since Europeans generally overlooked the pornographic elements in his writing. Hoyle disagrees, unsurprisingly, and justifiably so; Hoyle has demonstrated in this new biography that Miller was indeed very American, and very much rooted in the American literary tradition of challenging the status quo—both in literature and life.

- 12 There are two drawbacks to Hoyle’s biography that need mentioning. The first and most significant is that lack of any useful notes documenting Hoyle’s sources.¹ This absence hinders the biography from being a resource for future research by Miller scholars. While the index is sufficient for referencing sections in the book itself, Hoyle’s objection that Miller has not received due attention in academic settings may be in part due to the fact that little scholarly research is being generated on Miller when compared with those authors placed securely within the American canon. Therefore, I view that lack of detailed notes in this biography to be a missed opportunity for Hoyle to bolster access and awareness of Miller-related research material. A second concern that stands out is the rather abrupt ending to the biographical focus on Miller. Hoyle emphasizes the concentration on Miller in *Big Sur*, reducing the last 16 years of Miller’s life to a mere three paragraphs, which conveys an impression that Miller’s involvement and connection with *Big Sur* also dramatically ceased.
- 13 Hoyle’s focus on Miller in *Big Sur* reveals an emotional as well as business side of Miller that has been overshadowed in prior biographical efforts. He makes several new connections in Miller’s private life, arguing that many decisions Miller made were directly tied to his desire for companionship and emotional support from those in his life. Additionally, Hoyle goes to great lengths to describe Miller’s side of being an author and trying to publish in an environment hostile to his style of literary expression. *The Unknown Henry Miller* examines both the impact of life in *Big Sur* on Miller as well as the journey through which Miller went from a little known author returning from exile in Paris to the point of celebrity and becoming a household name in the United States. Miller disliked biographers, as Jay Martin made clear through his tribulations of writing about Miller while the author was still living (Martin); yet, Hoyle’s presentation of Miller is derived from a thorough understanding of the daily events in Miller’s *Big Sur* life and gives readers a fresh perspective on—to appropriate one of Miller’s own titles—the plight of one creative artist in the United States.

- 14 1. Hoyle is by no means the only Miller biographer to have avoided extensive notes. Jay Martin's monumental Miller biography also fails to demark sources, to a more erroneous degree than Hoyle.

15 **Works Cited**

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