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"The Triumph of the Individual Over Art":

A Comparison of the Works of Henry Miller
and Jack Kerouac

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I. Introduction

Henry Miller and Jack Kerouac had much in common with one another. One of their most unfortunate common traits was their lack of acceptance by the literary establishment. Both of them had unfair one-dimensional reputations which largely have remained intact, years after their deaths. For example, Miller was always seen as a writer of "dirty books," his early masterpieces such as Tropic of Cancer being regarded by many as little more than the literary equivalent of a raunchy stag film.

Kerouac was viewed by many critics, and much of the public, as nothing more than a hard-drinking, hell-raising hoodlum transcribing the "hep" aphorisms of his "beatnik" friends. Even when Kerouac attempted to publicly explain his ideas about the religious aspects of the Beat Generation, centering on his connection of the word "beat" with the notion of beatitude, people were generally unwilling to listen, choosing instead to dwell on, and exploit, the more lurid aspects of his work.

So, unfortunately, instead of their novels being required reading in American literature courses and being included in some

of the more commonly-used anthologies, the works of both men have been largely relegated to the fringes of American literature, much like the writings of Walt Whitman (a favorite of both) before he was "rediscovered" in the twentieth century.

Fortunately, in recent years, some astute critics such as Norman Mailer have publicly recognized the importance of much of their work. (Interestingly, Mailer wrote in one of his essays on Miller, "Nor is there bound to be a work titled 'Henry Miller and The Beat Generation'." Hopefully, I am helping to rectify this situation.)

There is no doubt that Miller and Kerouac were familiar with each other's work, to a certain extent. Miller wrote a very positive introduction for Kerouac's 1958 novel The Subterraneans, and according to biographer Gerald Nicosia, Kerouac's novel The Dharma Bums "elicited a laudatory letter" from Miller (Memory Babe 579).

Kerouac reciprocated by mentioning Miller in some of his later novels. In a short piece entitled "The Vanishing American Hobo," Kerouac, describing the callousness most Americans feel toward hobos, wrote, "Henry Miller would allow the hobos to swim in his swimming pool" (Lonesome Traveler 175). Also, in "Big Trip to Europe," Kerouac described how he used an article mentioning both himself and Miller (probably Kenneth Rexroth's February 1957 article in The Nation) to prove that he was indeed a famous writer, so that he would not be jailed as a vagrant while in England (Lonesome Traveler 168).

In Big Sur, Kerouac even described how he had meant to visit Miller at one time, but instead got drunk and missed the appointment. Here he wrote:

already feeling awful guilt about Henry Miller anyway, we've made an appointment with him about a week ago and instead of showing up at his friend's house in Santa Cruz we're all drunk at ten calling long distance and poor Henry just said 'Well I'm sorry I don't get to meet you Jack but I'm an old man and at ten o'clock it's time for me to go to bed . . . ' (Big Sur 185).

Clearly, much of Kerouac's guilt comes from the fact that he feels Miller was "disappointed in a way because he's gone to the trouble of writing the preface to one of my books" (Big Sur 185).

It is a shame that the two never got to meet and talk, because it is obvious from some of Miller's writings that he understood what Kerouac and his generation were going through, and showed sympathy for their struggles. In an essay entitled "Letter to Lafayette," Miller described a couple of young American writers that he befriended and then concluded:

The young men of America are growing desperate; they know they haven't a chance anymore. It's not simply that the war is drawing closer each day, it's that war or no war things have to come to a violent end . . . Most of the young men of talent whom I have met in this country give one the impression of being somewhat demented. Why shouldn't they? They are living amidst spiritual gorillas . . . God, if I were a young man today, if I were faced with a world such as we have created, I would blow my brains out (Nightmare 136-137).

Though Miller's comments contain a certain amount of exaggeration, he seems to have captured rather well the sense of frustration and ennui which drove Kerouac and the other Beat writers to the fringes of society, forcing them to become, at

best, marginal citizens, much like Miller himself.

In Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch, Miller described the "utterly disillusioned" members of the Beat Generation perfectly when he wrote:

These young men, usually in their late twenties or early thirties, are now roaming about in our midst like anonymous messengers from another planet. By force of example, by reason of their thoroughgoing nonconformity and, shall I say, 'nonresistance,' they are proving themselves a more potent, stimulating force than the most eloquent and vociferous of recognized artists (Hieronymus Bosch 17-18).

Strangely, these statements about the young men Miller encountered seem to apply to himself as well. Miller was always a nonconformist, and as much of a modern Thoreau as Kerouac or any of the other Beat Generation writers.

II. Theories of Writing

Henry Miller and Jack Kerouac were two of the most fascinating literary figures of the twentieth century. This is partially because of the "confessional" style of writing that both of them made use of. Instead of making up fictional plot lines and characters out of whole cloth like many "traditional" American writers, Miller and Kerouac both tended to write about their own experiences and acquaintances, though of course with a certain amount of fictionalization, which was necessary not only to produce more coherent works but also to avoid libel suits. Kerouac even went so far as to condemn outright the writing of pure fiction. In the opening pages of his 1966 "novel" (quotation marks supplied by Kerouac himself) Satori in Paris, Kerouac wrote, "made-up stories and romances about what would happen IF are for children and adult cretins who are afraid to read themselves in a book just as they might be afraid to look in the mirror when they're sick or injured or hungover or insane" (Satori 10). However, the fact is that by 1966, Kerouac's acute alcoholism had caused his creative powers to diminish to the point that he probably would have been unable to write any outstanding fiction, so his statement has a certain "sour grapes" ring to it.

Miller expressed a similar idea in a much more polite fashion in Black Spring. In the section entitled "The Fourteenth Ward," which contains Miller's nostalgic reminiscences of his childhood in Brooklyn, he wrote, "In the street you learn what human beings really are; otherwise, or afterwards, you invent them. What is not in the open street is false, derived, that is to say, literature" (Black Spring 3). If the "open street" can be seen as a metaphor for a person's actual life experiences, then Miller was saying that any writings not based on true experiences are essentially "false," and for Miller, truth was of the most importance. In The World of Sex, he wrote, "I have always thought that there is only one way, the way of truth, leading not to salvation but to enlightenment" (World of Sex 59).

The essence of Miller's writing style, indeed his statement of purpose, is contained in a passage of his classic Tropic of Cancer, where he was superficially writing about Matisse and Proust but was really writing about himself. Here, he wrote:

Standing on the threshold of the world which Matisse had created I re-experienced the power of that revelation which had permitted Proust to so deform the picture of life that only those who, like himself, are sensible to the alchemy of sound and sense, are capable of transforming the negative reality of life into the significant outlines of art. Only those who can admit the light into their gizzards can translate what is there in the heart (Cancer 146).

Clearly, by fictionalizing to a certain extent the "negative reality" of his own experiences, Miller was able to create many "substantial and significant" works. Over twenty years later,

Miller again expressed similar sentiments when he wrote, "To make anything truly significant one has to poetize it" (Hieronimus Bosch 322). For Miller, it appears that experience was ultimately of little importance unless it could be successfully translated into art. He expressed the idea of art as a *raison d'être* most eloquently when he wrote, "To make living itself an art, that is the goal" (Hieronimus Bosch 400).

Unfortunately, Kerouac's writings often reveal a man for whom writing about experiences eventually became more important than having new ones. Kerouac always had a reputation as a "mama's boy" who would frequently flee from his friends and their big-city "beatnik" lifestyle in order to return to the protective confines of his mother's home, where he did much of his writing. In his novel The Subterraneans, Kerouac described how his relationship with "Mardou Fox" (a.k.a. Alene Lee) deteriorated because of this problem. He wrote, "I thought secretly, in my mind I had privately superseded her importance with the importance of my writing work . . . I had secretly told myself: 'My work's more important than Mardou'" (Subterraneans 64). Later, in Big Sur, it is shown that Cody Pomeray (a.k.a. Neal Cassady), Kerouac's best friend and personal hero, lived his life in exactly the opposite way, which seemed to make Kerouac jealous. He wrote of Cody, "I can see from glancing at him that becoming a writer holds no interest for him because life is so holy for him there's no need to do anything but live it, writing's just an afterthought or a scratch anyway at the

surface" (Big Sur 141).

At any rate, Kerouac accumulated a wealth of experiences in his short life, as is evidenced by the fact that he was able to write sixteen autobiographical novels, in addition to books of poetry and a number of short pieces. His first published novel was The Town and the City, published in 1950 under the name John Kerouac. Apparently, he was not happy with the way that the novel had been written. In The Subterraneans, he referred to it as "the first novel, which has guts but has a dreary prose style to it when all's said and done" (Subterraneans 73). (Paradoxically, on page 9 he wrote that he was "talented as never since" when writing The Town and the City.) Shortly after his first novel was published, Kerouac developed his own unique writing style, which he dubbed "spontaneous prose," a style which he generally adhered to for the rest of his life.

In 1957, Kerouac outlined his ideas about writing in a short manifesto entitled "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose." One of his most interesting ideas was that there should be no revisions. This is expressed in the statement, "Never afterthink to 'improve' or defray impressions, as, the best writing is always the most painful personal wrung-out tossed from cradle warm protective mind" (Beat Reader 58). Also, more to the point, he wrote, "no revisions (except obvious rational mistakes, such as names or calculated insertions in act of not writing but inserting)" (Beat Reader 57-58). Interestingly, Miller had written something very similar almost twenty-five years earlier in Tropic

of Cancer. Here, he wrote, "I have made a silent compact with myself not to change a line of what I write . . . It is the triumph of the individual over art" (Cancer 10). Also, Black Spring contains the telling line, "I detest the eraser" (Black Spring 55). However, Kerouac and Miller both betrayed this idea frequently. For example, in the book My Life and Times by Henry Miller, some pages of the original manuscript of Tropic of Cancer are shown, and it can be seen that many of its lines were significantly rewritten. In the late 1950's, Miller also completely rewrote two of his earlier works, The World of Sex and Quiet Days in Clichy. As for Kerouac, it is known that some of his most famous novels, particularly On the Road and The Dharma Bums, were extensively rewritten and revised.

Kerouac also wrote in his essay on spontaneous prose, "If possible write 'without consciousness' in semitrance (as Yeats' later 'trance writing') allowing subconscious to admit in own uninhibited interesting necessary and so 'modern' language what conscious art would censor" (Beat Reader 58). This calls for total honesty, revealing everything to the reader, regardless of whether or not what one is writing is in "good taste." Again, Miller expressed roughly the same idea in Tropic of Cancer when he wrote, "There is only one thing which interests me vitally now, and that is the recording of all that which is omitted in books. Nobody, so far as I can see, is making use of those elements in the air which give direction and motivation to our lives" (Cancer 10). Presumably, one of the major omissions that

Miller was referring to was the absence of an honest portrayal of sexuality in novels, which is something that Miller felt very strongly about. In Black Spring he wrote:

I want a world where the vagina is represented by a crude, honest slit, a world that has feeling for bone and contour, for raw, primary colors, a world that has fear and respect for its animal origins. I'm sick of looking at cunts all tickled up, disguised, deformed, idealized . . . I want Madagascan funeral poles, with animal upon animal and at the top Adam and Eve, and Eve with a crude, honest slit between the legs. I want hermaphrodites who are real hermaphrodites, and not make-believes walking around with an atrophied penis or a dried-up cunt (Black Spring 43-44).

Elsewhere in the book, Miller wrote metaphorically about the refreshing nature of such honesty when he noted that the "ubiquitous urinal" in France is comforting because it lets one know "that he is in the midst of a people who admit to the necessity of peeing now and then and who know also that to piss one has to use a pisser and that if it is not done publicly it will be done privately and that it is no more incongruous to piss in the street than underground where some old derelict can watch you to see that you commit no nuisance" (Black Spring 38).

Another of Kerouac's "essentials" is his statement, "Begin not from preconceived idea of what to say about image but from jewel center of interest in subject of image at moment of writing, and write outwards swimming in a sea of language to peripheral release and exhaustion" (Beat Reader 58). This is something which Kerouac did very often and very well. For instance, at the beginning of his novel Visions of Cody, instead of beginning immediately with the story of Cody's life, he

describes his surroundings, which happen to be the inside of a cafe. Eventually, these details bring to mind certain things about Cody, and it gives Kerouac an interesting way to lead in to his story. Kerouac also wrote in The Subterraneans, "the details are the life of it, I insist, say everything on your mind, don't hold it back, don't analyze or anything as you go along" (Subterraneans 58).

It would be interesting to know if Kerouac had read Miller's Black Spring before writing his "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose." There is a section of Black Spring entitled "Jabberwhorl Cronstadt" which contains two lines that uncannily echo Kerouac's statement about the "center of interest." These lines, which Miller put in the mouth of Cronstadt, read, "A poem is a web which the poet spins out of his own body according to a logarithmic calculus of his own divination. It's always right, because the poet starts from the center and works outward" (Black Spring 119). Unfortunately, it is impossible to know how much influence, if any, Miller's works had on Kerouac, or to know which of Miller's books Kerouac had read at any given time. In a 1974 interview, John Tytell asked Kerouac's friend, fellow writer John Clellon Holmes, "Do you know whether he read Henry Miller, or even expressed any attitudes towards Miller's work?" to which Holmes replied, "Frankly, no" (Kerouac and the Beats 156).

Miller's Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch also contains some passages about writing that are similar to some of Kerouac's ideas about spontaneity. For example, in one passage

Miller describes how he told an aspiring young writer to simply write like he talks. Miller tells the young man, "A man who has the verbal gift -- and you certainly have it -- shouldn't be stymied by a piece of white paper . . . pretend that it's an ear. Talk to it! Talk into it! With your fingers, of course" (Hieronymus Bosch 55).

Another aspect of writing that the two seemed to agree on is what Kerouac referred to as "scoping" in his essay. Here, Kerouac wrote, "Blow as deep as you want -- write as deeply, fish as far down as you want, satisfy yourself first, then reader cannot fail to receive telepathic shock and meaning-excitement by same laws operating in his own human mind" (Beat Reader 57). Similarly, Miller wrote that "belief in one's self" is "that one indispensable thing" that no writer can do without (Hieronymus Bosch 60). He also wrote in the same book, "One should not be concerned whether a book turn out good or bad. One should write, think of nothing else. Write, write, write . . . " (Hieronymus Bosch 62).

However, there is also a certain amount of arrogance in some of these statements. For instance, Kerouac's statement that the reader "cannot fail to receive telepathic shock" is rather presumptuous. If the writing is poorly done, as some of Kerouac's spontaneous prose definitely was, then it is very easy for the reader to "fail" to get anything out of it or even have any idea what Kerouac's intentions were. (A good example is a section of Visions of Cody entitled "Joan Rawshanks in the Fog," which is

probably the nadir of Kerouac's spontaneous prose.

Further examples of arrogance occur in Kerouac's other brief list of thirty "essentials" entitled "Belief & Technique for Modern Prose." The twenty-ninth essential reads, "You're a genius all the time," and the final one reads, "Writer-Director of Earthly movies Sponsored & Angeled in Heaven" (Beat Reader 59). These statements make it seem as though Kerouac's prose style was supposed to preclude any sort of criticism. Apparently, since Kerouac was always a "Genius" and his writings had divine sponsorship, it has to be the reader's fault if he fails to recognize its significance. But, on the other hand, if, as Miller says, a writer must always have belief in himself (and his work), then Kerouac's statements show an admirable level of self-confidence.

An example of Miller's arrogance (or remarkable self-assurance) occurs in the section of Black Spring entitled "A Saturday Afternoon." Here, he wrote, "Don't worry about errors when you're writing. The biographers will explain all errors" (Black Spring 34). A similar statement appears later in "The Angel Is My Watermark!" Miller describes his notebook by writing, "Some of the lines I cannot decipher any more myself -- my biographers will take care of them" (Black Spring 51). These are remarkable statements to be coming from someone who at that point had published only one novel, Tropic of Cancer. It appears that even at this early date, Miller realized his ultimate importance as a writer. Kerouac expressed similar sentiments in his

essay "The Vanishing American Hobo" where he wrote, "I knew someday my literary efforts would be rewarded by social protection" (Lonesome Traveler 173).

Tropic of Cancer, on the other hand, begins with a rather humble statement from Miller, which seems to be an acknowledgment of his limitations as a writer. Here he wrote, "I am going to sing for you, a bit off key perhaps, but I will sing . . . I wish that I could sing better, more melodiously, but then perhaps you would never have consented to listen to me" (Cancer 2). However, towards the end of the novel, Miller puts forth the argument that the confused, over-elaborated writer is the best kind. Miller wrote:

I am tempted to say: 'Show me a man who over-elaborates and I will show you a great man! What is called their 'over-elaboration' is my meat: it is the sign of struggle, it is struggle itself with all the fibers clinging to it, the very aura and ambiance of the discordant spirit. And when you show me a man who expresses himself perfectly I will not say that he is great, but I will say that I am unattracted . . . I miss the cloying qualities (Cancer 228).

This passage can be seen as a sort of answer to readers who believe that Miller did not express himself as eloquently as he perhaps could (or should) have.

Both writers frequently contradicted themselves, sometimes espousing a particular idea in one book and then refuting it in the next. Miller even wrote some contradictory statements about whether or not there were any contradictory statements in his work. At one point in Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch, he wrote of an apparent contradiction, "Have I contra-

dicted myself? No! Both pictures are true, even though colored by the temperament of the writer. We are always in two worlds at once, and neither of them is the world of reality" (Hieronymus Bosch 144). However, later he admitted the possible presence of contradictions with the line, "Any contradictions which may have arisen thus far -- I know how touchy you are! -- can be ironed out on the piano clavier where there is absolutely no difference between sharps and flats, though some keys are white and the others black" (Hieronymus Bosch 234). Apparently, though, the responsibility for dealing with any of these contradictions rests squarely on the shoulders of the reader. In The World of Sex, Miller wrote, "Only a few discerning souls seem capable of reconciling the supposedly contradictory aspects of a being who has endeavoured to withhold no part of himself in his written work" (World of Sex 57).

Though Miller and Kerouac were both usually unable to express themselves "perfectly" and revelled in contradictions, both of them were definitely interesting writers. Neither of them were afraid to stand naked before their readers, letting all the details of their stories, even the unsavory ones, be revealed.

III. Miller and Kerouac: Misogynists? Sex Fiends?

Miller and Kerouac were both often accused of misogyny. Miller, in particular, dealt with this accusation frequently, especially from female critics. However, not all of his critics felt this way about him. In an essay entitled "Goodbye to Henry-san," Erica Jong wrote, "Sometimes I used to think that the critics who hated Henry were really suffering from nookie-envy. He seemed to spend so much time fucking, and fucking so guiltlessly! How could the perpetually guilty be anything but envious? But even in his fucking, he was literary."

Nonetheless, it is certainly understandable that his reputation as a misogynist existed. Many of Miller's works, especially Tropic of Cancer, contained many unflattering words about women. For example, in one passage he describes a whore by writing, "Perhaps it wasn't so pleasant to smell that boozy breath of hers . . . but the fire of it penetrated her, it glowed down there between her legs where women ought to glow" (Cancer 43). However, the low point of his descriptions of women occurs in Quiet Days in Clichy. Some of these descriptions in this novel are filled with some truly disgusting imagery. Describing a woman that the narrator has picked up, Miller wrote, "I already saw her dangling on the end of my cock, a fresh, hefty piece of

meat waiting to be cured and trimmed" (Clichy 17).

Later, when Miller is describing another woman who wants the narrator to speak romantically to her, he describes this kind of speech as "the language of love -- the glamorous, romantic, sentimental words which conceal the ugly, naked reality of the sexual assault" Apparently, Miller must have meant for this to serve as a sort of apology for his use of crude sexual imagery. The crudest image of them all shows up in the next paragraph where Miller wrote, "I placed my hand squarely over her cunt, which was steaming like manure under her dress" Then, after the narrator begins using the "language of love" with Christine, he says, "I rattled off more silly nonsense, all the while clutching her firmly, pushing my fingers into her gluey crack" (Clichy 143).

However, the problem with accusing Miller of misogyny is that it is unclear what relationship the narrators of his various novels have to Miller himself. Miller never made it really clear whether all of the ideas that he attributed to his narrators were necessarily his own ideas. But, at least in the case of Quiet Days in Clichy, there is very little doubt that Miller is the narrator, because in one scene he described the writing of Black Spring.

The narrators of Miller's novels are certainly not the only characters to show shallow attitudes towards women. For instance, in Tropic of Cancer, Van Norden gives what is probably the most misogynistic speech in the novel, when he says:

The thing is this -- they all look alike. When you look at them with their clothes on you imagine all sorts of things; you give them an individuality like, which they haven't got, of course. There's just a crack there between the legs and you get all steamed up about it . . . it's as though your penis did the thinking for you . . . You can get something out of a book, even a bad book . . . but a cunt, it's just sheer loss of time . . . " (Cancer 126-127).

Many of the male characters in Tropic of Cancer make the mistake of confusing living, breathing women with their "cunts." Speaking of one of his girlfriends, the narrator says at one point, "I could no more think of loving Germaine than I could think of loving a spider; and if I was faithful it was not to Germaine but to that bushy thing she carried between her legs" (Cancer 42). However, Miller later disavowed this idea in The World of Sex, where he wrote, "No matter how attached I became to a 'cunt', I was always more interested in the person who owned it. A cunt doesn't live a separate, independent existence. Nothing does. Everything is inter-related. Perhaps a cunt, smelly though it may be, is one of the prime symbols for the connection between all things" (World of Sex 76).

In the same book, Miller also wrote, "The Tropic of Cancer is a blood-soaked testament revealing the ravages of my struggle in the womb of death. The strong odour of sex which it purveys is really the aroma of birth; it is disagreeable or repulsive only to those who fail to recognize its significance" (World of Sex 61). Though this may seem ignorant or foolish to some, I believe that it is admirable. Miller obviously had a lot of faith in his work, so there is no reason why he should have to justify its content to anyone. The artist's job is to create

art; the task of interpretation is the responsibility of each individual audience member.

Kerouac also frequently wrote some unpleasant things about women. In The Subterraneans, the narrator, Kerouac surrogate Leo Percepied, seems to initiate his love affair with Mardou Fox, a black girl, more for novelty, shock effect and experience than anything else. About the early days of the relationship, the narrator says, "And in those days her love [meant] no more to me than that I had a nice convenient dog chasing after me" (Subterraneans 52-53).

At the end of the novel, when Percepied realizes that he is losing Mardou for good, he thinks to himself, "I should have paid more attention to the old junkey nevertheless, who said there's a lover on every corner -- they're all the same, boy, don't get hung-up on one." Then, when Mardou says to Percepied, "like, men have the essence in a woman, there's an essence," Percepied thinks to himself, "Yes . . . there's an essence, and that is your womb" (Subterraneans 110). Again, as in Miller's Tropic of Cancer, women are identified almost exclusively with their genitalia. However, at the beginning of the novel, Kerouac had his narrator (and perhaps himself) make the confession, "I am crudely malely sexual and cannot help myself and have lecherous and so on propensities as almost all my male readers no doubt are the same" (Subterraneans 3). This is obviously meant to serve as an apology in advance for any sexist language in the novel.

However, unlike Miller, Kerouac refused to reveal all of the

sexual details of his life. This is mentioned at the beginning of The Subterraneans, when the narrator (obviously Kerouac) says, "I cannot in this confession betray the innermosts, the thighs, what the thighs contain" (Subterraneans 17). Indeed, most of the details about the sexual nature of the narrator's relationship with Mardou are glossed over, but the narrator still manages at times to show the selfish nature of his sexuality. For instance, Percepiéd describes why he stopped performing cunnilingus on Mardou early in the relationship when he says:

Nor could it have been charming and helpful to her fears and anxieties to have me start out, at the outset of our romance, 'kissing her down between the stems' -- starting and then suddenly quitting, so later in an unguarded drinkingmoment she said, 'You suddenly stopped as tho I was -- ' and the reason I stopped being not in itself as significant as the reason I did it at all, to secure her greater sexual interest, which once tied on with a bow knot, I could dally out of" (Subterraneans 75).

If Kerouac was accurately describing here what happened in real life, then it shows a real lack of concern for Mardou and a tremendous amount of selfishness on his part. Here, Percepiéd/Kerouac is shown sexually manipulating a woman in order to make her love him.

More often in his novels, Keroauc showed women as manipulators and destroyers of mens' lives. In Big Sur, there is a mention of "women who regard themselves saviors of men simply stealing their substance because they think their swan-rich necks deserve it anyway (though for every swan-rich neck you lose there's another ten waiting, each one ready to lay for a lemon)" (Big Sur 166). However, if the narrator of Big Sur is the same

person as Sal Paradise in On the Road and Leo Perceived in The Subterraneans, then there is a strong element of hypocrisy in the above statement. Though Sal's relationship with Terry, the Mexican girl, and Leo's relationship with Mardou Fox both involve a certain amount of tenderness, they also involve a great deal of manipulation and "substance-stealing" on the part of the male figure, who always has the option (which he always uses) to return home to his mother. The most disturbing admission of Kerouac's desire to symbolically return to the womb occurs in The Subterraneans when Perceived says, "the thighs contain the essence . . . there I should stay and from there I came and'll eventually return" (Subterraneans 17). This is a prophetic statement as well, considering that Kerouac spent the last years of his life constantly at his mother's side. The scene is described in sad detail in Satori in Paris when Kerouac (both writer and narrator this time) says he is "thinking of my mother back home who has to clean the house while I yell insults at the T.V. from my rockingchair" (Satori 56).

However, although Kerouac considered his own mother the apotheosis of womanhood, he seemed to possess a startling contempt for most other mothers and wives, along with contempt for marriage itself. A typical description of an American woman occurs in Big Sur when Duluoz, the narrator, says, "Beside him sits wifey, the boss of America, wearing dark glasses and sneering, even if he wanted to pick me up or anybody up she wouldn't let him" (Big Sur 44). The insidious nature of

marriage and family life is shown again on the next page:

And if he thinks he wants to explore any of the silent secret roads of America it's no go, the lady in the sneering dark glasses has now become the navigator and sits there sneering over her previously printed blue-lined road map distributed by happy executives in neckties to the vacationists of America who would also wear neckties . . . but the vacation fashion is sports shirts, long visored hats, dark glasses, pressed slacks and baby's first shoes dipped in gold oil hanging from the dashboard (Big Sur 45).

This image of the women of America "whipping" their men into docile submission parallels Duluo's own situation towards the end of the novel when he has sexual intercourse with his girlfriend Billie in the superior position. Of this, he says, "she being on top indication of exactly how helpless and busted down I've become" (Big Sur 190). At this point in the novel, just as Duluo is about to lose his mind, his paranoid thoughts even have him convinced that Billie is trying to rob him of his potency. His disgust with sex is revealed when he says:

But there's an awful paranoiac element sometimes in orgasm that suddenly releases not sweet genteel sympathy but some token venom that splits up in the body -- I feel a great ghastly hatred of myself and everything, the empty feeling far from being the usual relief is now as tho I've been robbed of my spinal power right down the middle on purpose by a great witching force (Big Sur 191).

As an interesting aside, this statement seems to show the influence that William Burroughs had on Kerouac's writing. The business about the "spinal power" being robbed sounds like it could have come from The Naked Lunch or The Soft Machine.

However, Duluo seems to realize that his problems with women are largely his own fault and have a lot to do with his alcoholism. At one point, Duluo asks, "Can it be I'm

withholding from her something sacred just like she says, or am I just a fool who'll never learn to have a decent eternally minded relation with a woman and keep throwing that away for a song at a bottle?" (Big Sur 183). But, a few years later, in Satori in Paris, Kerouac gave another explanation for his relationship problems when he wrote, "Methinks women love me and then they realize I'm drunk for all the world and this makes them realize I can't concentrate on them alone, for long, makes them jealous, and I'm a fool in Love With God" (Satori 25). However, though this may sound nice, his novels usually showed his relationships breaking up more because of his love for his mother and for alcohol than because of his love for God.

The contempt for marriage and family life that Kerouac frequently exhibited is also present in some of Miller's early novels. For example, in Tropic of Cancer, there is a humorous, hallucinatory passage satirizing the sex life of Moldorf, one of his married friends. Here, Miller wrote:

Fanny carries him to bed and drops a little hot wax over his eyes. She puts rings around his navel and a thermometer up his ass. She places him and he quivers again. Suddenly he's dwindled, shrunk completely out of sight. She searches all over for him, in her intestines, everywhere. Something is tickling her -- she doesn't know where exactly (Cancer 32).

This is a very striking image of a man losing his independence once he gets married. Moldorf has not only been beaten down and "shrunk completely out of sight," he has actually become merely a part of his wife's body.

Even though Miller seemed to be contemptuous of marriage, he

still spent most of his adult life marrying, divorcing, and re-marrying. In Black Spring, he described the hopeless nature of his first marriage in a story called "The Tailor Shop." After describing how miserable his wife was while she was pregnant, he wrote, "Afterwards, when I had quieted her down a bit, when I realized that she really needed a kind word or two, I would tumble her on to the bed again and throw a good fuck into her. Blast me if she wasn't the finest piece of tail imaginable after these scenes of grief and anguish!" (Black Spring 90-91). Here, Miller is shown using sex as a substitute for real communication with his wife. It seems to be more of a reflex than anything else; whenever a real problem arises in Miller's early novels, the solution is simply to have sex.

Much of the sexual activity described in these novels seems very mechanical and without any real feeling or emotional involvement. Perhaps the line which best illustrates this idea occurs in Quiet Days in Clichy, where Miller wrote, "My cock stiffened instantly; it slid into her just as naturally as an engine going into a switch" (Clichy 23). In Tropic of Cancer, the sexual activities of Van Norden are shown in the same light. Describing how he watched Van Norden and one of his girlfriends having sex, the narrator says:

I am sitting on a chair behind him watching their movements with a cool, scientific detachment . . . It's like watching one of those crazy machines which throw the newspaper out, millions and billions and trillions of them with their meaningless headlines. The machine seems more sensible, crazy as it is, and more fascinating to watch, than the human beings and the events which produced it (Cancer 130).

Elsewhere, Van Norden describes the cold, mechanical nature of his sexuality in a similar way when he says, "Sometimes I'm amazed at myself, how quick I pull it off -- and how little it really means. I do it automatically like. Sometimes I'm not thinking about a woman at all, but suddenly I notice a woman looking at me and then, bango! it starts all over again" (Cancer 94). Van Norden's unfeeling, promiscuous sex is similar to that of Neal Cassady in Kerouac's novels, a man who will become sexually involved with almost anyone, male or female, at the drop of a hat.

In the novels of both Kerouac and Miller, the ideal world seems to be one where the male characters can have perfect, platonic relationships without women getting themselves and their complicated emotions in the way. In Big Sur, Duluo best expresses this idea when he says that he is looking for "some kind of new thing in the world actually where men can really be angelic friends and not be homosexual and not fight over girls" (Big Sur 135). Similarly, in Tropic of Cancer, the narrator and his friend Fillmore cannot really begin bonding until Fillmore's girlfriend is out of the picture. When Fillmore finally reappears to ask the narrator to move in with him, he says, "I would have asked you long before . . . if it hadn't been for that little bitch Jackie. I didn't know how to get her off my hands" (Cancer 198). Apparently, the greatest desire for most of the male characters in these novels is to be able to spend most of their time together, and to be with women only when they

need a sexual release.

However, in Kerouac's novels, a softer, more tender side of his sexuality frequently shows through his cynical, macho facade. In Big Sur, when Duluo describes his first sexual encounter with Billie, he says, "And we end up making love sweetly too -- A little blonde well experienced in all the facets of lovemaking and sweet with compassion and just too much so that b'dawn we're already going to get married and fly away to Mexico in a week" (Big Sur 146). Confessions of this sort are not typically found in Miller's novels.

In Miller's novels, terms of endearment are frequently replaced by crude sexual language, though even some of these passages can have a certain eloquence and power to them. A good example of this occurs in Opus Pistorum, a collection of hardcore pornography which was published posthumously. At one point in the book, the narrator says to one of his conquests:

I'll fill your body with fucking, and your mind with fucking, and your soul with fucking . . . I'll give you a fucking too great for you to hold within yourself, a screwing too big for your life and your experience . . . it will enter you, fill you to overflowing, spill into your children, and your children's great-grandchildren . . . ten generations from today your descendants will start from their sleep with the shock of a dream which will live forever in the cells and fibers of the line that springs from your ripe loins (Opus Pistorum 118).

Though this is hardly a tender speech, it is fairly typical of the attitudes of Miller's narrators.

Clearly, Miller and Kerouac both frequently showed condescending attitudes towards women in many of their novels. However, it is unfair to condemn the works of either man because

of this, or because of any other flaws that they may exhibit. Both men produced many exciting, enjoyable novels and should ultimately be forgiven for any apparent misogyny or predatory sexuality in their "crudely malely sexual" works. Also, although most of their novels were autobiographical in nature, it is almost impossible to really know how accurately the narrators of the novels reflect the writers themselves.

IV. Conclusion

Henry Miller and Jack Kerouac were members of two different generations. Miller came of age during World War I and would technically be considered a member of the Lost Generation, though he was not really a part of that literary movement. Kerouac, thirty years Miller's junior, came of age shortly before World War II and was a part of what he termed the Beat Generation. However, as I have shown, there are some interesting similarities in the ideas and styles of both writers.

It would not be difficult to imagine the mature Kerouac, or any of his friends, as characters in some of Miller's novels. The same love of sex, booze, travel and merriment are manifested in the characters of both men's autobiographical novels. Especially prevalent is the thumbing of one's nose at society and the established social order. Both men were free spirits, though Kerouac's adventurous nature diminished in his later years.

To a certain extent, the two did sometimes make brief appearances in each other's books. For example, Kerouac mentioned Miller by name in many of his later novels, like Big Sur, Lonesome Traveler and Satori in Paris. Also, Miller was clearly aware of the existence and importance of the new Beat Generation. In both The Air-Conditioned Nightmare and Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch, Miller described in

uncanny detail this new group of furtive young men, and those descriptions read almost like exact descriptions of Kerouac and the other Beats.

However, it is interesting to note that although Miller began writing almost twenty years before Kerouac, his best and most important, works, like the Tropics, Black Spring and The Rosy Crucifixion trilogy, were not legally available in the United States until a few years after Kerouac's best novels were published. Before 1961, the only Miller books available here were his more innocuous ones, which were not widely read. Therefore, Kerouac became a popular literary influence here in the States before Miller, whose masterpiece, Tropic of Cancer, had been available in Europe since 1934. Certainly, if Miller's early novels had been made available here sooner, it would be hard to imagine that anyone would have been shocked by the bohemian lifestyle presented by Kerouac in On the Road or The Subterraneans.

What may have seemed shocking or pornographic thirty or forty years ago seems rather tame these days. In the case of the novels of Kerouac, and especially Miller, this is a positive development. Now that the shock value of their novels has worn off, it is possible to evaluate them strictly on their literary merits, which are considerable. I believe it is a testimonial to the quality of both men's writing that almost everything that either of them ever released is still in print, with new volumes of unpublished material still surfacing periodically. Hopefully,

the literary and cultural influence of both of them will carry over into the next century and beyond.

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