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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

HACKING AWAY WITH AN AX:
HENRY MILLER AND MODERNITY

A Dissertation
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By
STEPHEN L. STARCK
Norman, Oklahoma
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HACKING AWAY WITH AN AX:
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A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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This dissertation is dedicated to one who did not make it: Scooter, my companion of eleven and a half years.

Table of Contents

Abstract	vii
 Introduction / Neither Crank nor <i>Littérateur</i>: Henry Miller in a Worn Pair of	
Shoes	1
The Focus of this Study	4
The Role of the Artist	10
Miller's Mission	18
Henry Miller: Throwing the Gauntlet	31
Critics of Culture and Miller's Cultural Criticism	39
 Chapter One / Cities of Disgust and Delight: New York City and Paris	
The Developing City	46
Acknowledging Differences	49
Defining the City	56
Beneficial Aspects to Cities	58
Mid-Century Paris, America, and City Planning	62
<i>Flânerie</i> , Inspiration, and Exile: City Streets and Crowds	63
The City as Wilderness	73
Not the City of Dreams	89
Inhabitants of the City: Parks and Leisure Space	97
Miller's Paris and the American South	109
 Chapter Two / Cities of Delight and Disgust: the City Spectacle and	
Consumption	130
What Becomes a Commodity	133
Commodity Culture and Learning Your Place	137
Manipulation and Circulation	145
The New Dance--Fashion	150
Consumption as Optimism	156
The Peculiar Character of Advertising	158
Lighting and Spectacle	165
The Media Spectacle	172
Lands of Disgust	186
 Chapter Three / Out of Step: Miller, Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Disobedience ...	
From Baudelaire to Rimbaud	190
Rejecting Bourgeois Ways	191
Money and the Borrowing Instinct	195
A Most Depressing Thought	206
Damning Praise: George Orwell's Conception of Passive Acceptance in the works of Henry Miller	214
"I'd Prefer Not To"	237
What are We Fighting For?	252
	260

Chapter Four / Life Never Looked So Bleak: Henry Miller on Progress	282
A Short History of Progress	287
It's Getting So Much Better All the Time	292
Miller, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Progress	297
Reason to the Nth Degree	303
Raging Against the Machine	308
Rescuing the Individual	316
Consumer Capitalism and Human Evolution	322
The Ultimate Failure of Progress	329
Down on Progress: Chaos, the Dandy and the Bohemian	333
True Progress	341
 Conclusion / Reading Miller Now	 348
Miller's Criticisms Today	350
Coda	359
 Works Cited	 364

Abstract

Hacking Away with an Ax: Henry Miller and Modernity

Henry Miller offers an "oppositional" critique of the West, rather than the Modernist "alternative" critique of an Eliot or a Joyce, openly attacking industrial capitalism for its inhumanity. French poets Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud, precursors of Miller, voiced complaints similar to those Miller raised some sixty to eighty years later, and evinced much the same anti-bourgeois attitude.

Miller condemns cities, especially New York City. American cities were often established quickly, to bring immediate profits to real estate investors, but little thought was devoted to their future inhabitants. These cities have little architectural history: older buildings have regularly been demolished to make room for new buildings. European cities, in contrast, present a historic text mixing old and new buildings, a space where businesses, cafes, parks, and dwellings mingle.

Consumer capitalism, epitomized by the department store and sustained by factory labor, dominates. Thousands of new products and technological improvements mask discontent. People toil at jobs, receiving, in exchange, products which inspire only momentary satisfaction. Miller's critique of work and his refusal to support the Second World War are linked by his belief that the rich are the main beneficiaries of the system. The average American or European enjoys few of the alleged benefits of the industrial age.

These critiques coalesce in Miller's denunciation of "Progress." People, though possessing a variety of commodities, are no happier. Rationality, furthermore, dominates lives, but in a dehumanizing fashion, most clearly evident in grid-cities and assembly-line work where laborers perform mind-numbing mechanical motions. Technology, rather than freeing, only further enslaves people. Miller, like Baudelaire and Rimbaud, denies progress in human affairs has occurred.

Miller attacks his world as fundamentally flawed. The world he critiques, however, still exists. The shape it was taking in the early part of the century has only become clearer with an urban crisis and mass lay-offs of industrial workers due to technological developments and the shifting of factories to third-world countries. Miller remains one of the great oppositional voices of "the American century."

Introduction / Neither Crank nor *Littérateur*: Henry Miller in a Worn Pair of Shoes

One has to hack his way out with the ax. The real wilderness is not out there somewhere, but in the towns and cities, in that complicated web which we have made of life and which serves no purpose but to thwart, cramp and inhibit free spirits. (Henry Miller, *Stand Still like the Hummingbird*, 117)

In 1984, Salman Rushdie asserted that, in "Inside the Whale," George Orwell had *overrated* Henry Miller. Rushdie, entitling his own essay "Outside the Whale," reports, "Miller's reputation has more or less completely evaporated, and he now looks to be very little more than the happy pornographer beneath whose scatological surface Orwell saw such improbable depths" (95-96). Rushdie's denunciation represents a fairly common--if limited and distorted--view of Miller, especially in America and Great Britain. Reading Henry Miller as a "happy pornographer" surely necessitates jettisoning much in Miller's works that is not sexual in nature. In the 1991 introduction to the collection of essays, *Imaginary Homelands*, which includes "Outside the Whale," Rushdie claims, "seven years on, I find 'Outside the Whale' a little unfair to George Orwell and to Henry Miller, too" (3). Regrettably, he fails to clarify what in the essay he finds "unfair," and thus his portrait of Miller has yet to be rectified.

To dismiss Henry Miller as a crank, a "happy pornographer," is to assert that nothing he wrote has any lasting consequence. However, his critique of American culture, which ranges so widely that there is little that does not wilt under his caustic glance, calls for nothing less than a radical transformation of American culture and the American landscape. He challenges many of the most basic principles Americans affirm--among them the notion of individual freedom, the necessity for work, and the belief that new technologies and new products bring in their wake security and

happiness (this in an era before the "downsizing" so prevalent in many industries in late twentieth-century America, often resulting from corporate mergers made feasible by improved computer technologies). Were he labelled a crank, Henry Miller would appear to be only an unrepentant rebel--as well as a vocal sexist and anti-Semite--who waged a failed, futile, and essentially wrong-headed war against the West in the first three-quarters of the twentieth century. At most, he might figure in as a colorful footnote to discussions of American culture between 1930 and 1980.

On the other hand, one could argue that *Tropic of Cancer* and many of Miller's later books constitute great works of literature deserving their fair share of the attention academe has thus far directed elsewhere. From this perspective, *Tropic of Cancer* should be set alongside T. S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" or F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, as the work of a wordsmith, a genius, a consummate example of a modernist work critical of the post-World War I world, while offering an alternative--a sometimes explosive, sometimes muted optimism--to the despair evinced in these other works. At the very least it could be set alongside another recently revived classic, also set largely in Paris, Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*.

Such a restricted reading of Henry Miller, focussing on those elements that make his works "classic," would then strip *Tropic of Cancer* and his other works of any value as cultural artifacts and arguments in their own right, reducing them to museum pieces to be admired from afar. Miller's introduction to a book collecting three essays by Henry David Thoreau combats such debilitating readings. "As always happens with bold, original utterances," he writes, "these essays have now become classic. Which means that, though they still have the power to mold character, they

no longer influence the men who govern our destiny" (*Stand Still* 112): They may inspire admiration, even quotation, but they do not affect behavior.

Additionally, we have only to look at the way in which Eliot's "The Wasteland" and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* have been gutted by academic criticism in order to foresee the fate of Miller's works were they, like Thoreau's, to be fully accepted and admitted into the classroom. Any relevance to the culture in which Miller's works were produced, *and* to that in which they are being read, would be safely overlooked in a strict adherence to the text. We have all seen *Gatsby* alternately set on a pedestal as a modernist artifact, such that any critique of capitalist culture in the story is examined in a vacuum and thus neutralized, or turned-in upon itself through its language, made the sport of Deconstructionists and Post-Structuralists alike, such that it is once again elevated and nullified.

Both approaches to the works of Henry Miller, as crank and as literary genius, offer dismissive readings of a writer who saw his role as artist to liberate himself, first, and, later, others. A third approach to Miller and his works, one common among readers who conceive of Miller as primarily a wisdom writer, is as dismissive as the first two readings: Henry Miller as saint. Lives of the saints are not open to us for emulation; their visions and their destinies remain singularly theirs. Henry Miller must instead be understood as a flawed human being, with a talent for writing, who observed his world and commented upon it passionately, pointing out the cracks in the fabric of society and the crackpots who inhabited it. Sometimes accurate, sometimes mistaken, Miller is a writer who calls on the reader to question what is taken for granted in the every-day-world, who challenges expectations, and, in doing so, brings the world vividly back to life.

The Focus of this Study

Why read Henry Miller in the nineteen-nineties? Erica Jong asks in her 1993 study, *The Devil at Large: Erica Jong on Henry Miller*, a work that demands hyphenated descriptors. Having posed the question, she attempts to answer the question herself:

All the questions his life and oeuvre raise about the role of the writer in society, the impact of books on sexual politics, the impact of sexual politics on books, the threat of censorship to free speech and written expression are, unfortunately, as fresh today as they ever were. (3)

Jong's answer spotlights one of the most vexatious problems confronting a writer attempting a study of Henry Miller, one that Jong herself fails to overcome: moving beyond "the sex question." Apart from first amendment questions and discussions of sex in literature, which remain the typical concern of writers (journalists as well as scholars and essayists) who either praise or condemn Miller, there is for Jong an additional reason for reading a writer whose overarching theme was liberation: "Because we are no freer today than we were in 1934, when he published *Tropic of Cancer*, in many ways we are more enslaved" (3). Though Jong seems to be referring once more to sex, I believe her answer confronts a broader spectrum of modern experience. Perhaps we are more enslaved now because we even more firmly believe, *a priori*, that we are free.

For Miller, the issue of freedom is of paramount importance. Compared with many other nations, Americans and many in the West certainly enjoy great freedom. But while such a statement may have a basis in fact, it is also an important tenet of American ideology: Americans generally believe themselves the freest, their country the most democratic on the face of the earth. What is overlooked or discounted, in an

uncritical acceptance and even valorization of "American freedom," is evidence that, rather than greater freedom, Americans currently enjoy less freedom than ever. They often quite willingly submit to questionable prohibitions--against drugs (recreational as well as medical) and prostitution for instance--and even seek to limit the freedom of others--with anti-abortion, seat-belt, and smoking laws. Perhaps more importantly, fewer and fewer people own more and more of America and can dictate what products materialize on store shelves, what movies receive financial backing in order to make it to the screen or to receive wide distribution, what books get published. Furthermore, sheer volume of goods in various shapes and forms often masks the fact that many products are not clearly distinct from each other. Finally, freedoms as enunciated in a constitution or some other charter, often differ substantially from those enjoyed in day to day life, often due to cultural conventions, as well as to limiting interpretations of such statutes--freedom of speech does not mean an activist can launch a protest march without a permit. The capitalist system in America today, while it often acknowledges dissenting voices, tends to defuse rebellion in a number of ways, ignoring it, repressing it, or transforming it into fashion, into marketable products--Nehru jackets, torn jeans, sagging jeans--and thus undermining it, while appearing to respond to it. It is this doubtful conception, that we in the democratic West are free, that Americans live in the land of plenty which proves they are among the blessed people of the planet, which Miller continually disputes. Moreover, as the author of a number of banned books--the most famous of which include *Tropic of Cancer* (1934), *Black Spring* (1936), *Tropic of Capricorn* (1939), *Sexus* (1949), *Plexus* (1953) and *Nexus* (1959)--Miller knew first-hand the realistic limits to that most cherished of freedoms, the Freedom of Speech.

Miller's notoriety as a sex writer grew, between initial publication in France of *Tropic of Cancer* in 1934 and American publication in 1961, despite the fact that his books were very difficult to obtain. Few, in those years, had first-hand knowledge of the works listed above. To read Henry Miller as a sex writer, rather than a writer who assimilated sexual motifs into his works, however, greatly reduces the scope of his texts to a concern with sexual freedom, a danger Miller himself recognized. He argues, in *The World of Sex*, "the problem of the author [of *Tropic of Cancer*] was never one of sex, nor even of religion, but of self-liberation" (*On Writing* 117). Miller perhaps makes his point a little too emphatically: surely freeing himself from deeply ingrained American puritanical attitudes toward (or, more properly, against) sex played a role in his self-liberation. Still, focussing solely on the sexual and, in turn, disregarding the many other elements of his critique of the West, which constitutes a major component of his project of self-liberation, is effectively to mis-read his works.

For this study, a more pointed response to the issue of Miller's relevance in the nineteen-nineties would be that Miller should be read because his broad critique of American and Western culture, even apart from the "sex" issue, remains relevant, if it is not more relevant in our time than it was in his. In the last years of the twentieth century, the trends Miller critiqued are still recognizably a part of the cultural landscape in America and much of the West. As we will see in Chapter Two, for instance, Miller deplores intrusive, all-pervasive advertising because it manipulates consumers through creating desire for products previously unnecessary, projecting an image of the world as better for possessing this product. The hype used to sell a variety of products--the mid-nineteen-nineties Nike slogan "Just do it" being only an

especially blatant example--encourages consumers to adopt an uncritical attitude, to buy products because they have "No Fear."

In addition, a number of works published in the last decade, among them James Kunstler's *The Geography of Nowhere* and Witold Rybczynski's *City Life*, scrutinize the American city and critique it in terms very similar to Miller's, comparing U.S. cities unfavorably with many European cities, especially Paris. Rybczynski's focus on Paris as a model city, in particular parallels Miller's repeated assertions of his love for Paris. Paris as a city designed to serve the needs of the inhabitants as well as the needs of business interests provides a strong contrast to most American cities, which were laid-out with an eye solely to profit.

William Leach's *Land of Desire* critically explores the genesis of the consumer culture that came of age with Miller and which he rejected. Leach's work concludes with the proposition that the deficiencies and extravagances of the capitalist consumption system are today only multiplied, its effects even more widespread, even more deleterious. Rather than attacking a world that has disappeared, Miller attacked a world taking shape, one that contained most of the characteristics we still recognize today, a world that has ripened and whose features, often, have only intensified.

A secondary argument that I will not directly address until the conclusion is that the censorship Miller encountered as an alleged sex writer, as well as the general hostility of some readers, resulted in large part from his anarchic¹ condemnation of Western Culture in general, and American culture in particular. Whether consciously or not, censors and readers rejecting his works rightly linked the sexually graphic

¹ Anarchic (as an adjective) in the sense of wide-ranging and sometimes pell-mell, rather than (as a noun) in the political sense.

aspects of Miller's works with his harsh criticism of American and Western culture, understanding that one was not necessarily separate from the other, that Miller was a writer *exposing* something they found unpalatable. The rejection of puritanical sexual mores forms one part of a more general repudiation of much that is taken for granted in "Western" and capitalist society which forms the subject of this study.² Some readers were repulsed equally by the descriptions of sex and the rampant anti-Western attitude informing Miller's works, and their experiences can be likened to shell-shock. That these issues in Miller's works have not been explored in any depth, that his critiques of Western culture have thus far received little beyond half-hearted, under-analyzed rejections³ while the questions he raises remain unresolved, demonstrates his ill-repute in academic circles--as well, perhaps, as a failure of nerve: Miller's descriptions of sexual relations and his attacks on Western culture can make reading his works a disturbing experience.

While Miller no longer faces legal censorship, Miller-biographer Mary Dearborn notes that, though American sales of his books are not high, "they sell steadily. They are more successful abroad, most notably in France, Germany, and Japan" (308-09). While this lack of a large reading public in his native land might be

² For a link between sex and consumer capitalism see Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, *Eros and Civilization*, as well as the discussion of "Work" in Chapter Three.

³ See for instance Alan Trachtenberg's 1970 essay "'History on the Side': Henry Miller's American Dream," where Miller as *cultural icon* is of interest, but as *cultural critic* is dismissed--without "the closer attention" the author claims Miller's criticisms deserve. Trachtenberg, an otherwise highly-reputable and insightful critic of American culture, fails to recognize the value of Miller's critiques, many of which will appear in his 1982 *The Incorporation of America*, which exclusively employs canonical writers--William Dean Howells, Walt Whitman, Henry James, Stephen Crane, and Theodore Dreiser, among others.

understood as a trend toward actively-producing authors, Miller is still largely ignored in academic circles as well (308), a locale where many writers past and present (Henry James and Thomas Pynchon, to provide only two examples) find, if not their only audience, the largest percentage of their readers. Roger Jackson, who compiled an exhaustive bibliography of Miller's published works, opted to direct his bibliography toward collectors rather than scholars ("Bibliographer's Tale" 31). In what Jackson terms "a curious phenomenon," in the three years after the 1993 publication more Japanese collectors had purchased his 1000+ page bibliography of Henry Miller's primary works than had American libraries (25). While Miller's reputation abroad appears to remain relatively high, in his homeland it is, as Rushdie claimed, almost nil.

In this study, I propose to examine Henry Miller's works for their commentary on American and Western civilization, almost to the exclusion of sex. While the sexual issue has still seemingly not been exhausted, I view the "sexual" in the works of Miller as integral, but also as the on-ramp to the broader exploration of "Life," of which it is, naturally, one of the lanes. To switch metaphors, the "sexual" in his works is one strand of many woven into the fabric that forms his subject matter. In fact, the sexual and the social maintain a reciprocal relationship. In his biography of Sigmund Freud, Peter Gay argues that Freud's interest in things sexual "brought unexpected dividends for his social theory," that Freud's awareness of "sexual misery" directed him to "the study of religion and civilization" thus enlarging the scope of his work (548). Similarly, Miller's perception of sexual problems, more specifically the secrecy, guilt, and repression that surrounds sex, the inwardness and the variety of

distinct masks with which we face the world, leads him to explore the individual's relationship with the larger society as he, Miller, experiences it himself.

Though possibly any one of his longer works (for instance, one of the "Paris books"--*Tropic of Cancer*, *Black Spring*, *Max and the White Phagocytes*, and *Tropic of Capricorn*) might suffice to illustrate Miller's rejection (at least in a précis) of much that is modern, I will incorporate a wide variety of published works by Miller to provide greater depth and breadth to my account of his criticism.

The Role of the Artist

Throughout his oeuvre, Miller expounds upon the life of the writer as an instance of the artist's role in American and Western society. This theme of the artist's role assumes such a prominent place in Miller's oeuvre that Thomas H. Moore compiled a selection of such passages, from a variety of published and unpublished works by Miller, into *Henry Miller on Writing*. Miller, then, consciously created a body of works that he believed illustrated and addressed the issue of the role of the artist in society.

The role of the artist, however, has been the subject of much theorizing, dating back at least to the Romantics and, even much further, to Plato. More recently, Colin Partridge has examined the function of literature in cultures recently established, focussing mainly on countries colonized by Western powers since the seventeenth century--especially Australia, New Zealand, North and South America, Africa, and the Caribbean. For Partridge, a culture is an "original system of values," and it is through culture that "social structure, individual relations, art and religion take substance,

meaning, and form" (30). Partridge's definition agrees with Raymond Williams' rather more expansive definition of culture:

a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our sense and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values--constitutive and constituting--which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. (R. Williams, *Marxism*, 110)

As the newly-formed culture begins to develop, individual relations and their patterns, in the form of values within a fixed yet evolving constellation, begin "to become congealed in narratives" (30). The values "congealed" in these narratives--the literature of the early New England writers (Cotton Mather, Anne Bradstreet, Jonathan Edwards, and others), for example--diverge from those of the mother countries, often intentionally so. Furthermore, the world the settlers faced in New England, on the Virginia coast, or in the convict camps of Australia, necessitated that they "modify European cultures" (31) in order to survive. When writers from within this new culture begin to produce texts, one element implicit in their subject matter is "their innovative responses to life and growth in the new land" (31-2). In this way, a distinctive literature arises, one with a different sense of what is important or at least a different perspective on that importance.

The artist in these new cultures plays a primary role "in surveying the culture's needs, shaping new attitudes and restructuring the imported European language" (32). In America, a writer such as Washington Irving continues the process of delineating a uniquely American literature, through his short stories and tall tales, though he spends many years in Europe. James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* bears the influence of Sir Walter Scott; at the same time his work considers a distinctively American subject--the occasionally friendly, often tense and destructive relations

between the settlers and the native inhabitants of the land. Fenimore Cooper's work offers a mixture of the old and new cultures, an instance of a literature, as well as a culture, in conspicuous transition.

One characteristic of new cultures, writes Partridge, "is a concern with analyzing both the origins of the culture and the processes that formed the value system" (34). Such analysis involves both compiling history as well as evaluating and re-evaluating the history, and not only in straight-forward histories (if such can be said to exist) but also in fiction. The classic example of such fictions in American culture are Nathaniel Hawthorne's short stories and novels which evaluate certain events of the New England past.

Another characteristic of new cultures is that after a period of development, the writers become aware of the choice either to "explore the possibilities of their own culture's colloquial usage; or they could fashion an amalgam from old-world orthodoxy and new regional inventiveness" (38)--such as we see in *The Last of the Mohicans*. Many authors producing first-person texts (Partridge cites as one example Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and the "negro dialect" in the work of Richard Wright offers another) devote themselves entirely to native dialects (40-2), a medium which functions to transmit as well as to affirm the new dialect as a particularly native construction, an implicit or explicit challenge to the imported idiom. In Henry Miller's case, we find an attempt to directly record or reproduce street-talk, hence the four-letter words strewn throughout his texts and which signal, among other things, a different relation between the public and private persona. This new idiom "congeals" the new values, at once as their transmitter and as their illustration.

But Partridge notes one other feature of these new cultures--a certain

"restlessness" (44):

Process, not fixity, is the unavoidable inheritance and the great writers of new societies have analyzed this restlessness in their work; by doing so they have gained personal articulation but they have also contributed to the radical criticism of their cultural formation. (44)

This "criticism" of the "cultural formation" of a nation is one element of Miller's attack on America, as will be discussed in the opening sections of the first chapter.

Miller hopes to move forward, to a new vision of America, but to do so he must expose the unpleasant underside to American history. Among many other examples, Miller cites the particularly harsh treatment of the indigenous peoples.

In an older culture, in France for instance, which has literature dating back a millennia, there exists a certain rigidity in the literary forms. The *Académie française*, founded in 1635 and charged with overseeing literary production, moderates the evolution of the language.⁴ Thus the literary establishment attempts "to diminish invention by appealing to tradition" (44); even in a new culture, as the process of formulating and solidifying new values in a new literature is taking place, many writers feel the compulsion to conform with what appear to be the unique characteristics of the new literature. Writers often learn these characteristics through study of the literatures that contributed to the development of their literature but must reject them, if not wholesale then in part, as models (32).

Once the new culture finally informs the perceptions of those within it, it is *dominant*, in Raymond Williams' use of that term in *Marxism and Literature*. The

⁴ In France, the protectors of language have battled so-called "franglais," the incorporation of English terms into the French language.

dominant, though, always retains a dynamic relationship with what Williams calls the *residual*, that which was "effectively formed in the past, but . . . is still active in the cultural process" (*M&L* 122), and the *emergent*, "new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kind of relationship [which] are continually being created" (123). A culture is rarely if ever monolithic, even in its formative years, but composed of elements that were once determining but are presently less so, elements that are more or less defining now, and those that *may* one day replace the dominant. "Resolute dissidents may protest," writes Partridge, "but they can never fully evade the cultural processes which are locked into their very beings and into their human language" (30), a mechanism Williams labels "incorporation."

Partridge's interest ends at the point at which the literature reflects the establishment of a particular culture. However, it seems that the next step, beyond the establishment of a native literature, requires a reaction *against* that newly-established literature. Some writers continually seek new methods to communicate the experience of living in a certain region, in a certain era, while others wish to lodge a protest against this or that aspect of the culture. Few writers wish merely to reflect some monolithic vision of their society, though many may support it largely as it is.

Protesters can be divided into those who are *alternative* and those who are *oppositional*, as Williams identifies them. *Alternative* writers do not object to the goals of their culture, though they may in part, so much as to the means of attaining these goals or the measure of importance ascribed to them. *Oppositional* writers, however, disagree with these goals, and the values inscribed in them, in a fundamental way, aspiring additionally to effect great change. While the difference between *alternative* and *oppositional* writers might at first glance seem only a matter of degree,

it actually indicates a difference in kind, involving a combination of such factors as medium (fiction, poetry), "message" (admittedly a problematic term), and accessibility (language--slang, syntax, for instance; publication, distribution). Oppositional writers constitute a challenge to the existing order and its extension and continuation in a way that alternative writers do not.

Miller, as a "resolute dissident," in fact as an oppositional writer, lodges his protest many times over. He believed what he wrote mattered, that art really could change people, and that he was not just howling into the abyss, an attitude shared by the Surrealists in France and writers in England, such as W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and Louis MacNeice (as George Orwell pointed out in "Inside the Whale"). In his first published book, *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller announces his abandonment of literature, reacting against current literary fashion as well as his own earlier unpublished books in order to do so. Erica Jong characterizes his first two manuscripts, *Moloch, or This Gentile World* and *Crazy Cock*, as the work of a man "at war with his surroundings, trying [through literature] to make the uncompromising asphalt bloom" (*Devil* 83). In both works, only recently published, the third-person narrator⁵ recounts the story, attempting to give literary expression to the rage of the "heroes," Dion Moloch and Tony Bring. Finally in *Cancer* Miller declares, "Everything that was literature has fallen from me" (1). Such a rejection is not perfunctory and involves rejecting old idols as well as old forms: "I'm not reading Thomas Mann any more, any more," he reports soon after finishing *Cancer*. "No Sir!

⁵Apart from these two works, *The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder*, and his play *Just Wild About Harry*, only a tiny fraction of Miller's published works are in anything but first-person voice.

Through with him! Reject him! He's a polished, finished craftsman--and that's why I drop him. He's 30 years behind the day" (*Emil* 156-57). For Miller, the term "finished craftsman" has both literal and figurative meaning, that the work of art is seamless, technically flawless, and that it is dead, for life itself is anything but "polished" and seamless.

"What is not in the open street," Miller writes in the opening pages of his second book, *Black Spring*, "is false, derived, that is to say, *literature*" (3). Instead of a work of literature, *Cancer* "is a gob of spit in the face of Art, a kick in the pants to God, Man, Destiny, Time, Love, Beauty . . . what you will" (ellipses in original, 2). Notice the words in capital letters. In Miller's view, "literature" equals transcendent values enshrined, untouchable, worshipped unquestioningly, and that is what he wishes to confront.⁶ Like Charles Baudelaire, he wishes, above all, "to restore life to literature" (*Time* 5). It is a "literature" that lies, as we shall see in a moment, that is not true to life, that Miller targets; it is a death-dealing Western culture he hopes to destroy. Miller had once esteemed Sherwood Anderson, had read popular realists like Theodore Dreiser, but he rejects them for their distanced view, for their linear narratives, for their essential untruth. Marshall Berman, writing of 'sixties radicals, unwittingly invokes Miller's literary project: They found, writes Berman,

a source of life and energy and affirmation that was just as modern as the expressway world, but radically opposed to the forms and motions

⁶ Miller does not, as Trachtenberg would have it, merely "dishonor all pieties in order to honor the piety of free expression" ("History" 248). His first goal was to express himself as boldly and baldly as possible, in order to be true to his perception of his experience, to leave nothing out. First Amendment concerns became of major interest to Miller only after he had received positive responses to *Tropic of Cancer* from Eliot, Orwell, Ezra Pound, Blaise Cendrars, and others. Once confident in himself as a writer, he resented the fact he could not publish his books in his native land.

of that world. They would find it in a place where very few of the modernists of the 1950s would have dreamt of looking for it: in the everyday life of the street. (314)

Though Berman cites James Joyce's *Stephen Dedalus* as a precursor to the sixties radicals, Henry Miller would certainly be a more unambiguous figure.⁷ The sixties radicals realized, as did Miller, they had to clearly and demonstratively reject certain values that were even then being passed on to them. Many of these radicals also adopted an alternative canon of writers--the Beat writers of the previous decade, among others.

The difficulty implicit in rejecting previous literary gods is evident in Miller, who succumbs to the urge to produce "literature," in a letter, even as he quite overtly struggles against it:

This afternoon I went up to Sacré Coeur and looked over the city. It is just such a vision as I have often dreamed. It is all that you wish--and maybe a little more. And I thought (this is literature, because I didn't think any such thing) of how it looked to the Romans when they christened it *Lutetia*--and how it looked to Napoleon when drunk with the wine of victory he came back from Italy through what is now the Metro Station Place d'Italie. (*Emil* 17)

Instead of exploring what he felt and saw at Sacré Coeur directly, he tumbles into historical allusion--or *illusion*. At worst, the literary writer turns away from the experience, unable to communicate anything more than surface facts in sure, poetical language, which masks a deadly vacuity, even falsity. Such writing is, for Miller, an evasion, a sign of failure, and must be exposed as such. The letter quoted above, however, is dated March 6, 1930 and is the first Miller wrote upon his arrival in

⁷ "Henry Miller" as protagonist in Henry Miller's works. Ronald Gottesman writes, in the introduction to his collection of essays on Miller, "If it is usually difficult to separate a writer from his work, in the case of Henry Miller it is virtually impossible to do so" (xvii). I will attempt no such separation in the present study.

France. The change he claims to have experienced there finally results in *Cancer*, begun over a year later and published four years later, where one finds a new Henry Miller: "Paris plus first person bravado equals the voice we have come to know as Henry Miller," declares Erica Jong ("Foreword," ix). *Moloch* and *Crazy Cock* provide, for her, interesting examples of what Miller "had to overcome to find his own voice as a writer" (vii). It is in *Cancer* that Miller begins crafting a vision of the world in which he attempts to hold nothing back.

Miller's Mission

In order to understand Miller's mission as a writer, one he believes he shares with all true artists, it is important to recognize Oswald Spengler's influence on Miller and, with that in mind, to understand Miller's notion of the individual. Spengler's most important work, *The Decline of the West*, influenced many artists and intellectuals in the post-World War I era, since it seemed to describe as well as explain the decay many of them sensed. The Great Crash of 1929 even appeared to confirm Spengler's vision. In the aftermath of the Second World War, however, the influence of Spengler's contribution to "*kulturkritik*" (Farrenkopf 165) began to wane as the post-war economies in America and western Europe boomed. Erich Heller, defending *Decline* from a multitude of attacks, argues the book is ultimately "untrue" because it looks down on history from such a high perspective that finally Spengler's "historical vision is lacking in depth as well as in love, pity and pathos" (193). He likewise faults the author for repudiating "the idea of progress" (195), though without confronting Spengler's argument. Heller critiques precisely those points that Spengler holds dearest, the first his method, which attempts to be all-inclusive and asserts

"depth" as one of the goals (Spengler 6); the second implicit in his vision of the recurrent rise and fall of civilizations. Heller's argument can today be seen as a blindly ideological response to an unorthodox work, a response that lacks grounds as well as argumentation.

Literary scholars have explored Spengler's influence on such authors as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Jack Kerouac,⁸ but they tend to view Spengler simply as a period figure rather than a philosopher of long-standing importance, whose work may still have relevance. Philosopher Tomislav Sunic, on the other hand, traces Spengler's current influence to a number of recent cultural critics, among them Jean Baudrillard, in *America*, and Christopher Lasch, in *The Culture of Narcissism* (51n), specifically in the despair they evince toward Western culture. Sunic, further, accuses those who share Spengler's vision of decline of endorsing passivity (61) or of implicitly assuming proto-totalitarian positions since Spengler himself assumed such a position. Sunic's response, which may or may not accurately reflect the position of those he lists, rests basically on unfounded assumptions about readers of Spengler. What would seem to be one of the more expected criticisms of Spengler, in the so-called postmodern era, would be his reliance on a totalizing system: Spengler attempts to read a variety of cultures through one specific lens. But even given present skepticism about such systems, certain elements of Spengler's criticisms retain validity. His discussion of cities laid out on the grid format, for instance, in which he argues that such a form augurs the end of the creative era of a civilization, is echoed (though perhaps not in

⁸ John S. Whitley's "'A Touch of Disaster'": Fitzgerald, Spengler and the Decline of the West" in *Scott Fitzgerald: The Promise of Life*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989; Michael D'Orso's "Man Out Of Time: Kerouac, Spengler, and the 'Faustian Soul'" in *Studies in American Fiction*, Spring 1983, 11:1, 19-30.

precisely the same terms) in Richard Sennett,⁹ Marshall Berman, James Kunstler, and Witold Rybczynski, critics of the city in the last thirty years.

Though the concept of progress will be explored in a later chapter, at this point we can see that insisting the modern world has not been substantially improved fosters an oppositional stance, in an era otherwise absolutely sure of its ascendancy. Thinking the negative, thinking dialectically--as did Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Herbert Marcuse--is to challenge current assumptions, current ideologies. The chief beneficiaries of capitalism, the bourgeois class, claim they have improved the world; to view the world as in decline is to declare the failure of the capitalist system and the bourgeoisie, and to imply that some other system is required.

Miller quite certainly believes his world, "Western Civilization," is on the decline. Looking back over fifteen years, Miller claims in the 1947 *Remember to Remember*, "I could never have written the sort of books I did [*Tropic of Cancer*, *Black Spring*, *Tropic of Capricorn*] had I not been imbued with the absolute conviction of the imminence of the end" (129). His certainty was such that, borrowing a descriptive term from Spengler, he describes himself as "a *late-city* artist" (*Semblance* 8, emphasis added), prefiguring the current notion of "late capitalism." Though Miller agrees with Spengler's analysis of Western culture, he has one caveat: "I do not accept it applying to the individual artist" (*Hamlet* 72). Spengler views civilizations as organic forms that age like other biological creatures. Just as people, whether from Madagascar or Samoa or Germany, go through phases of development between birth and death, so too do civilizations. Based on certain stages previously encountered by

⁹ See Sennett's *The Uses of Disorder*, as well as *The Conscience of the Eye*.

other cultures throughout various historical periods, which Spengler enumerates in the work, he concludes that Western civilization is on its last leg: it has stopped developing, its contours are frozen, it will generate nothing further of any substantive value. Accordingly he announces "the great crisis of the present" (Spengler 26), to which Miller believes the artist can still effectively respond.

In a world in decline, where systems have failed, Miller decides the individual must be his focus. His almost total reliance on autobiography, for instance, emphasizes the significance the individual holds for him. Not all individuals are capable of responding to his call, but Miller has faith that some will manage to evolve. German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche also venerates individuals, specifically those he calls "the free spirits," to whom he dedicates *Human, All Too Human*. Later works such as *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Genealogy of Morals* also attempt to extricate these "free spirits" from the limiting, even crushing bonds of Western, Christian culture through a sustained illumination of the repressive, life-negating forces underpinning the culture, and Miller's works function similarly, as we will see.

The concept of the individual, even during the nineteen-twenties and -thirties, was problematic, and it has only become more so today. Freud's notion of the unconscious, as a force operating in our lives and of which we are largely unaware, and Marx's concept of the socially-constructed individual, both call into question the uniqueness of the individual, the amount of freedom a person has for self-creation. Freud and Marx have both been updated by Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Raymond Williams, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Catherine Belsey and many, many others, so that the question of individuality, the possibility of the truly *individual* individual, is much more questionable than it once seemed to be.

Along the same lines as Walt Whitman, Miller holds an exalted--though not altogether--Romantic notion of the individual as differentiated, as self-created and self-determining. Such a notion of the individual, as an autonomous and self-willed entity who stands up against an "objectified (unconscious and unwilled)" society, Raymond Williams rejects as "a bourgeois version of society" (*M&L*, 86-7). The individual should, instead, be understood as created within a social process--which may partially explain Arthur Rimbaud's notion that *Je est un autre* [I is an other]--as part and parcel of that process, even as it struggles against the process, hence a force to act as well as to be acted upon. But, since a culture is composed of competing claims, of struggling "movements and tendencies" (121), the individual is no more a monolith than is the society within which he or she emerges.

Catherine Belsey problematizes the individual in somewhat different terms. She writes that it "is not a unity, not autonomous, but a process, perpetually in construction, perpetually contradictory, perpetually open to change" (132). The concept of the individual as a stable being, completely self-aware, knowledgeable of all its desires and the source of these desires is untenable once the import of the unconscious is accepted. To be constructed in such an apparently random fashion seems disempowering: How can I act when, ultimately, there is no consistent *I*? To recognize, however, that one is constructed by a culture in a myriad of ways seems to offer some clue to understanding the ground for certain assumed values and hence the key to rejecting them. Miller, for instance, never fully recognized the way in which he was constructed by his culture, in regard to his often problematic (though typical for his time) views of women, Jews and black people, for instance, but he does seem to realize that people are multidimensional, perceiving himself as a fragmented being.

In *Black Spring*, he writes, "For me the book is the man and my book is the man I am, the confused man, the negligent man, the reckless man, the lusty, obscene, boisterous, thoughtful, scrupulous, lying, diabolically truthful man that I am" (23). Miller seems aware of the complexity of individuals but cannot respond to it. Hence, Miller's individual is an abstraction as well as something of a fiction.

Moreover, his faith in the individual is, I believe, restricted; he would not extend to the masses or to most "accepted" artists the status of true individuals. Miller, in what might be described as "reverse elitism," usually reveres only the little guy, one of Nietzsche's "free spirits," who creates solely for the pleasure of creating and who will probably never receive recognition, nor be corrupted by such recognition--for recognition seems to lead to "incorporation" by the establishment. Such figures as the black shoeshine man who has written unpublishable novels for twenty years or Dr. Souchon the New Orleans surgeon who paints for pleasure and release are two of the many people Miller venerates in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* and *Remember to Remember*. Such are the individuals, the artists that Miller honors.

While this faith in the individual, however limited, may seem naïve to modern readers, I believe it reflects our experience of the world: we regard ourselves and those close to us as individuals, people who have real options and make real choices. Those beyond our circle of friends and acquaintances we are not so sure about. Intellectually we understand that we are all more or less "incorporated," but we do not necessarily act upon that knowledge on a daily basis. Miller's untheoretical conception of the individual does not really pose a high hurdle for modern readers and may reflect, as well, Miller's sense that truth is in the streets. In addition, such contemporary writers as Marshall Berman still demonstrate a belief in the strength of

the individual. In opposition to his criticism of the Frankfurt School theorists, and other twentieth-century philosophers, for what he calls their "monolithic cultural despair" (28n), Berman seems to broach bourgeois individualism. He endorses a number of nineteenth-century philosophers who "understood the ways in which modern technology and social organization determined man's fate. But they all believed that modern individuals had the capacity both to understand this fate and, once they understood it, to fight it" (27). The individual struggling, not against but outside society, is Miller's answer to the problem of the decline of civilization, which helps to explain the rich wells of inspiration he found in Paris, where he felt himself an outsider--though today we can see that he really was not so far outside as he believed. Berman may be suggesting, rather than a naïve or outmoded belief in the individual, a course of action exemplified by Antonio Gramsci's "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will" (qtd. in Berman 120), which also constitutes Spengler's response to his own cultural pessimism, as we shall see.

It is Miller's perception of decline, and the role open to the individual, that is responsible for much of the urgency of his works. "For a hundred years or more," Miller writes, once again echoing Spengler (30), "the world, *our* world, has been dying" (*Cancer* 26).

And not one man, in these last hundred years or so, has been crazy enough to put a bomb up the asshole of creation and set it off. The world is rotting away, dying piecemeal. But it needs the *coup de grace*, it needs to be blown to smithereens. (26)

For Miller the time of the cloistered genius is past. "We have need for strong hands, for spirits who are willing to give up the ghost and put on flesh . . ."--to become real, living human beings acting outside the roles society thrusts upon them (27, ellipses in

original). In the age of decline, the role of the artist has nothing to do with remaining aloof. It is a time for involvement, for looking to the street for motivation. The artist's role is to recover value, to take back the capitalized ideals listed above, now devoid of significance, and to create new purpose. "Life," writes Miller, "has to be given meaning because of the obvious fact that it has no meaning" (*Wisdom* 5). Though Miller has been critiqued for being apolitical, ever since George Orwell's 1940 essay "Inside the Whale," it will become clear that he is quite political, simply not in terms of political parties or sauntering off to battle with a gun on his shoulder.

For Miller, the artist must be committed. Miller's critique of the European founders of America parallels his critique of most artists who receive acclaim:

Men have come here hoping to "find," not to "build." Not all men, of course, for if that were true this would indeed be a hell unbearable. But there has been the persistent feeling all throughout the history of this land that America had inexhaustible riches to yield up. It has brought out the plunderer and the exploiter of human beings. ("Fragment from Letter of Thanksgiving" 81)

The writing task involves more than simply describing what is on the surface, what is "out there." This task demands constructing a vision of the world as the artist truly perceives it, on the street, beneath all the surface smoke generally mistaken for "reality"--but even that is not enough. Spengler describes his own project in terms that very nearly parallel Miller's: "What concerns us is not what the historical facts which appear at this or that time *are*, per se, but what they signify, what they point to, *by appearing*" (6). Miller aspires to get at "the works" as well, to understand the functioning of the apparatus.

Miller critiques James Joyce and Marcel Proust because, in his reading of these two writers, they merely "*reflect* the times. We see in them no revolt: it is surrender,

suicide, and the more poignant since it springs from creative sources" (*Cosmological* 109). Miller critiques Joyce and Proust,¹⁰ not for lack of talent, but for failure of nerve. Rather than oppositional, in Williams' sense, they are at best alternative. Miller detects "no struggle" (108), in the sense of rebellion, in the sense of creating a forward-looking vision of the world.

The only way to be an artist in a disintegrating world is to work against the grain, to rebuild with new stones. "Joyce is the lost soul of this soulless world," Miller declares; "his interest is not in life, in men and deeds, not in history, not in God, but in the dead dust of books" (115). Joyce, in short, is a long way from the streets, even if his protagonist Leopold Bloom spends much of his day in June 1904 walking the Dublin streets.

In his introduction to *Finnegan's Wake*, Seamus Deane defines Joyce's works (the *Wake* as well as *Ulysses*) as "alternative" (x)¹¹ as well as subversive (xiii), but ultimately acknowledges they are self-defeating since works that require scholarly exegesis "are politically neutralized" (xviii). These inaccessible texts demand every bit of the reader's energy just to be understood; none remains for revolt. Joyce creates ingenious works, exhibiting his erudition but offering little recognition of the impasse in which modern readers find themselves; if he recognizes the world situation, he only acknowledges it through the medium of myth, hence "literature," which Miller considers a distancing technique. For Miller, as for Spengler, "the point [is] to

¹⁰ My interest, here, lies not in whether Miller's critique of Joyce and Proust is valid, though such a case could be made; rather, his critique offers a useful foil for expounding his goals as a writer.

¹¹ Deane does not mention whether or not he uses "alternative" after Raymond Williams, but it fits in any case.

distinguish the 'superficial' from the 'profound'" (Hughes xvii). Joyce's "literature" limits him to the superficial, despite the pretension of great depth.

In contrast, Miller claims, "Everything I write is loaded with the dynamite which will one day destroy the barriers erected about me" (*Cosmological* 159). He means to rearrange the pieces, to make the world once more strange and the site of exploration, rather than the source of settled values. To be oppositional, however, usually means to go uncompensated. "The only artists at present who are being handsomely rewarded for their toil are the mountebanks . . . skilled in raising a cloud of dust when real issues are at stake" (*Air-Conditioned* 133). The non-threatening, non-challenging artist is generally the only one to receive substantial recompense for his or her work, though these artists do not produce works of real and lasting value, works that articulate some problematic--instead they "raise clouds of dust." But Miller takes the mission of the writer seriously, working against the grain quite in earnest. He writes, "Every creative act is a declaration of war" (*Hamlet* 101), against the way things are and the way they appear to be. "A creative act is in the nature of a trespass. It is a violation of the static order of things" (101). This declaration of war signifies an attempt to breach the protective film that has congealed around culture, especially as it manifests itself in narratives, and to open that culture to questioning, to evaluation and evolution, hence to new values. "It is [the poet's] mission to seduce us," Miller proposes in his book on French poet Arthur Rimbaud, *The Time of the Assassins*, "to render intolerable this limited world which bounds us" (55), to make the reader uncomfortable and thus to effect an awakening and inspire action, to begin seeking for what Miller repeatedly calls the life more abundant.

This mission of the artist is not simply destructive--though Miller, like Rimbaud, affirms "[p]art of every artist's time and energy is devoted to *destruction*--willful, deliberate, purposive destruction" (*Semblance* 35); or it is not destructive solely in a negative sense. "Man is a creator," Miller asserts. "And to create means to destroy at the same time. To destroy usually gives us pleasure, but to create produces a sense of guilt. And why? Because to create entails responsibility" (*Hamlet* 101). There is, thus, a fecundatory side to the artist's mission. Walter Benjamin asserts, "destroying rejuvenates in clearing away the traces of our own age" (*One-Way Street* 157), like burning dead vegetation in order to sow new seeds in fertile soil, a view which links this "destructive character" to Berman's "developer," that "consummate wrecker and creator, the dark and deeply ambiguous figure" (63), who arises in the capitalist era and who Berman sees prefigured in Goethe's Faust. While Benjamin's "destructive character," as he terms it, "avoids . . . being creative" (158) (and he or she is so incidentally, provoking misunderstandings in order to ensure nothing becomes settled), Berman's developer unleashes an "impersonal drive . . . to create a totally modernized space, in which the look and feel of the old world have disappeared without a trace" (68). The developer, a dialectical counterpart to the artist, transforms the world simply because he or she can, for the sheer pleasure of exertion, of creating a modern world. "Whatever I do is done out of sheer joy," Miller proclaims. "I drop my fruits like a ripe tree. What the general reader or the critic makes of it," he asserts, contradicting his earlier declaration of responsibility, "is not my concern. I am establishing values: I defecate and nourish. There is nothing more to it" (*Wisdom*

22).¹² Miller digests, to maintain the metaphor, the material of his life, transforming it into a fertilizer that he hopes will allow others to flourish. Through detailing his struggle to free himself from the many constraints of Western culture, he believes he will benefit his public.

Directly addressing his readers, Miller writes that one of his goals is "to give you the courage to live your own life, and live it abundantly" ("Fragment" 82). Such an assertion is somewhat disingenuous; it is Miller posturing as a wisdom writer, hoping to make his works more acceptable to the censor. As he had previously asserted, in *The World of Sex*, it was his own freedom he was battling for in the *Tropics*. Readers, he might reasonably assume, could benefit from his experience, as recounted in his works, but it was certainly not a conscious *goal*. If his hope, later, that readers could learn from his example appears naïve, the validity of the criticisms Miller leveled at America and Western culture in general still stands.

But if civilization is on the decline, it might be asked, what role is there for an artist? what is left to be done, short of surrendering to circumstances beyond the artist's control? One aspect of Miller's ethos is a joyful embracing of even the most awful, even hopeless situations, rather than the despairing sigh of an Eliot.¹³ Like Nietzsche, Miller often takes a position that seems absurd at first glance, but then, with explanation, validates it. "Not only have I never felt the least desire to conserve

¹² The artist's "responsibility" for readings of his or her text remains an open question. The *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie provides persuasive evidence that many hold the artist responsible for opinions expressed in works of art.

¹³ "Up to that time," he writes in *Cancer*, "nothing very terrible had befallen me, though I had already lost all my worldly possessions and had known what it was to walk the streets in hunger and in fear of the police" (180).

or bolster up or buttress anything," Miller asserts, "but I might say that I have always looked upon decay as being just as wonderful and rich an expression of life as growth" (*Wisdom* 29). Just as Miller attempts to write about "the street"--everything that is left out of novels--so he venerates that which is often despaired of, decay and destruction, for instance, which remain for him signs of life, providing him hope for the future.

In Spengler's conception of the world, the only option open to Westerners is "to embrace the present and its narrowly defined, historically determined possibilities" (Farrenkopf 173). Thus Miller claims another role for the artist, perhaps clarifying what he means when labelling himself a "late-city artist": "*you can play the role of the undertaker*" (*Cosmological* 345). The late-city artist helps to bury the old world, which suggests that he or she will then be present at the dawn of a new one.

It is important to be aware, however, that Miller is often deliberately provoking his audience, that he is contradictory, that while he sees Western civilization in a period of decline, from which there is no hope of escape until the decline has run its course, he also views art and the role of the artist, and thus culture too, in positive terms: "Art is only a means to life, to the life more abundant. It is not in itself the life more abundant. It merely points the way, something which is overlooked not only by the public, but very often by the artist himself" (*Wisdom* 24). Miller, then, points out the irreversible course of the present but holds out hope for the future.

The role of the artist, for Miller, can be summarized as follows: The artist must be, in Jean-Paul Sartre's term, engaged. He or she must expose the values of a culture to examination, must expose as well the manifold imperfections and trends in a culture, making the reader conscious of what was once accepted uncritically, without

question or quibble, and which must now be altered or rejected. "Literature" either purposefully reinforces the status quo or does so incidentally because it "throws up a lot of smoke" and obscures the need for change, so Miller abandons it in favor of the prose we find in *Tropic of Cancer* and later works. His incitory descriptions of the role of the artist, finally, serve to underscore the importance he assigns to that role.

Henry Miller: Throwing the Gauntlet

Already it should be clear that Henry Miller's prose is provocative, meaning he makes bold emphatic statements, striking analogies, and employs strong language--hyperbole, slang, profanity. Miller writes above about defecating, about the writer as undertaker, about spitting (spit appears on page two of *Tropic of Cancer* and page one of *Tropic of Capricorn*--the first time aimed at the face of Art, the second time at the face of God). He describes sex graphically, and just as graphically supports letting the world fall to pieces, perhaps even giving it a shove on its way. All of this unusual content strikes even the avid readers of Miller, for few other writers employ such language, while attributing the thoughts to a narrator the reader is expected to identify with, to admire.

Not every sentence, of course, is provocative. M. M. Bakhtin defines the novel "as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even a diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (262). Not only are there the various voices of characters in Miller's novels,¹⁴ but the narrator has a variety of voices. Trachtenberg notes that in contrast to French writer Louis-Ferdinand Céline,

¹⁴ Characters in *The Rosy Crucifixion* tend to sound like the Miller-figure; this is less true of the earlier works.

with whom Miller is often (and I think uncomprehendingly) compared, Miller "has striking moments of softness" ("History" 249), moments when he is sentimental, broken, or joyful.

Just why, then, does Miller write so provocatively? First, we can argue, negatively, that it surely did not help sell books, for there was twenty to thirty years lag-time between French publication and American publication of the "Paris books" in the early nineteen-sixties. Miller was by then seventy and had survived many lean years. Most of his works, published between 1940 and 1961, came out on small presses with limited distribution. New Directions, in 1939 a small and independent publishing house, brought out Miller's first American book, *The Cosmological Eye*, and many thereafter, though these books were often compilations of essays published in various journals rather than conceptually unified works. Other presses published *The World of Sex* (clandestinely), *Semblance of a Devoted Past*, and *The Colossus of Maroussi*, one of Miller's most celebrated books. The books Miller considered his major works, apart from *Colossus* and New Directions-published works like *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, were unpublishable except in France, where The Obelisk Press (later renamed The Olympia Press), which dealt almost exclusively in pornography, published them. These books could not be legally imported into English-speaking countries, though many were smuggled in. Certainly Miller could have benefited from a reputation as a banned author. On the other hand, the books available to an English-speaking audience, those mentioned above, differed substantially, in form and content, from the earlier, more radical works, and would serve only to mystify readers aware of his reputation rather than to help develop a significant body of readers.

If not to publish books and make a fortune, what other reasons might Miller have had to write so provocatively? To begin with, Miller claimed his "motives" for including sex and obscenity in his works went "far beyond sex" (*Remember* 287). George Bataille defines obscenity as "our name for the uneasiness which upsets the physical state associated with self-possession, with the possession of a recognized and stable individuality" (17-8). The uneasiness Bataille describes, which results in "disequilibrium" and calls into question one's "own existence" (31), or awakens one to the physical nature of existence, results from transgression. In Nietzschean terms, the individual transgresses, or is made to transgress, the boundary between the stable world of *forms* (the Apollonian) and enters into the unstable world of *becoming* (the Dionysian). Transgression leads to transformation of the self and the world as viewed by the individual self. Sex and death, specifically the disintegration which follows immediately upon death, are two of the primary sources of obscenity, and alluded to in Miller's declared focus on "what happens in the streets."

"It's purpose is to awaken," Miller writes of his use of obscenity, "to usher in a sense of reality" (*Remember* 287). Obscenity removes the lid from the metaphysical stew, as it were, to let us see and smell what is cooking, to provide glimpses of unadorned living. Through obscenity, Miller lifts the reader up out of the flow of common daily occurrences which pass by almost unnoticed, demanding the reader's attention, his or her awareness of so much of life that is hidden, repressed by the unconscious, by culture, by routine. Like a snow-dome shaken, the view of the world changes--perhaps only briefly, as a momentary insight, or possibly permanently.

The obscenity of Miller's works then, incorporated strategically rather than accidentally, constitutes yet another element of his oppositional stance, for without the

obscenity he would be at best *alternative*. But the obscenity is also another instance where Miller's failure, equally, shows itself. Though he perceives society's attitude toward sex as seriously flawed, he fails to observe that his own attitudes toward sex, but especially toward women and the sex roles of men and women, is culturally constructed. Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other*, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, and many other works, explore ways in which sexuality is gendered, desire is constructed, taboos created. While I do not necessarily fault Miller for not going to these lengths, to the degree that he does not recognize his own attitudes toward women are as problematic as the general attitude toward sex, we can see some limits to his own oppositional stance.

Apart from the sexual and the obscene, however, Miller's prose remains notably unsettling. The provocation can be related to Benjamin's conception of the storyteller. Benjamin writes:

The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks. (*Illuminations* 89)

Miller too seeks "amplitude," though in a somewhat different fashion than Benjamin's storyteller, by including in books what is usually left out--work and complaints against work, a very personal experience of sex as well as a generalized rage against the modern world. In this instance, Miller, as does Benjamin, follows the High Modernist notion of "making it new," which reaches back to the Romantics' desire to "lift the veil of familiarity," though for an Eliot the notion reaches even farther back to John Donne and George Herbert, and the so-called Metaphysical Poets, alternately praised and condemned for the uniting of two disparate images--the "metaphysical conceit."

Rather than simple reportage or a collection of facts, Miller's works usually proceed impressionistically, without the connecting links often supplied by narrators. Everything in a seemingly self-contained narrative is held together by explanatory links. The story told by Benjamin's storyteller, however, offers no such connecting links, no such final interpretation, which may be one reason such a story bears repeating. Information, for Benjamin, "lays claim to prompt verifiability" (89) and thus secures no grip on the imagination, engenders little or no contemplation on the part of the reader or listener for motivational purposes, and does not encourage the reader to make connections with other snippets of information. It encourages passive reading and passive experience.

Graeme Gilloch describes Benjamin's project in a way that parallels Benjamin's description of the storyteller, but further bears upon Miller's narrative structure as well Benjamin's apparent methodology in the *Passagenarbeit*, uniting quotes and fragments without the interpreting mediation of a narrator, presupposes "the disruption of established contexts and the juxtapositions of diverse elements in order to startle the reader" (116). The methodology is meant to "engender shock" (116) and to actively engage the reader in the construction of the meaning of the text and thus its relevance

Like the *storyteller* who presents events without providing definitive motives, thus forcing the listener to attempt to do so; and like Benjamin's collection of quotes and fragments without the guiding analysis of a narrative voice, requiring the reader to hypothesize the connection, Miller similarly engages his readers. Through his provocative prose, obscene, defiant, and hyperbolic, as well as his plotless scene-shifting, he forces readers to react: sometimes they reject aspects of the world they have thus far tolerated; sometimes they reject Miller. They can no longer passively

consume the text. Once awakened in this rarified atmosphere, in this world of decline and despair and joy and "cunts," the reader becomes an outsider, able to observe his or her daily world from a different perceptual angle. Miller does not expect that his works will simply make manifest a new vision, however. "The worst sin that can be committed against the artist," he writes, "is to take him at his word, to see in his work a fulfillment instead of an horizon" (*Cosmological* 168). His work is a call "To-Arms" rather than an "All-Clear," a challenge with only a suggestion of a solution.

Miller's inspiration for such provocative language derives at least in part from some of his most admired writers. François Rabelais, Nietzsche, and Spengler are all given to hyperbole, to blasphemous or nonconformist declarations, to the use of unorthodox images. M. M. Bakhtin, writing of the "Carnavalesque" in Rabelais, says:

It is necessary to destroy and rebuild the entire false picture of the world, to sunder the false hierarchical links between objects and ideas, to abolish the divisive ideational strata. It is necessary to liberate all these objects and permit them to enter into the free unions that are organic to them, no matter how monstrous these unions might seem from the point of view of ordinary, traditional associations. (169)

This description of the writer's task is also descriptive of the task of Nietzsche, of Spengler, and of Miller. The destruction Bakhtin writes of necessitates a voice prone to overstatement as well as sometimes grotesque imagery, which suggests the reader need not always take the writer strictly at his or her word. Bakhtin notes that in this destruction "the foremost device is Rabelaisian laughter--directly linked to the medieval genres of the clown, the rogue and fool" (170). Miller's works employ "Rabelaisian laughter" as well: exaggeration often functions satirically in his works, and he plays the role of the clown, the rogue and the fool in many of his major works. This laughter that Bakhtin foregrounds appears in "the crude, unmediated connections

between things that people otherwise seek to keep separate, in pharisaical error" (170): otherwise known as the obscene, as well as the Spenglerian desire to get beneath the facts to their signification.

This destructive Rabelaisian laughter is at the same time constructive. It is, to employ a Nietzschean image, once again tossing the dice, in hopes of happening on a better world. Nietzsche's Zarathustra likewise venerates destruction, seeing in it the seeds of rebirth: "I love the great despisers because they are the great reverers and arrows of longing for the other shore" (*Portable* 127). The flip-side of destruction (decay, defecation), as Miller suggests above, fosters creation (nourishment). Berman describes the provocative "voice" peculiar to both Marx and Nietzsche as a voice

distinctive and remarkable . . . not only [for] its breathless pace, its vibrant energy, its imaginative richness, but also its fast and drastic shifts in tone and inflection, its readiness to turn on itself, to question and negate all it has said, to transform itself into a great range of harmonic or dissonant voices, and to stretch itself beyond its capacities into an endlessly wider range, to express and grasp a world where everything is pregnant with its contrary This voice resonates at once with self-discovery and self-mockery, with self-delight and self-doubt. It is a voice that knows pain and dread, but believes in its power to come through. (23)

Berman's description of the multi-faceted voices of Marx and Nietzsche, voices which take their inspiration from a complex and contradictory world, describes Miller's as well. Like the dominating figure of nineteenth-century American poetry, Walt Whitman, Miller is not afraid of contradicting himself, nor of exposing himself, literally or figuratively, but only of being untrue to himself, to his experience.

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno view provocative language as a necessity. "When language becomes apologetic," they argue, "it is already corrupted, and it can neither be neutral nor practical in its essence There is only one

expression for the truth: that thought which denies injustice" (219). Certainly Horkheimer and Adorno refer to Hitler's Germany, to the complicity of silence that surrounded the Nazi rise, in Germany and elsewhere, and to the necessity of combatting Nazi "injustice." But they are also more generally addressing commitment, the requirement that people take clear, principled positions on issues, especially those that dramatically affect the future. The change the world has undergone due to industrialism comprises one such issue. New technologies as well as a capitalist system more than ever dominating countries greatly changed the way people lived, often for the worse despite pronouncements to the contrary. To return to Miller's earlier criticism of James Joyce, it becomes clear that a provocative prose, a challenging, oppositional prose--but a prose that is at the same time not mired in intellectual mystification--becomes a necessity for those who maintain there is something very wrong in the world, that it is somehow out of kilter and on the decline.

Raoul R. Ibargüen declares that Miller and Céline were the losers in the battle for whose version of modernism would prevail (489). Joyce, Eliot and the New Critics were the victors, advancing "the 'mythical method' that Eliot endorsed" (492), alluding to Greek, Roman and other mythologies in their works to provide, especially, depth, a sense of historic continuity to modern literature, and a certain amount of distance between the work and the society that produced it. Benjamin notes a conservative, superstitious element to mythology, asserting that it is a "nightmare" humanity has already once overcome (*Illuminations* 102). Miller, Céline, and others put forth "their own versions of literary modernity," but they were narrative rather than mythical--"burlesque, anecdotal, and digressive narratives of hyperbolic rage, elation

and boredom" (490).¹⁵ These narratives employed provocative language as a tool for engaging the readers' attention, for exposing the reader to a viewpoint quite other to that which he or she might normally be inclined, for more accurately mirroring the world. The New Critics spring from Eliot and Joyce and proffer "symbolic, ironic and mythic" textual exegesis (492) which purposefully restricts, even denies, any grounded political reading one might make, hence largely neutralizing these texts. As we have seen, Miller claims in the beginning of *Cancer* that his book "is a gob of spit in the face of Art [...] what have you" (2); because he and those like him lost the battle that was modernism, he still pays dearly for the insult and readers approach his texts unprepared at best, antagonistic at worst.¹⁶

Critics of Culture and Miller's Cultural Criticism

Despite the fact that Miller remains a very American writer, occasionally naïve and often hopeful, he is influenced almost as much by Europeans--Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, and others--as by Americans. Though it is not certain he ever read works by the Surrealists, their manifestoes contain some of the ideas, focussing on the

¹⁵ I do not believe Miller and Céline have a great deal in common beyond similar styles and general attitudes toward modernity. Miller answers despair with laughter, Céline with a wail of helplessness; Miller refuses to support either side in World War II, faulting all sides for an anti-life attitude, while Céline succumbs to nihilism, collaborating with the Nazis.

¹⁶Modernity/Modernism will be considered to range from the beginnings of industrialism, roughly the early years of the 1800s, reaching its peak between 1880-1930 in America. It is the time of "high capitalism," and results in artists, deeply divided, often vocally anti-modern while concerned with many of the same things the capitalists are: "novelty, innovation, the transformation of older forms . . . " (Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 304).

"marvelous" and scouring the psychic depths, for instance, that seem to guide Miller's writing.

Miller's first published works, perhaps because he was older, are a mixture of characteristics of writers of the end of the nineteenth century and the first thirty years of the twentieth century. His earliest American influences are writers Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, active especially in the first twenty years of the twentieth century, as well as later ones like John Dos Passos, writers whose influence is manifest in Miller's earliest, only recently published works.

In the years immediately following the stock market crash of 1929, it was popularly believed that the literature most characteristic of the previous decade was unpolitical, even decadent, more concerned with painting a portrait of the changing fashions of life than with commenting on those changes--and it was writers like Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Anderson, and others who were at the head of this movement, though not all truly correspond to such a description with consistency. The writers of the thirties, however, were much more overtly concerned with politics, many of them Marxists, some even joining the Communist Party. There is a certain amount of overlap, however, between writers from both decades. There were writers in the nineteen-twenties whose works exhibited "aesthetic dissent from the materialism and puritanism of contemporary American life" (Bradbury 80), among them Dos Passos, Fitzgerald, and Anderson. The novelists of the thirties, however, while flaunting their political engagement, were also engaged in a search for a new form, one that could "deal with the displacement, alienation, and deep unease generated by urban, technological, capitalist American life" (127). Dos Passos is probably nearest to Miller in that he bridges the twenties and thirties, demonstrates great concern for the

world around him, while embarking on a search for a more modern form. Dos Passos, however, still relies on the distancing technique of a narrator, and incorporates documentary-style techniques in *U.S.A.*, his major work of the thirties: He writes "Literature." Miller's search for form involves, instead, an eschewal of any obvious form, simply recording impressions seemingly as they happen, and an abandonment of chronology as well, simply describing one adventure after another and, in between, recounting memories or offering opinions, observations, and venting his rage. Miller attempts to remove all inhibitions, to include all experiences, however banal or "shocking," in order to get at the "truth." The apparent formlessness of it all, however, is part of the story--an existence demonstratively outside the expected bipolar structure of work-home, a life without a rigidly-defined plot.

Berman proposes that "to be fully modern is to be anti-modern" (13) because modern life has become so multi-faceted due to the impact of numerous novel forces, technological developments as well as the reverberations of a new economy, modern consumer capitalism. He writes, further, "Modern mankind found itself in the midst of a great absence [the death of God] and emptiness of values and yet, at the same time, a remarkable abundance of possibilities" (21). This new world was greatly lamented by conservative figures (Eliot) as well liberal figures (Fitzgerald). Miller, whose ideas are sometimes, perhaps unwittingly, Marxist on the one hand (redistribute the wealth) and then staunchly conservative on the other (the masses are just robots), offers something neither Eliot nor Fitzgerald, or even most of those associated with modernism, profess: Hope. Miller quite clearly believes the world could have become something other than it did and finds in that very belief a reason to be optimistic. He

tends to blame systems for the failure and thus rejects party politics in general, in favor of the individual, who can help bring the world back to life.

Miller often cites Emma Goldman as an influence, "the most important encounter of my life" he calls her in *The Cosmological Eye*, implicitly aligning himself with Anarchism. Miller then credits her with "open[ing] up the whole world of European culture" (368), more specifically, "European drama" (370), rather than "opening up" to him the philosophy of Anarchism. Like most or all Anarchists, however, Miller rejects systems, party politics, and any formal grouping which might enforce some sort of regulating behavior or which might inspire people to act in ways they might not normally act. He rarely projects a future, however, which would offer some specific, positive side to his rejection. Anarchists generally foresee "a self-regulated society of individuals and freely-formed groups" (Bottomore 18), and, in "Artist and Public," from *Remember to Remember*, Miller writes,

No man is a failure who lives up to the best that is in him. That the world does not follow suit means nothing. [...] No Utopia is realizable which demands that every one think and act alike. A Utopia is in essence always a dream of harmony, if not perfection. (414)

He looks toward a time when people do not control others, where people "live up to the best that is in them," as if that is a natural impulse. Miller's works, filled with criticism of the modern world and everything that he perceives as sustaining the system, encourage people to live outside these systems, outside their world.

To provide a framework for Miller's cultural criticism as well as to aid in clarifying his arguments, I will employ a number of current historians--many of whom have already been cited--as well as a group of philosophers whose stated goal was criticism of contemporary culture. Around the same time as Miller was putting the

final touches on *Tropic of Cancer* and seeing it published, Max Horkheimer in Frankfurt, Germany, was gathering together a group of scholars at the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (the Institute for Social Research), known popularly as the Frankfurt School. Similar to Miller, though he would not join a "school," these scholars operated outside the accepted paths, united in "the belief that formulating the negative in the epoch of transition was more meaningful than academic careers" (Horkheimer, "Foreword," xxv). They were, in short, committed to a radical questioning of society. According to Benjamin, who was associated but never a full-fledged member, the members of the Frankfurt School, though from various backgrounds, "converge[d] in a critique of bourgeois consciousness" (qtd. in Jay 292). The Frankfurt School philosophers took as one of the primary goals of their collective project a thorough critique of German and Western society.

The members of the Frankfurt School were critical of much of the western world, especially decrying its blind attachment to "reason,"¹⁷ the effects of which go well beyond science. The critiques put forth, almost simultaneously, by Miller and members of the Frankfurt School (especially Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin, and Herbert Marcuse) often overlap. For instance, Miller's critique of Hollywood in "The Golden Age" (from *The Cosmological Eye*) echoes that of Horkheimer and Adorno in "The Culture Industry" from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Marcuse in "The Affirmative Character of Culture" collected in *Negations*. All understand Hollywood as most often providing sheer escapism to the audience, hence implicitly supporting the current system, rather than using the new medium to challenge viewers and to

¹⁷ See for example Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* or Horkheimer's *Eclipse of Reason*.

effect social change. As I will demonstrate, the critiques of both Miller and the Frankfurt School serve to illuminate each other and, moreover, are still pertinent as we near the year two thousand.

To provide some literary points of comparison, I have examined the literary works of two French poets of the nineteenth century, Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud, in order to look at their cultural criticism. Both examine a world undergoing great change due to capitalism, a force that, similarly, made itself felt strongly on Miller's America. It is not clear how familiar Miller was with the work of Charles Baudelaire. In *Crazy Cock*, written between 1927 and 1930, the Miller-character mentions "talking about the poet Baudelaire" (106), though reductively and somewhat inaccurately as an example of decadence. Throughout the nineteen-thirties, Benjamin examined the affects of capitalism, and the concomitant rise of French department stores (forty years ahead of the American version), employing Baudelaire's poetry, *Les fleurs du mal* and *Le Spleen de Paris*, and Baudelaire's translation of Edgar Allen Poe's short story "The man of the crowd," as well as his art criticism, as a key to the culture. Many of Benjamin's conclusions agree with those reached by Miller about his own time period.

Miller seems to have been more familiar with the work of Rimbaud, to whom he devoted a book, *Time of the Assassins*. Still, even with Rimbaud it is not certain that Miller, who in 1949 contributed an introduction to a new edition of *Illuminations*, went beyond the biographies and actually read and grasped the works. In his book on Rimbaud, Miller uses Rimbaud primarily to understand himself. Their attitudes against the bourgeoisie, their wish to shock, and their lack of concern for strict

consistency unites them. Choices they made, for or against fighting, often were made on the same basis and, hence, provide rich points of comparison.

Works by Baudelaire, Rimbaud, the Frankfurt School theorists, Spengler, Nietzsche, as well as theorists of modernity will help to contextualize as well as to elaborate Miller's cultural criticism. Miller claimed his works were autobiography. If they constituted a mere recounting of events, however, they would be of little enough interest within American culture, let alone other cultures. Miller, though, connects his life with that of the culture he was raised in as well as the world he experienced. What I propose to examine in this study is his response to his world, meaning the West, America, New York City, Paris, consumer capitalism and advertising, war and industrialization, work, and other facets of a culture with which Miller stood in deep disagreement. Henry Miller was not a crank, nor was he a *littérateur* or a saint. Like most Modernists, Miller expresses distaste for the modern world; unlike them, however, he holds out hope for the future. Just as Charles Baudelaire did in Paris in the middle of the nineteenth century, Miller walked the streets of his world, observing it first-hand, and assessing it, in very personal and uninhibited terms, both loving and hating the world.

Chapter One / Cities of Disgust and Delight: New York City and Paris

"At this very moment, in every part of the world, people were dreaming or talking about New York. New York! What was it made people so damned silly about New York?" Tony Bring. *Crazy Cock* 44-5.

New York City and Paris: two cities that, as embodiments of western culture, the sites where everything of lasting importance happens, have attracted people from all over the world, sometimes as emigrants but more often as tourists. Even their names--Paris, New York City--inspire awe, a sense of the overwhelming, boasting the best as well as the worst modern civilization has to offer. Canadian writer Witold Rybczynski, in *City Life*, his study of North American cities, devotes much of the introductory chapter to a discussion of Paris as a metropolis that for many Americans exemplifies the ideal city, a city designed for people: with large and verdant parks, streets alive with history, stores located inside the communities they serve, buildings displaying sculpted facades that reward even casual glances from passersby, as well as magnificent, inspiring monuments. New York City, on the other hand, with its skyscrapers and Broadway and Wall Street, is the city where people amass their fortunes; for many, however, it constitutes an aesthetic horror with a hostile environment, where endurance rather than enjoyment of life is the order of the day.

Henry Miller lived in New York City, "grew up with [the] changing skyline" (Miller, *Cosmological*, 338), during the last years of the nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth, when the city experienced great changes--construction of more and more skyscrapers and the influx of new waves of immigration only the most obvious--before moving to Paris in 1930, where he was to live, on and off, for nearly ten years. French poet, essayist and art critic Charles Baudelaire, on the other hand, lived in Paris in the middle decades of the nineteenth

century, a witness to many of the great changes that city experienced, the destruction of old yet vital communities, the leveling of buildings that had stood for centuries, in order to make way for the new, wide boulevards. Paris underwent fundamental change at the hands of Baron von Haussmann and his army of laborers, such that Paris today still bears the stamp "which Haussmann gave it" (Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* [CB], 85).

What Walter Benjamin said of Charles Baudelaire, living in a city undergoing profound transformation, characterizes Henry Miller in New York City some eighty years later: "He was not pleased by his times nor could he deceive himself about them" ("Central Park" 35). Forced to return to America at the very end of 1939 by the onset in Europe of the Second World War, Miller embarked on a tour of America, late the following year, which resulted in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, a book critical of all things American but especially cities, where the mercantile spirit reigns supreme and people retain importance only for the role they play within the economy.

The brutality and ugliness Miller observes in America, in the way it treats so-called outsiders and in the cities it has built, has been a feature of American culture since Columbus. "Was not their precious new world reared on the destruction of the innocent, on rape and plunder and torture and devastation?" he questions in *Tropic of Capricorn* (287). The men who accompanied Christopher Columbus on his voyages east Miller describes as "a bunch of desperate, hopeless men," (*Cosmological* 181); rather than some Romantic notion of these men as adventurers or people of high moral integrity seeking asylum, they "were ignorant, superstitious and filled with greed" (181). These men and later generations of emigrants, for Miller, sewed violence in the soil of America. In his 1925 study of American history, *In the American Grain*,

Miller's contemporary William Carlos Williams declares, of "the orgy of blood which followed [the Columbian 'discovery' of the Americas], no man has written. We are the slaughterers. It is the tortured soul of our world" (41). The violence with which the Spanish began their conquest of this new land, Williams and Miller assert separately, remains a feature of the American psyche. The first permanent settlement founded in the "New World" began a process of colonization which entailed clearing the land of its native inhabitants, building cities and developing industries, and watching the two expand, gradually at first but with increasing rapidity over the years.

Williams, in a spirit similar to that which Miller would later adopt, depicts the Puritans as "the bane, not the staff" (66) of life. "In those little pips," Williams maintains, "a nadir, sure as the sun, was reached in which lay the character of the beginnings in North America" (63). The settlement of America was an act of imperialism and brutality, such as one finds historically--in empires assembled by the Romans, in the Far East (Hong Kong, India, and others) of the British, the African colonies of various European countries in the second half of the nineteenth century--where a land and a people were colonized. The *free* land the predominantly British and Dutch colonists settled had prior inhabitants and thus was not free at all. This fact later necessitated the creation of rationalizing myths like *manifest destiny* and *the frontier* in order to explain away the brutal and inhuman treatment of the indigenous populations at the hands of supposedly Christian beings (Jennings 321). "[N]o race was ever more ruthlessly wiped out than the American Indian," Miller writes. "I blush to think of our origins--our hands are steeped in blood and crime" (*Capricorn* 287). Such brutality flows, for Miller as for Williams, in the very veins of Americans, and continues to shape their behavior.

The Developing City

"John Winthrop," writes Leo Marx, "envisaged the colony the Puritans were about to establish as 'a city upon a hill'" (210). This city, though conceived as a paradise, evolved through human rather than, as the Puritans had anticipated, divine agency, and thus developed a history quite different from that foreseen by John Winthrop. Indeed, the city, as an exemplar of human creation, has been the site of remarkable social and technological changes, both for better and for worse.

Like everything else, cities have a history. They were usually not founded as "cities," did not simply spring into being fully-formed. In America, writes James Kunstler, "[u]ntil after the Revolution, few towns were worthy of the term *city*" (39). Across the Atlantic Ocean, in the "Old World," the situation was not much different. Though founded well before 52 B.C.E., the year it was attacked by the Romans (Favier 22), only in the sixteenth century was the population and territory of Paris finally large enough to necessitate a guidebook (P. Ferguson 38-9). With the escalation of capitalist industrialization in the early 1800s, however, cities in America and elsewhere grew much more quickly and quite differently than imagined in Winthrop's "city upon a hill." Small communities such as Chicago, fortuitously located on Lake Michigan and the convergence of several smaller rivers, received an influx of industry and people looking for work, and were transformed "overnight" from virtual back-water encampments to major centers of business (L. Marx 210).

It was not long before these early American cities suffered "the horror of industrialism" (Kunstler 39); among the attendant horrors were overpopulation, pollution of every kind (trash, human and animal feces, rotting animal carcasses), and street after street of face-less, unadorned buildings. While the first two problems were

largely resolved, though certainly not completely, the third still plagues most, perhaps all, American cities. Initially, there was little time for ornamentation, considered a luxury on the frontier, where protection from the elements as well as the need to produce profits constituted more pressing needs. Whereas a European city such as Paris might have buildings 800 years old, buildings designed to glorify God and the human spirit, and streets that since the sixteenth century had been ornamented just for the sake of decoration (Favier 184), in the New York City of 1831, the most active city in America was "a dismal place," a "hurriedly built place, which, combined with the lack of an architectural heritage, gave it a makeshift, insubstantial air" (Rybczynski 99). It suffered notably from haphazard growth, shoddy construction, and inadequate housing.

American writers have often written about the city but have seldom produced encomiums to its beauty. Miller notes the surprise exhibited by the French when they read American writers who "have worse things to say about their own country than any foreigner" (*Remember* xvii). Vincent McHugh's largely-forgotten classic *I Am Thinking of My Darling* provides, however, a conspicuous exception. In this 1943 novel, New York City is described appreciatively, the cosmopolitan aura sympathetically evoked. But even this work includes intimations that the city manifests marked faults: it takes a virus which intoxicates nearly the entire population of the city, rendering them uncharacteristically out-going and generous, for the narrator, Jim Rowan (who also happens to be an architect), to truly appreciate the city and to feel himself a true New Yorker. More often than not American cities are subject to censure, often as "a space of neutrality, . . . achieved by denying to the environment any value of its own" (Sennett, *Conscience*, 55). Few American writers

are attached to American cities the way certain French writers, André Breton and Louis Aragon for instance, are attached to Paris (White and White 1-2).

Early American writers, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Edgar Allen Poe, demonstrated a certain patriotism: though they condemned American cities, they believed European cities to be even worse (53). Melville, for instance, regards Liverpool with horror, describing the "indifference" with which Liverpoolians look on starving people in the streets (38). Liverpool and London are nightmarish (38); the American city, however, is only less so. Walt Whitman describes himself in "Starting from Paumonauk" as a "lover of populous pavements, / Dweller in Mannahatta my city" (*Leaves* 12). Where in his poetry Whitman attempted to unite a divided nation, through highlighting commonality as well as emphasizing the best features of America and Americans, in prose pieces such as "Democratic Vistas" he reveals a strong ambivalence toward the success of the American experiment. His journalism, similarly, often presents a bleak vision of the city that has little counterpart in his poetry. "Mobs and murderers appear to rule the hour," he declares. "The revolver rules, the revolver is triumphant" (qtd. in Reynolds 106). While Whitman's poetry, accentuating the good, may be read as wish-fulfillment, the journalism, more critical of New York City, reflects the day-to-day world he encountered. Later American writers such as Frank Norris, Upton Sinclair, and Theodore Dreiser present an even more equivocal response to the city, especially New York City and Chicago, then the second most populous city in America. Though they condemn the city, recognizing it as a divisive force (Bradbury 33), they often do not leave it and finally, like Winston Smith swooning over Big Brother, come to love it--only to later once again maintain their dislike (White and White 137).

Henry Miller's commonality with earlier American writers critical of the city consists in an analysis that revolves around the industrialization of the city and its effect upon the inhabitants. In opposition to these earlier writers, Miller registers a very personal vision of the nightmarish city, for he is not looking over a character's shoulder, describing and commenting on the scene; rather, he vehemently depicts the anger, disgust, fear and delight he personally experiences, recording the ways in which he perceives his life has been shaped by the city and the lines of thought inspired by what he sees. The reader is provided the opportunity to experience Miller's various sensations at first hand, as if unsynthesized.

Beginning with some of his earliest attempts at writing and continuing throughout most of his career as a writer, Miller consistently concerns himself with America, particularly the American city, of which New York City is unquestionably the epitome. Often his enjoyment of locales such as Paris, or an island off the coast of Greece, is set in opposition to his experience of New York City, which he depicts almost uniformly negatively even as he includes the joy he experiences there. In works written before his first published book, *Tropic of Cancer*, but only published within the last ten years, Miller has already targeted the American city. In *Crazy Cock*, written in the year prior to his 1930 relocation to Paris, he offers an encapsulated history and summary of the Greenwich Village section of New York City: "In the beginning were cow paths and the cow paths were all there was of the village. Today she sprawls out like a sick bitch debilitated by an attack of delirium tremens. Dreary. Greasy. Depressing" (14). Greenwich Village begins natural enough, as farm land, but ends a wreck, inhabited by a people corrupted by society, shaking with the "delirium tremens" of civilization: the corruption of the land and the

people occurring simultaneously. The city and its inhabitants make a whole--or a hole, negative space from which no one can escape, space upon which few leave positive marks.

The people who inhabit this rotting world, though, rouse Miller's interest and sympathy. A poignant description of the city dwellers who do the work of industry appears in an even earlier work, from 1925, one of Miller's *mezzotints*, a broadside of sorts printed on six-by-nine inch colored cardboard. In a piece entitled "...Dawn Travellers..." he argues,

No righteous God fashioned this bleak subway world in which the "Great Unwashed" scud before dawn. They look so weary, so utterly dejected, so futile. [...] No these monsters of despair, fashioned out of our industrial civilization, have yet to be portrayed. We need another Gustave Dore for this modern Inferno. (*Mezzotints* 21)

Miller evokes here the grey morning of the world of the modern factory worker living in a hell, displaying a concern for working men and women which reappears often in later works, most especially in *Tropic of Capricorn* and *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*.

A poem depicting the weariness of the waking worker, similar to that presented in Miller's *mezzotint*, appeared some sixty-five years earlier in a poem entitled "Le Crépuscule du matin" by Charles Baudelaire. There, too, the writer attempts to elicit a sense of "human distress and heart-break" by identifying Paris with workers in the modern city (Leakey 40). Baudelaire, though living in a different country and in a different era than Henry Miller, had a remarkably similar experience of the city, in his case Paris, and of the results of capitalism and urban expansion. Claude Pichois, in his biography of the poet, characterizes Baudelaire's Paris as "a society based on law-

of-the-jungle capitalism" (152), an accurate and perhaps even more justified description of New York City of the early 1900s.

As in America, in Europe there was an established history of writing about the city. Many French poets took Paris as their topic (Leakey 42), but Baudelaire differs from his contemporaries in that he does not attempt to distance himself from the city. While many poets of the mid-century, such as Théophile Gautier *et al*, subscribed to "l'art pour l'art," Baudelaire goes to the streets and writes about his experiences (Chambers, "Street," 254). Paris represents not just a setting for Baudelaire's poetry but a "complex background" against which he studies "the extraordinary range of often mysterious behavior" the city provokes (Leakey 42). Though other poets took Paris as their subject, Baudelaire is considered "its laureate," for he perceives in the city a network of "social forces" with both "a moral and a symbolic dimension" at the root of "mundane urban existence" (Sharpe, *Unreal Cities*, 39). William Chapman Sharpe compares Baudelaire to another poet of the city, this time London, arguing Baudelaire displays "a Blakean willingness to listen and hear, however unsettling the experience," the noise of the crowd and to study the variety of individuals, the "types"--the ragpicker and the prostitute, the flâneur and the dandy--who inhabit the street and become the topic of much discussion (56).

Both Miller and Baudelaire, then, take the city as one of the central subjects of their work. Miller, whose great topic was his life lived in New York City, and secondarily in Paris, continuously describes his reaction to this city and the surrounding country. Baudelaire, meanwhile, argues throughout "Le peintre de la vie moderne" [The Painter of Modern Life] that the true topic for the modern artist is not (as sometimes supposed by many of his contemporaries) the ancient but the modern

world, in which there is great beauty: "La modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable" [Modernity, it is the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, the one half of art, of which the other half is the eternal and the immutable](*Ecrits esthétiques* 372-73). He compares the modern artist's response to the city to that of the Romantic's response to nature, noting the similarity of "the 'vertige' experienced in a big city to that had in nature" (Hannoosh 176). The poems in *Les Fleurs du mal*, while they rarely address the city or its crowds directly, convey Baudelaire's experience of living in the city; the prose poems of *Le Spleen de Paris*, alternatively, contain explicit depictions of the city and city life.

Miller in New York and Paris in the period 1900-1945, and Baudelaire in the Paris of 1840-1864 share a number of sentiments, among which are a general dislike for the expanding city and for the consumer culture that developed in and around the city. These two men experience an alienation from the city, as well as from the culture of their respective eras. Baudelaire, allying himself with American writer Edgar Allen Poe (or Edgar Poe, as the French seem to prefer), best summarizes how his alienation, and later that of Miller's, will appear to readers of his works: "The time is not distant when it will be understood that a literature which refuses to make its way in brotherly concord with *science and philosophy* is a murderous and suicidal literature" (qtd. in Benjamin, *CB*, 43). Artists critical of their own era, of prominent features such as glitzy lighting on buildings, face not an indifferent audience but potentially a hostile audience, for their works will make readers and/or viewers uncomfortable and rouse antagonisms.

Acknowledging Differences

Certain differences between these two writers must be noted at the outset, firstly, the different genres through which they approach the writing task. As we will see, Miller, in his novels, short stories, and essays,¹ makes what may amount to sociological asides when describing the city; Baudelaire is much more fragmentary in his descriptions, and allegorical in his responses to the ever-changing Parisian landscape, since much of his work is poetry, often sonnets. That the world of the modern is fragmented, however, is a theme and an aesthetic principle of much literature of the late nineteenth century and of the twentieth century, perhaps culminating in such works as T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* or, much later, William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* and the cut-up novels. In Baudelaire's poetry, especially in what Ross Chambers has called his "street poetry," the poet reveals "a disconnectedness of experience which, since Marx, we have learned to call alienation" (Chambers 244). Miller's plotless novels demonstrate that, as do many of his generation, he shares that alienation.

Next, though Miller also at times deplores the ugliness of certain features of Paris, especially the most recent additions, he venerates a city Baudelaire felt "bound" to by his hate, a trait often said to be typical of Parisians (Pichois 258), much as hatred of New York City may be a feature frequently ascribed to New Yorkers. Miller's approval of Paris, however, is not one-hundred percent, nor is it based solely on the physical city. Rather, Miller's commendation is heightened by the Parisian attitude toward life, a sense that pleasure in the present has importance and need not

¹ Miller's works tend to resist easy categorization. For instance, they mix autobiography, fiction, philosophy, and mysticism.

be continually deferred, a quite different attitude from that found in a puritanical, work- and success-oriented America.

These two writers are obviously also active at different times; however, the city of Paris in 1930, though it may have been modernized technologically, still resembles its counterpart from eighty years earlier enough for a philosopher such as Walter Benjamin to explain the present through a constellation of enduring connections with the past. Moreover, each era is characterized by great change in relatively short periods of time. The two writers approach the problem of describing the experience of modern life and realize current language is inadequate. Even in the piece cited above, "...Dawn Travellers...", Miller calls for a new vision and a new approach to depicting the modern world. In order to represent modern experience, Miller turns from self-consciously literary novels to novels without plot and without apparent restraint, producing texts often difficult to classify, in order to incorporate the numerous asides that could sometimes stand alone, employing a language characterized by obscenity and verbal pyrotechnics.

Baudelaire, too, realized he had to develop "a new, comprehensive urban aesthetic" in order to "take in 'tous les hôpitaux et . . . tous les palais'" [all the hospitals and . . . all the palaces] (Sharpe 39). The city of Paris had undergone such great change that it "brought traditional models of interpretation into question" so that Baudelaire was forced to fashion what Patricia Ferguson calls a "new literature of articulation" (117). Baudelaire moves away from objective, factual realism to "cruel realism . . . where the most brutally physical details encompass the most subtle metaphysical reflections" (Lombardo 152). Patrizia Lombardo provides as example the French verb "hurlait" (to scream), which is attributed to the street in "À une passante"

[To a (female) Passerby], which transforms the street into a troubling site of violence, "dehumanizing the human voice, disfiguring architectural structures" (153).

Furthermore, that the verb is in the *imparfait*, the imperfect tense, indicates that the "screaming" began at some indefinite point in the past and suggests the deforming action is prolonged rather than of a relatively brief duration. Baudelaire's poem "Correspondances" offers a sort of aesthetic manifesto, similar to those later produced in great numbers by the French Surrealists and other avant-garde groups (the Italian Futurists, for instance) in the first four decades of the twentieth century, explaining that the verbs and adjectives descriptive of the various senses must be exchanged (an technique termed "synesthesia") in order to provide a more full and accurate depiction of modern life.

These two writers, Henry Miller and Charles Baudelaire, despite important differences, are more alike than not in their responses to their respective worlds. Though not contemporaries, the worlds they live in, the problems they face and the way they choose to face them, contain enough similarities that the differences between them are, generally, instructive.

Defining the City

Though it is a task seldom attempted by writers-on-the-city (there is for instance no definition of "city" in James Kunstler's book on the American city- and town-scape), it is essential to attempt the difficult job of defining, or at least sketching an outline of, what is meant when one uses the word "city." Christopher Prendergast typifies the difficulties inherent in defining "city-ness" when he examines the assumption underlying the works of Honoré de Balzac and his contemporaries: the

city "is what goes without saying, either too obvious or too complex for anything other than the knowledge or weary self-evidence of tautological statement" (179). Similar to the cliché "If you have to ask how much it costs, you can't afford it," either you know what a city is or you've never been in one, the implication being that words alone cannot adequately define a city, that it must be experienced.

However, certain characteristics can be compiled that add up to "city-ness." Cities, for instance, are generally associated with "concentrations of people" (Rybczynski 36). Still, as Rybczynski himself acknowledges, this is vague. Throughout history, various population densities have been considered sufficient for the designation *city*: anywhere between three hundred and three thousand people or more has been considered adequate (36-7). Walled French cities of the middle ages, with populations between two to three thousand people, "functioned like modern neighborhoods" (37) rather than cities, intimating the inhabitants knew each other and were typically familiar with all corners of the city, which were easily if not always safely accessible. Modern, industrialized cities, however, are generally considered places where it is impossible for one person to know everybody. Friedrich Engels, in an early, proto-sociological work entitled *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, describes people in London passing "by one another as though they had nothing in common, nothing to do with one another, and their only agreement is the tacit one, that each keep to his own side of the pavement"; people tend to become alienated from one another due to the sheer size of the population of a modern, capitalist city (69).

The notion of "city-ness," then, has changed under capitalism, or, more accurately, it has expanded, both in population and territory. Though Engels, writing

in 1844, refers to London--inaccurately--as a "town,"² he describes the capitalist city as a place "where a man may wander for hours together without reaching the beginning of the end, without meeting the slightest hint which could lead to the inference that there is open country within reach . . ." (68). The city has grown to such proportions that it has forced nature to retreat, walling itself in with factories and tenements rather than the bricks that characterized so many medieval European cities.

Another characteristic of cities is that they are usually deemed "self-sufficient" (39); people bring their wares to the city rather than representatives of the city going to the countryside to fetch what the city requires. Villagers generally travelled to the city on a regular basis to sell their hand-made wares or home-grown products and to purchase at least some household necessities. The city, then, functions as a magnet, attracting what it needs--raw materials, products, and workers--while producing finished goods that will induce repeated visits from those in the surrounding countryside and beyond.

By the nineteenth century, cities were generally recognized to be distinguished by "industrial employment, access to power sources (steam, gas, and, eventually, electricity), pollution, literacy, technological innovation, unemployment, social reform" (Rybczynski 49). The city of the twentieth century, though still an economic center, is less easily defined, for now people often live outside these centers but commute in on a daily basis, to work and/or shop, thus making the split between city and town or city and village much more fluid. In fact, expanding cities like Paris and New York City

² Engels describes London, within the same paragraph, as "the commercial capital of the world" (68), which should confirm the label of "city."

have simply incorporated some villages, what we might today call "suburbs," that once lay outside the city perimeter.

Importantly, cities have often been the seat of power. For centuries, Paris was home to the French monarchy and, when Louis XIV decided Paris was becoming too unruly and unpredictable, he transferred his throne to Versailles, a village not too distant from Paris. In Germany, which was at best a coalition of sovereigns rather than a united country until 1871, princes and dukes built their castles in the principal cities, *die hauptstadten*, of their domains. With capitalist industrialization, large populations in cities signified more than large armies for the military. Again describing London, Engels writes, "this heaping together of two and a half millions of human beings at one point, has multiplied the power of this two and a half millions a hundredfold" (68). Power, now economic as well as military, concentrated and organized, is reflected in the opulent homes of the rulers as well as in the sheer volume of products a city produces and, especially, exports.

The reason few writers attempt to define "city-ness" is clear: the city has become a semanticist's nightmare. What constitutes "city-ness" constantly changes, as populations grow, technologies evolve, and events occur that offer populations different possibilities for social organization hence different power structures. However, the description of the nineteenth century city (with the exception of some features--access to electricity and literacy--which are widely available in the West) as a capitalist-industrial, thus political, center will suffice, without attaching a specific, and arbitrary, number for population concentration, while still recognizing that the city requires a population sufficient to operate its political and economic machinery.

Beneficial Aspects to Cities

It is appropriate to note, before exploring critiques of the city put forth by Miller and Baudelaire, that cities clearly do not simply represent social evils that should be wiped off the face of the earth--and that neither writer assumes such a one-dimensional position. Leo Marx notes another characteristic of "city-ness" is that in cities we generally find culture and the institutions that both support and inspire it, "universities, libraries, theaters, museums, galleries, publishers, printers--almost invariably have been located in cities" (211). Cities also offer individuals a chance to recreate themselves, since anonymity, found in the crowds of cities, allows them the requisite space. Cities, then, represent a site of creation.

Furthermore, though today we sometimes consider cities to be almost faceless (Kunstler tellingly entitled his critique of the American landscape *The Geography of Nowhere*), cities at least at one time manifested a semblance of identity "that indicated that at least some personality flourished" (Goldfield and Brownell 193), though even in the nineteenth century American cities and culture "demonstrated a startling tendency toward a far-flung homogeneity" (Rybczynski 112), or what Richard Sennett has called, in *The Conscience of the Eye*, "neutrality." Goldfield and Brownell, in a book often highly critical of cities, agree with Leo Marx "that only a city could support such a variety of architecture, peoples, shops, gardens . . . that lent a special character to that particular city" (193). The authors provide the example of a "well-travelled gentleman" of the mid-1800s who could tell the difference between New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington D.C., although adding that "each [city] borrowed each other's innovations with impunity" (193). "A visitor," they assert, "could indeed tell whether he or she was in Chicago or Mobile, though both had

gridiron streets, new urban parks, and a dozen other characteristics in common" (193). These characteristics included a variety of improvements so that by the end of the century the city was more aesthetically pleasing, as well as a healthier place to live, than it had been at the beginning of the century (189). These improvements were often shared characteristics--"Some streets were paved, gas-lighting adorned the thoroughfares, sewer systems flushed many city streets" (189), and thus cities for a brief period in the late nineteenth century offered inhabitants health benefits not found in smaller towns or in the countryside. Such benefits were, however, disproportionately located in regions where the middle and upper classes lived.

Henry Miller's writings on the city reveal his experience of the city as anything but one-dimensional. Like many of his modernist contemporaries, as well as those who came before him, Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson, for example, Miller's reaction to the modern city can best be described as ambivalent. He roundly condemns the city, as we will soon see, and yet takes great inspiration and joy from the city. It is a text he returns to repeatedly, finding it endlessly stimulating, endlessly frustrating.

Mid-Century Paris, America, and City Planning

Baudelaire's Paris was the hub of French capitalism. The Paris of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, writes Susan Buck-Morss in her study of Benjamin's Paris Arcades project, *The Dialectic of Seeing*, stood "at the bursting point of unprecedented material abundance" (178). A depression between the years 1846 and 1851 forced many peasants to leave their villages for the city, especially Paris, in search of work (Wright 179). The Paris they entered provided a home to "Europe's most highly centralised government," and was, as well, a frequent site of "experimental revolution" (Collier

25), revolutions having occurred there at least three times (1789, 1830, 1848) in the previous sixty years. It was the era of the Paris Arcades, precursors to modern department stores, and of Haussmannization, that traumatic transformation of the familiar historic Paris into modern Paris with "uniform facades" and long, wide boulevards (P. Ferguson 118). This transformation of Paris left many Parisians, born and raised in the old Paris, bewildered, an experience Baudelaire relates in his poem "Le Cygne." A similar occurrence befell citizens of American cities after the Civil War, due to increasing industrialization (Trachtenberg 115), an exodus of people from the country to the city analogous to that experienced in France, and further waves of immigrants from various corners of the world.

Many old European cities, such as Paris, can be described as organic, meaning they were founded and grew as people arrived and built their own communities to fit their needs. Over time, various sections were "gradually knitted together" and a city took shape (Rybczynski 46). Little city planning, beyond that dictated by geographical circumstances (the Seine for instance), was initially involved. The Romans usually imposed a grid layout in the center, but often left the peripheries to develop for themselves (Favier 163-64), such that by the Middle Ages Paris was characterized by the lack of a simple passage across the city, due to the narrow width of the streets, usually only one or two meters wide (167). "Saint-Denis, called in 1310 'the largest street in Paris,' was only six meters wide" (167). Later, management of growth and expansion became a practical necessity. Paris has a history of city planning, dating back to the period when French kings first consolidated power, planning that has consistently involved "an aesthetic vision" (Rybczynski 24), though certainly not all "visions" have been considered equally pleasing.

As opposed to the organic design of most European cities, many cities in America were designed solely on the grid pattern, which involved dividing land into square-shaped, identically-sized parcels for easy sale. Their grids, imposed upon terrains "as a weapon to be used against environmental character" (Sennett, *Conscience*, 52), ignored natural features, occasionally to the detriment of the city. For example, the grid that Manhattan was laid out in had deleterious effects upon the water table (53). A further liability of the grid pattern as a foundation for city design, however, is that it fosters a certain attitude toward the land constituting the city, one foreign to many Europeans³: "the city as 'real estate' [*property*] rather than as communal space" (Trachtenberg 116). Laying out a city in a grid pattern often had the effect of producing cities designed not for people but for profit, to provide quick financial returns to investors with a minimum of risk and initial outlay. The use of each plot of land was left to the owner's discretion, even if at odds with what surrounded it. A factory, for instance, producing a great deal of smoke, noise, and waste might be built near houses. Moreover, no one ensured that the inhabitants of the grid-city had some place to meet or to enjoy leisure time. Grid cities, again, did not arise with America; they had precedents in ancient Egypt and Rome. But where this design once had spread out from a center and fostered complexity, in America the grid served "to deny that complexity and difference existed in the environment" (Sennett 48), and, furthermore, provided little or no basis for the organization of communal life, assured in earlier versions.

³ I would argue, however, that one result of the "Americanisation" of Europe and, indeed, the world is just such a change in attitude toward the land. In Europe, we are beginning to see full-blown suburbs executed in the American style.

Citing examples of what he terms "the chessboard form" in many previous cultures on the verge of decline, Babylon and Tenochtitlàn for example, Oswald Spengler, in an argument Miller will appropriate, rates these grid-based cities "soulless," perceiving in them signs of the decay of civilization itself (248). While some might perceive the sinister specter of socialism or communism in the concept of overseers for city planning, such planning "also reflects human ambitions and desires": the desires of French kings, for instance, to transform Paris from a small, dingy medieval city into an appropriately ornate seat for the monarchy (Rybczynski 127). Architect Louis Sullivan argued repeatedly that architects should seek to evoke the spirit of the citizens of a region or country in their buildings, rather than adopt styles wholesale from other countries. Sullivan encourages his readers to read everything, to go beyond the printed page and to read landscapes. When he studies the American cityscape, what he reads there, writes Sullivan, is that

[t]his Architecture shows no love of Nature--you despise Nature. In it is no joy of living--you know not what the fullness of life signifies--you are unhappy, fevered and perturbed. In these buildings the Dollar is vulgarly exalted--and the Dollar you place above Man. You adore it twenty-four hours each day: it is your God! (187)⁴

America, precisely because it has skewed values, as exemplified in its cities, has ceased for Sullivan to be a truly creative place, the people half-dead.

Lacking public space and buildings of anything more than use-value, a city designed on the grid pattern represents "surveying rather than town planning," the basic benefit being "simplicity and speed of execution" (Rybczynski 69). Since large parts of American cities are in the hands of private individuals and no one is charged

⁴ I have preserved Sullivan's idiosyncratic capitalization and punctuation wherever I have quoted him.

with providing an aesthetic plan for the city, some features of cities simply reflect the outcome of "idiosyncratic decisions": what results is not so much a city as a jumble (30).⁵ In the United States, the absolute freedom of the individual appears to be more important than imbuing a city with a sense of community. Laissez-faire attitudes toward property ownership, the belief that owners can do whatever they please with their property, encourages them to attempt to make as much profit as possible off land, whether to the benefit or detriment of the community at large. In such an atmosphere, notes Lewis Mumford in his study *The City in History*, owners endeavored "to utilize every square foot of rentable space" even when the land was designated for "private use and not . . . sheer pecuniary exploitation" (428). Trying to crowd as much as possible onto a parcel of land, however, is not as fiscally promising as it may at first appear, because it does not necessarily follow that immediate profits will be maximized, "nor is [the property] likely to remain sound and attractive enough to ensure profitable exploitation" over a stretch of many years (428). It has long been assumed by Americans that free enterprise automatically looks to all needs, provides for all wants, without requiring the guiding hand of any person or persons: American cities often provide evidence to the contrary.

While Haussmann was roundly criticized by many of his contemporaries for his renovation of Paris during his reign as Napoleon III's prefect for Paris, Howard Saalman argues that both Haussmann and Napoleon III had great plans for Paris,

⁵ *Zoning and Planning* are two different issues. Zoning is more passive, merely defining (often arbitrarily) what may or may not be done with a certain piece of land (residential, business), loosely based on features of the land, without providing a detailed vision of the city. Planning determines the needs of the inhabitants and seeks to satisfy them when completing a design of the city.

intending "to improve the city, not destroy it" (114), though one does not preclude the other.⁶ Much was torn down--"most of the area between *Les Halles* and *le Marais* which during the July Monarchy had been the cite of large insurrections and the erection of barricades," along with a number of streets on the Left Bank that had served as a center for "student agitation" (Favier 210)--to roll out the new, wide boulevards that now seem so identifiably Parisian. Still, adjacent to these boulevards remained "the tightly knit, highly organic, and lively fabric of the old town" (Saalman 114). Paris, though permanently altered--industries and workers had largely been forced to the outskirts of the city (Marchand 128)--was still Paris.

James Kunstler is a much less forgiving observer than Saalman. In his view, Modernity, under the influence of capitalism, "dedicated itself to the worship of machines, to sweeping away all architectural history, all romantic impulses and to jamming all human aspiration into a plain box" (Kunstler 57). Though speaking specifically of America, Kunstler's statement is true, in part, of Paris during the period of Haussmannization, for Haussmann, after demolishing blocks of old Paris, proudly labelled himself an "*artiste démolisseur*" (Benjamin, *CB*, 174). Certainly not everyone was pleased with the new Paris, as we will see. But never "in their wildest dreams of demolition," Saalman asserts, did either Napoleon III or Haussmann consider tearing "down all of old Paris in order to rebuild it anew" (114), a project Le Corbusier would later suggest. In those charged with expanding the city of Paris, or renovating sections so that needs of certain of its citizens could be met, there was the desire to enhance

⁶ Implicit in most accounts of Haussmannization is that the city is "improved" for the bourgeois class but "ruined" for the working class, whose communities most often fell foul of Haussmann's boulevards.

Paris, to make it a better city to live in, to facilitate circulation of traffic, but not at the cost of divorcing it from its past.⁷ Benjamin has pointed out a French propensity, regarding construction in cities, one that critics of American cities usually find lacking in their own cities: "the tendency . . . to ennoble technical exigencies with artistic aims" (*CB* 173). American cities, and those people charged with designing or expanding them, have generally been "bottom-line" fixated, with profits rather than aesthetics the most important if not the sole measure of success.

In a behavior pattern that continues to characterize America, but has been particularly prominent since the end of the Civil War, when old buildings were demolished in America, more often than not what went up in their place were usually "new buildings of a different kind" (Trachtenberg 118), thus tending to make of the old city a completely new entity with very little or no connection to its past. In Paris, overseers almost uniformly ensured that no such transformations occurred. Even during the height of Haussmannization, a committee "exercised a harmonizing influence on individual buildings" to ensure a certain cohesiveness in the city landscape (Rybczynski 152n). Plus, Haussmann's architects, attentive to the history of the city, "favored the classical style" (152n) so that, as Anthony Sutcliffe notes in *Paris: An Architectural History*, "the result was a classical architecture for the industrial era rather than an industrial architecture" (qtd. in Rybczynski 152n).

⁷ Benjamin and many others have noted the political dimension to Haussmann's renovations, arguing the wide boulevards were intended to prevent barricades, and the destruction of bohemian neighborhoods, such as the old Carrousel, represented another attack on disruptive elements. If there were such a political dimension to the renovations, the rise of Paris Commune in 1871 demonstrates its failure.

Hausmannization notwithstanding, expansion of Paris has often occurred with as little demolition as possible. Henry IV's projects for Paris, in the early seventeenth century, "involved no extensive demolition whatever" (Saalman 35); the same is true of Louis XIV's schemes at the end of the same century (41). When renovation of Paris occurred under the Restoration, in the early nineteenth century, of the 687 houses demolished, 404 came down because they were dilapidated and 283 because they stood in the way of the planned reorganization of the city (Favier 197). But when the first railroads were built in central France in the eighteen-thirties and -forties, they did not penetrate Paris proper: "No one dreamed," writes Saalman, "of cutting a passage for these iron roads into the heart of the city," not merely for the demolition it would involve but also for the resulting pollution and congestion (44-5). Napoleon III and Baron von Haussmann, of course, reversed that predilection against destruction, levelling entire sections of old Paris, here and there, and bringing the railroad into the heart of the city. However, even with such large scale change, Paris and other European cities, still "retained a residue of earlier stages" (Trachtenberg 115). "In America," writes Henry Miller,

though there are vestiges [of the past], they are effaced, wiped out of the consciousness, trampled upon, obliterated, nullified by the new. The new is, from day to day, a moth which eats into the fabric of life, leaving nothing finally but a great hole. (*Capricorn* 217)

Worship of the new has consistently guided city-building in America, but that same worship of the new, rather than a search for consistent and distinctively American style, results in transparent or "neutral" cities. Robert Twambly reports that of the more than 190 buildings Louis Sullivan designed and built, between 1879 and 1922, only 50 remained in 1987 (xi). What is sometimes called character, distinguishing

features of a city, retreats as the past is effaced. Most American cities lack "old towns" which serve "as a visible memory" or reminder of the city's history (Trachtenberg 115). Rybczynski acknowledges that the markers of the past are often "impatiently discarded," but optimistically argues that all this tearing down and building up is "evidence of a constant striving to correct and improve, of an attempt to finally get it right" (34), suggesting that "striving" alone, however blind or schizophrenic, is enough. In 1908, Sullivan condemns American architecture arguing, *"we neither do things right, inquire how to do things right, see things right, nor attend, nor reflect"* (197), asserting his contention that Americans lack the patience that could result in wisdom, hence in cities that could rival the best Europe has to offer.

When expansion of American cities occurred, construction often took place on the outskirts of cities, where cheaper acreage was often available, rather than in the center where land remained a limited commodity and was thus more expensive. Rather than utilizing available buildings in the city center, many businesses opted to locate themselves on the outskirts where rents were lower. Thus the American city, by the early twentieth century, "was vital and dynamic on its fringe, and often decaying in its core" (Goldfield and Brownell 304). Responsibility for social services as well as city planning were "divided among a number of autonomous municipalities" (304) whose attempts to improve the city were not coordinated. Similar to what some Parisians experienced during Haussmannization, the American city, in a rush of change, was no longer recognizable "to those who had resided there for only a generation" (308). Miller understands America as a place "where things grow so fast and so large over night" (*Aller Retour* 18), buildings popping up like pimples, change more or less unthinkingly signifying "progress."

Neighborhoods, too, change swiftly: the population of Miller's beloved Williamsburg, a region of Brooklyn, was completely transformed between 1890-1914 due to an influx of Jewish immigrants (R. Ferguson 13); Miller cites, several decades later, the slums on the south side of Chicago, where former mansions of the rich were divided into apartments and inhabited by working class black people (*Nightmare* 52). The modern American city was gradually "becoming more spatially divided by economic status," the wealthy living in ever-greater opulence while for the poor "the burdens of poverty" yielded greater misery (Goldfield and Brownell 149). At the same time, the wealthy and near-wealthy began to move to the outskirts of town (210), finding there more space and greater safety. No city planners attempted to channel the growth involved in this outpouring from the city center, until the nineteen-sixties when the city centers were at last considered sites for "urban renewal."

Where Paris grew along with the environment, only much later experiencing the imposition of grand designs that affected some or all corners of Paris, American cities laid out in grids grew haphazardly, away from city centers where these existed. Where Paris remained Paris, American cities often lost whatever character they had once possessed and became "neutralized." Marshall Berman discusses the influence of a self-proclaimed son of Haussmann, Robert Moses, who transformed New York City between the nineteen-twenties and the nineteen-sixties. At first his projects, according to Berman, improved the city, for the most part, removing refuse piles, improving traffic circulation, providing beaches. But later, his projects grew in size and destructiveness, such that a highway through the Bronx in the nineteen-fifties, which could have been run around the neighborhood, effectively destroyed the communities

and businesses there, creating a wasteland (367-68). Not even Haussmann's destruction left such lingering devastation.

***Flânerie, Inspiration, and Exile: City Streets and Crowds*⁸**

Both writers acquired knowledge of their respective cities directly on the streets. For Miller and Baudelaire, this consciousness was arrived at through *flânerie*: through walking the streets of a city and observing, moving as it were instinctually, in order to gain knowledge and understanding of the city (Blanchard 73-4). *Flâneurs* thus can be divided into two groups, those "who merely experience it" and those "who understand the city"; experience followed by understanding is the goal for the "highest" (P. Ferguson 90).

Miller, while trying to make sense of his world, complains Americans in general "refuse to look facts in the face, or rather, to look behind the facts for the reality which animates them" (*Remember* 323). Facts do not in and of themselves produce knowledge; it is the ordering of facts and gaining insight into the reality, or perhaps structure of forces, behind them that constitutes knowledge. Sullivan, in a 1906 essay, draws a correlation Miller will later take up, between the American acceptance of dismal cities and their unwillingness to "draw aside a word-mask to see . . . the countenance of reality which it may both reveal and conceal" (191). Much in late capitalist western culture must be interrogated because so often words attached to

⁸ An assumption in this section is *flâneurs* were male. For an essay on the female *flâneurie* see Janet Wolff's "The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity" in *The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin*, Andrew Benjamin, ed., New York: Routledge, 1989.

facts, to movements, to actions and objects function as labels which short-circuit thought. Horkheimer and Adorno write,

Terms themselves become impenetrable; they obtain a striking force, a power of adhesion and repulsion which makes them like their extreme opposite, incantations. They come to be a kind of trick. [...] The layer of experience which created the words for their speakers has been removed; in this swift appropriation language acquires the coldness which until now it had only on billboards and in the advertisement columns of newspapers. (164-66)

Language often contains currents of propaganda, functioning to obscure issues through implicit assertions and simplifications. Americans in Miller's view remain, for the most part, uncritical, blind to what they see on the streets, accepting what should not be accepted. The writer-*flâneur* attempts to reunite his world with experience as he lives it, to elude as much as possible the meanings daily projected upon him and his world.

Roaming the city on foot, hence, should not necessarily be mistaken for aimless wandering, though Benjamin contends writer-*flâneurs* "have traversed the city absently, as it were, lost in thought or worry" (CB 69). He further asserts an important characteristic in Baudelaire was his "absent-mindedness" (CB 69). For "absent-minded,"⁹ however, I would substitute "preoccupied": Baudelaire, on many of his walks, was absorbed in his poetry, his essays, his financial worries, his mistress(es), or his troubled relationship with his mother--Miller, as we will see, shared similar obsessions--but he was not oblivious to his surroundings. The importance of this distinction, between *preoccupied* and *absent-minded*, lays in the fact that both enjoyed a heightened, rather than diminished, awareness of their surroundings due to their

⁹ The German word "abwesend" is used by Benjamin and accurately translated by Harry Zohn.

overwrought states. They would imprint their moods on the passing architecture, window displays, and faces, and derive associations, arrest impressions and freeze them in the moment. Hence, Benjamin's assertion that *flâneurs* have not drawn the "revealing presentations of the city" constitutes a half-truth. The traditional *flâneur* may not have been a writer, but writers, like Miller and Baudelaire, who have layed the city bare, were also *flâneurs*: people who knew their city, who had internalized the city through direct and thorough contact with it.

In such a way, the writer-*flâneur* also differs from many analysts of conditions in the city, who tend to remain aloof from the object of study. While reporting he knew Manchester "as intimately as my own native town" (83), Engels, in his study of working class conditions in Manchester and elsewhere in England, repeatedly decries the seemingly willed blindness of those entrusted with examining working class conditions. They have not seen working class neighborhoods, nor the dwellings these people inhabit, nor the factories they work in--and yet they file their reports, documents that will do little or nothing to improve the conditions of the working class. Moreover, those who do penetrate these regions often cannot divest themselves of even the most blatant of class prejudices and, thus, tend to blame the working class itself for the misery rather than the system. The writer-*flâneur*, in contrast, studies his subject personally and opens himself to that subject, struggling to imaginatively cross class boundaries, attempting to function as medium before interpreter, witness before judge. Further, he believes he stands outside the system that so many must bolster for fear of losing all; his detachment, pretended or otherwise, allows him insights that might escape others.

For the *flâneur*, familiar with the reality behind the facts of the streets, the street is "an interior" where he is "at home" (Benjamin, *CB*, 37). Signs, shop windows, advertisements, architecture and architectural anomalies "are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to a bourgeois in his salon" (37). Benjamin notes that the *flâneur* was at times an "unwilling detective," but that such ventures were a benefit for "it accredits his idleness" (40-1). *Flânerie* requires an active intelligence searching out inspiration in the city, a point of entry from which to explore the experience of living in a specific moment and to begin the process of translating the moment into words: Baudelaire depicts the writer-*flâneur* traversing the city, "Trébuchant sur les mots comme sur les pavés" [Tripping over words as over the cobblestones] ("Le Soleil, *FM*, 92).

The *flâneur*, as a type, was "a distinctive feature of modern Paris" (P. Ferguson 90) during the first half of the nineteenth century, then fading out as a discernable figure sometime after the middle of the century, with the rise of the modern department store, which replaced the *passages* that had served as a popular attraction for *flâneurs*.¹⁰ In an article on Realism and Walter Benjamin, John Rignall regards the *flâneur* as an "overdetermined figure," the result of too many studies and of too many depictions in nineteenth century literature (113). However, a general portrait should include that the *flâneur* was usually a man of private means, though not always of great wealth, such that working for a living was not an absolute requirement. Thus there is in the *flâneur* a "lack of identification" with the cityscape surrounding him

¹⁰ Benjamin suggests as much when he writes of the department store as a sign of the "interior's decay," *CB*, 54. For more on the *passages* and department stores, see Chapter Two.

(Blanchard 91). He stands on the "margin," neither a member of the bourgeois class, from which he often originated, nor a worker, drawing inspiration from the streets (Benjamin, *CB*, 170). By virtue of his marginality, he is, or conceives himself to be, an objective observer. It is not one or another part of the city he desires, but "the city as a whole" (P. Ferguson 84). For the *flâneur*, however, the actual, physical layout of the city comprises one "text" (38) and the people who populate it yet another.

A defining feature of any city is the character of its inhabitants. The *flâneur* does not wish to become personally acquainted with people of all classes, even hypothesizing that such meetings would sway objectivity, but he joins the crowd to "gain personal experience of its alienation" (Blanchard 73-4). He prefers to survey people with a certain aloofness, so that those who fall under his gaze do not step out of character. Benjamin argues the decisive influence of the crowd on Baudelaire, for "through it he saw Paris" (*Illuminations* 168). Baudelaire's observations of the crowd focus on the poor and destitute, the underdogs--and those who "accommodate his mood"--in order to expose differences among members of the city crowd (Blanchard 93). These differences serve to distinguish the variety of peoples produced by a city, by Paris.

In "Le Vieux Saltimbanque," Baudelaire describes a circus where he observes an old, downcast clown, "voûté, caduc, décrépit, une ruine d'homme, adossé contre un des poteaux de sa cahute" [bent, old-fashioned, decrepit, a ruin of a man, leaning against one of the props of his hut] (*Le Spleen de Paris* 100), but finds himself carried away from the scene by the crowd, unable to return, led on to other sights. This loss of control is among the most satisfying experiences for the *flâneur*, "willingly surrendering himself to the stimulating but demanding shocks, penetrations, and gazes

of this 'ineffable orgy'" (Sharpe 52). The experience might be comparable to a *voyeur* who, stumbling upon a couple making love in a park, discretely stands behind a tree to observe--the lovers unaware they are performing.

Where some might find the city crowds, among which the *flâneur* must circulate, frightening even alienating, Baudelaire writes that one must "*épouser la foule*" [join/marry the crowd]:

Pour le parfait flâneur, pour l'observateur passionné, c'est une immense jouissance que d'élire domicile dans le nombre, dans l'ondoyant, dans le mouvement, dans le fugitif et l'infini. Être hors de chez soi, et pourtant se sentir partout chez soi; voir le monde, être au centre du monde et rester caché au monde

[For the perfect *flâneur*, for the impassioned observer, it is an immense pleasure to choose residence in number, in the undulation, in motion, in the ephemeral and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the center of the world and remain hidden to the world] (*Ecrits* 369)

These pleasures, writes Baudelaire, are among the greatest a sensitive soul can experience (369), for there is depth to the experience, a result of its dialectical nature: one is part of something and not, grounded in the world and outside it. Like an intravenous drug-user who injects a *speedball*, a concoction that is half heroin (a depressant) and half cocaine (a stimulant), the *flâneur* experiences a rupture, if only momentarily, that leads to (a possibly dangerous) rapture. He must be able to maintain control and make sense of this experience of the crowd and the various sights it affords him; thus it is no wonder a new language is required.

Few *flâneurs* articulate their experiences in poems or written works. Rather, the *flâneur* represents both an image of the poet, as a discerning observer, as well as another figure for the poet to observe. *Flânerie*, for the poet, involves a certain projection, distantiation. The writer-*flâneur* must first seek to stand outside the city,

outside any particular class, outside the crowd, must actually tear himself away from all structures that seek to restrain him in order, as Marc Blanchard asserts, to create new meanings, new interpretations of all he encounters (82). Once free, the *flâneur* can observe the city as it is at that very moment and attempt to assimilate the multiplicity of perspectives it contains, funneling these perceptions into paintings, novels, poetry, essays, or, more typically, simple café conversation.

The writer-*flâneur*, ambulatory and curious, comes closest to depicting the city in the fleeting moment, for he is a "moving observer in the midst of a moving city" (82). Such a comprehensive depiction is quite possibly doomed to failure; however, the quantity of input available provides the writer-*flâneur* a source from which to pick and choose (P. Ferguson 93). A poet such as Baudelaire examines an encounter, attempts to reexperience it, and thus to become "attuned to the secrets of the city" and to lose himself in it (Blanchard 80).

Baudelaire "wishes to embrace the city in its strangeness," to observe features of Paris recognized by few Parisians, yet he is not interested in making it *other*, does not seek "to reduce the strangeness of the world at hand" through an exhaustive listing of landmarks and facts that might help locate the reader on familiar terrain (Blanchard 76). Instead, he warns "le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant" [the specter in broad daylight sidetracks the passerby] and "les mysteres partout coulent" [mysteries circulate everywhere] ("Les Sept Vieillards," *FM*, 97). But where Blanchard sees this indeterminacy as an attempt to make Paris "one city, any city" (76), it can also be interpreted as a stripping away of the familiar city in order to remake it as the poet perceives and experiences it, a setting for Baudelaire's experiences of his city: the ever-changing, personal city of Paris, rather than the monumental, eternal city of Paris.

While, for Benjamin, Blanchard, and others, Baudelaire is an archetype for the *flâneur*, the *flâneur* need not be considered a purely nineteenth-century phenomenon. Surrealists such as André Breton and Louis Aragon write texts, *Nadja* and *Le Paysan de Paris*, respectively, employing *flânerie* as a sort of *modus operandus*. Adrian Rifkin, in his book on Parisian popular culture of the early twentieth century, traces the *flâneur* into the twentieth century citing writers Francis Carco and Pierre Mac Orlan, among others, as prominent examples (17). Henry Miller, too, is a twentieth century *flâneur*. In the "Paris books" and *The Rosy Crucifixion*, one reads of his life on the streets and what he experiences there, both in New York City and Paris, among the varieties of architecture and the crowds.

In *Tropic of Capricorn*, Miller recounts his life on the streets of New York City in the nineteen-twenties, where he retreats to avoid the unhappy apartment he shares with his wife and infant daughter. Elsewhere he relates that this troubled domestic scene, his aversion for America, the misery he felt himself mired in at work drove him to the streets: "I had to take what was happening to me and walk the streets with it" (*Black Spring* 118), he writes. But it is not only misery and the need to endure that takes Miller, or any *flâneur*, to the streets. Declaring his affection for the city, ugly and depressing as it often is, he writes, "To be lost in a great city is the greatest joy I know; to become oriented is to lose everything" (*Cosmological Eye* 346), especially the ability to be surprised. Orientation, however, is not merely spatial, found in the knowledge of which streets intersect where and the best route from point A to point B, but also involves recognizing distinctive features and facets of each street, from an architectural perspective to the people one is likely to meet or particular smells resulting from the variety of ethnic cuisines prepared in the area. Dion Moloch, the

protagonist of *Moloch* set in early nineteen-twenties New York City, exemplifies the knowingness the *flâneur* brings to the street: "What was it about Bedford Avenue that tickled him so? Not the upper reaches, mind you . . . [But] Down near the fountain, where the avenue first broadens out and *begins to take on dignity*--that was the section" (emphasis added, 101). The *flâneur* has an educated eye, one that has learned to read and characterize the streets, that notes features it does not like--the regions of Bedford Avenue "where the dour bourgeoisie dwelt in smug, stiff apartment houses"--and can mark developments: in the section of Bedford Avenue that was good, "[e]ach time he went back to it, it got worse" (101).

Miller's experience of the streets of Paris is analogous to that of New York City, minus (usually) the horror New York City inspired in him, for he still feels drawn to these streets. In a letter to his friend Emil Schnellock, written in April 1930, soon after his arrival in Paris, Miller says of the streets:

You want to go down all of them at once--but each of them requires a day in itself. This is one of the reasons why I seldom get back to the same place twice. I am always going off on a tangent. Each street promises the end of the rainbow. (*Emil* 40)

His depiction of Parisian streets was not uniformly glowing, as it might be for tourists who rarely get beyond initial impressions to knowledge of the streets: "for friends I had the streets, and the streets spoke to me in that sad, bitter language compounded of human misery, yearning, regret, failure, wasted effort" (*Cancer* 184). In evidence here is another similarity between Baudelaire and Miller, as *flâneurs*, for both men "exploration of the city is a pretext for exploration of the self" (P. Ferguson 94). The failure Miller sees in the streets of New York City or, later, in Paris is the failure he acknowledges after ten years of attempting to write, if not a publishable novel, at least

one he felt proud of. Like Baudelaire, however, Miller's Paris is a personal Paris, one that he cannot even communicate to his wife:

. . . I suddenly realized the impossibility of ever revealing to her that Paris which I had gotten to know, the Paris whose *arrondissements* are undefined, a Paris that has never existed except by virtue of my loneliness, my hunger for her. Such a huge Paris! [....] This Paris, to which I alone had the key, hardly lends itself to a tour, even with the best of intentions; it is a Paris that has to be lived, that has to be experienced (*Cancer* 179).

Miller describes, here, a Paris on which he has put his imprint: the *Place de l'Estrapade* or some "little square, a few trees and a bench" where he and Mona have argued (179). His Paris contains echoes of French history as well as of his own personal history.

Many years after his return to America, Miller reports, "There are scarcely any streets in Paris I did not get to know" (*Remember* 309). He wished to see and know Paris, all parts of it--not just the isolated sections that catered to tourists or the sections the "Lost Generation" writers kept to. Miller did not simply wander the streets; he observed, he learned, he let his interest and his instincts and the crowd lead him, in true *flâneur*-style, around Paris. One of his proudest experiences involved helping a Frenchman around Paris; Miller relished the surprise the man evinced at his knowledge of the city since at the time, Miller asserts, he could "barely talk the language" (344). He thus considered himself a person with an aptitude for the streets of Paris, potentially an expert on them. "Through me," he writes, "Paris will live again, a little more, a little brighter" (*Wisdom* 179).

Neither Miller's knowledge of New York City nor his knowledge of Paris can finally make him feel a part of that culture. "I am not an American any more," he asserts in *Cancer*,

nor a New Yorker, and even less a European, or a Parisian. I haven't any allegiance, any responsibilities, any hatreds, any worries, any prejudices, any passion. I'm neither for nor against. I'm a neutral."
(153)

Miller is a Western writer, certainly, perhaps even quite clearly an American writer,¹¹ despite his denials, but his assertion of neutrality signifies the *flâneur's* attempt to distance himself from the object of his study, in Miller's case Western culture.

While Miller found something like a home there, Paris--like Miller's New York City--accorded Baudelaire "no sense of belonging" (Buck-Morss 186). Buck-Morss quotes Benjamin, "No one felt less at home in Paris than Baudelaire" (186). Chased through the streets by creditors, unable to fully join in the Parisian life, watching the city he had grown up within transformed by Baron von Haussmann, Baudelaire suffered an alienation from his city. Though both men were born in cities in which neither felt a "sense of belonging," Baudelaire, as did Miller, turned to the crowds for "refuge," even escape (186). Akin to Baudelaire's experience, then, the crowd on Broadway and other streets of New York City, "thick as molasses" (*Capricorn* 97), was a notable experience for Miller: "Just fling yourself into it like an ant and let yourself get pushed along" (97), he exhorts his readers. Let the crowd take you on *its* tour of New York, he suggests. During his years in Paris, Miller, too, entered the streets to mingle with the crowd, "to study the passing throngs and to absorb the complex changing spectacle of urban life" (Kennedy 148). Miller enjoyed observing vendors on the streets, seeing people sitting outside at the cafés, watching the prostitutes on the beat and their *maquereaux* [pimps] relaxing in bars.

¹¹ Miller's individualism and his rejection of literary movements seems very American.

The *flâneur*, then, is a counterpart to the exile, to the expatriate, for he is someone who stands apart from most or all that he sees. Miller's experience of Paris mirrors that of many exiles, for despite his obsessive traversing of Paris he faces the impossibility of ever truly coming to know the inhabitants or of ever fully entering into the life of the city of exile. "I know all the places," he asserts in a letter, "--from the outside" (*Emil* 62). Winter, however, exacerbated Miller's sense of isolation:

Where the lights are there are people on the sidewalks, jostling one another, giving off a little animal heat through their dirty underwear and their foul cursing breaths. Maybe for a stretch of eight or ten blocks there is a semblance of gaiety, and then it tumbles back into night, dismal, foul, black night like frozen fat in a soup tureen. (*Cancer* 241)

Walking along the wintry Parisian streets, Miller notes "every window closed tight, every shopfront barred and bolted" (*Cancer* 241); Parisians are in hibernation, more distant than ever.

In relocating to Paris, Miller had sought distance: "from dominating women, past failures, and the American cult of wealth and success" (Kennedy 144). Another side to the expatriate experience, J. Gerald Kennedy notes in his book on American writers in Paris, is "the assumption of an ambiguous position between 'outsideness' and 'insideness'" (26), a position often fostered by language differences and difficulties. Hungarian photographer Brassai notes that in his first meeting with Miller in 1931 they said very little to each other: "His French was rough, and I spoke almost no English" (29). Miller's French vocabulary improved quickly, though he always spoke it with a Brooklyn accent, so the language barrier was not insurmountable. Still, in a letter written shortly before his departure from Paris in 1939, Miller states that he had "never been able to make any worth while contact with the French" ("Farewell" n.p.), suggesting he had never been invited into or had never fully entered into the

intellectual circles of Paris, but he was "grateful to them for having tolerated [him]" (n.p.).

American writer Samuel Putnam in his wistful, chatty, catty, and childish memoir of his years in Paris in the late twenties and early thirties, *Paris Was Our Mistress*, affirms that Miller was not typical of the American expatriates, who largely kept to themselves and to Montparnasse. The expatriate community of the twenties had largely melted away, in any case, with the stock market crash. Miller, more than those who came before him, sought to immerse himself in Paris and Parisian culture. "He associated more with the natives of the country than many Americans did," Putnam claims, adding derisively, "even though his interest appeared to be confined largely to prostitutes and other representatives of the demimonde" (113). Here, however, Putnam demonstrates either a forgetfulness of his own experience in Paris or a lingering naïvete. Anyone who has lived in a foreign country must acknowledge the difficulty in penetrating native communities without the mediating influence of mutual friends or employment. Miller, working for a time at the Paris branch of the *Chicago Tribune*, was surrounded mostly by British, German, Austrian, Russian, Hungarian, and American expatriates. Generally, only the cash nexus, money exchanges in cafés, restaurants, or on the streets, allowed him access, however limited, to the French. But Miller also attempted to immerse himself in French culture, reading the works of French writers--Honoré de Balzac, Marcel Proust, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Blaise Cendrars, André Gide, and Jean Giono, among others. "I scarcely read any English books any more," he confides in a 1932 letter (*Emil* 94).

Once Miller believed he was no longer an American he felt himself completely free: "I have no country, no frontiers, no taxes to pay, no army to fight for" (*Emil*

94). Miller asserts elsewhere that he bears no hatred for America; he is, rather, indifferent to their fate. "I lived out my American problem; it is for the other 120,000,000 Americans to live out theirs" (*Hamlet* 82). Miller, the *flâneur*, the expatriate, feels himself on the margins and thus believes he is able to see the world clearly, to see what good there is elsewhere in this decaying world and to use a new yardstick to measure societies, whether they promote the "life more abundant" or whether they tend to squelch the life out of their citizens.

Though in the last years of the twentieth century, we often think of exile as politically-motivated--people fleeing murderous regimes in Africa and Asia and South America, until recently fleeing the Soviet Union and its satellites in Eastern Europe, of artists such as Alexandr Solzhenitsyn in America and Salman Rushdie in hiding in England--in America there exists a history of literary exile, a phenomenon spurred, in part, by the notion discussed earlier that American artists experience few ties to America, particularly an America undergoing radical change and ruptures.

Annette Kar Baxter notes that from Washington Irving to Henry Miller and beyond, the American artist as expatriate "has been a type, persistent and familiar" (1). Only in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, however, did an awareness grow of expatriation "as a literary-artistic phenomenon" (Putnam 9). After the initial insecurity the first so-called American writers felt for a "colonial dependence on British literary models," with increasing confidence that they could marry the inherited literary tradition to a foundation that "could be regarded as indigenous" American writers more and more began to view exile as "an assertion of cultural independence" (Baxter 1). The literary exile, according to Kennedy, "regarded displacement as an elective strategy of replenishment, a way of shifting one's angle of vision" (26). Literary exile,

then, often reflects "a quest for a more productive milieu" (26), with the implication, especially for American exiles, that the soil at home is not fertile or provides insufficient stimulus for creative endeavors, something usually unthinkable for the *flâneur*.

Literary exile can be differentiated into *permanent exile*, *short-term exile*, and *internal exile*. Permanent exiles, like Henry James, T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, and James Joyce, never return to their native lands or do so infrequently and only for brief visits. Short term exiles are those whose periods of exile are of finite duration and who return to America and there take up once again their work: the "Lost Generation" writers of the twenties (Hemingway, Fitzgerald and many others) fit in this category. Finally, internal exiles like Emily Dickinson, Henry David Thoreau and Edgar Allen Poe never leave but are secluded, or seclude themselves, from contact with the larger world.

The figure of the *flâneur*, as an outsider, implies exile, and, as noted earlier, Baudelaire certainly did not feel "at home" in Paris. An internal exile in Paris, toward the end of his life he travelled to Brussels where he spent his last active years sick and bemoaning a largely self-imposed exile, as Claude Pichois describes it. Miller, too, experienced both a short-term exile and an internal exile, in New York City before--and in Big Sur, California after--his years in Paris. Though there was clearly another facet to Miller's expatriation, a political dimension that should be emerging by now but will be developed further in this and later chapters, Miller shared with the writers of the twenties what Annette Kar Baxter calls a "literary despair" (4), a sense of estrangement from America, expressed in his disgust for the American landscape as

well as his rejection of such literary figures prominent in America as Fitzgerald and Hemingway, James Joyce and Thomas Mann.

Putnam makes it clear that for many of his generation all that was necessary to precipitate a journey abroad was some event, or series of events, upon which to attach their reasons for exile. The story of Putnam's own belated escape from Chicago, inspired by the theft of a box of his books in the midst of a move from one apartment to another, along with the predictably poor reception of articles he had written critical of the current literary establishment (Putnam 44-7), indicates that often the grounds for leaving were excuses and that, in short, many self-proclaimed expatriates literally and figuratively jumped on the boat, with or without the requisite "literary despair." Quite candidly, Miller acknowledges that the idea of going to Paris did not come from him but his friend Emil Schnellock, who had spent a couple years in Paris around 1920 and depicted the life he had led there as one of relative freedom (*Capricorn* 47-8). Alternatively, Mary Dearborn, in her biography of Miller, argues that the move to Paris was his wife June's idea: "She presented it to Miller [in February 1930] as a terrific gamble. If he wanted to become a great writer, she said, then he needed to return to Europe alone" (119). Whichever version is true, and both seem to have a core of truth, it was not a self-conscious literary despair that drove Miller to Paris, for his was for the most part unwitting. Miller's life before his move to Paris was, as narrated in *Crazy Cock* and *The Rosy Crucifixion*, quite out of control and fraught with failure.

The immediate affinity Miller felt to Paris drew him to the streets where he struggled to know the city and to master the language. Whether or not he was more successful than other expatriates in making his way into French society, he was bound

as an outsider to make the cultural comparisons spread throughout his *oeuvre*, to compare New York City and America to Paris and the life of the French. Without his years in Paris, Miller's criticisms of New York City would likely have remained limited to the visual, rather than expanding to connect those criticisms to life as lived in the city, as lived in America. Once in Paris, experiencing the new surroundings, he blossomed, he found his voice, and began describing his world, the world of the present and the past, a world that began to look more and more like a wilderness.

The City as Wilderness

Miller and Baudelaire ventured out into a kind of wilderness, one that inspired Baudelaire to wonder, "What are the dangers of the forest and the prairie compared with the daily shocks and conflicts of civilization?" (qtd. in Benjamin, *CB*, 39). Among the most conspicuous shocks for many Parisians was, naturally, the transformation of Paris under the direction of Baron von Haussmann. Baudelaire's wilderness consists quite literally in the torn-up streets and neighborhoods of Paris, the rubble of demolished buildings, the piles of dirt from excavations for the new sewage system, the clamor and commotion of workers. The resulting impression is one of dislocation, for wilderness, here, signifies *terra incognita*--as well as the disturbing, the deadly, the unusual phenomena encountered on the streets of Paris. In Miller's case, the wilderness corresponds to the modern city rising up like a goliath, forests of skyscrapers frozen and austere, virtually anonymous, inspiring fear and repulsion, leaving in its wake broken-down people. In reading Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* or *Spleen de Paris*, one senses that though the poet is appalled by the city and thus miserable, he enjoys his misery, experiencing a certain fascination in studying his own

responses, from which he appears to take much inspiration. With Miller, one senses an assertion in his works, an *I am*, amidst such numbing hostility. In Baudelaire's time, people were more likely to lament the changes pervading their lives; by Miller's time change had become a constant and the response had turned to fear, for progress no longer signified a simple, unalloyed "good."

Despite Miller's avowed affinity for cities and indulgence in *flânerie*, he demonstrates a marked ambivalence toward cities, and quite often depicts them negatively. His disillusionment with New York City and even Paris suggests defeated hopes. Rather than an oasis, as it promised to become, America on a purely physical or visual level is for Miller an *Air-Conditioned Nightmare*. He employs "nightmare" literally as well as figuratively: the country has become a terrible and unhealthy place to live, physically and mentally, save that it has been made comfortable, usually with technology (thus the "air-conditioning" of the title), so that people do not recognize the nightmare *as* nightmare and thus attempt to change it. Rather, they remain altogether oblivious, as one dreamer is to another's dreams, to what for Miller appears quite obvious, that life in America is not the idyll it once seemed to promise, it is not a new Eden, but its opposite: a kind of Babylon-meets-Sodom, as epitomized by New York City.

Similar to Miller's description of America, a nineteenth-century commonplace in French literature equates Paris with hell. Patricia Ferguson asserts that the notion of Paris as hell had become "a cliché by the time Balzac got to it in the 1830s in his celebrated opening of *La Fille aux yeux d'or*" (39). Behind this clichéd perception of Paris lurks the sensation that the city is "beset by evils" (39), an idea lucratively

exploited by *Guide de Paris mystérieux*, *Guide Noir de Paris*, and other guidebooks conjuring up a Paris of superstitions, macabre happenings, and horrific crimes.

As did Miller in his descriptions of America, Baudelaire depicted Paris as a nightmare, as pure spectacle in much the same way Dante's *Hell* constitutes a spectacle, with its great variety of personal histories, dangers, and tortures. The phantasmagoric aspect of Baudelaire's nightmare, however, is seldom ascribed to the cityscape, which receives much attention from Miller, and more often to the people who populate it--the ragpicker, the emaciated (or, more literally, the skeletal) laborer ("Le squelette laboureur"), the prostitute, the old men and women. These beings appear in Baudelaire's poems, indelibly marking the city, for the city comprises the wilderness where the fantastic is on display.

The setting for these human phenomena, Paris, inspires in a more general way as much curiosity as does its inhabitants: "O cité! / Pendant qu'autour de nous tu chantes, ris and beugles, / Éprise du plaisir jusqu'à l'atrocité" [O city! / While all around us you sing, laugh and bawl / Taking your pleasure unto (the point of) atrocity] ("Les Aveugles," *FM*, 103). Paris is personified in these lines as a high-living *gourmand*, a demented Gargantua, who devours life to the point where not even the bones remain on the plate. In two poems that might be considered companion pieces, to describe Paris Baudelaire employs the word "fourmillant(e)"--swarming--a term used to describe the movement of ants or bees and which conjures an image of the city as so thickly populated that individuals lose their distinctness. Paris becomes "le fourmillant tableau" [the swarming tableau] of "Les Petites Vieilles" [The Little Old Women] (*FM* 100), and the "fourmillante cité" [swarming city] of "Les Sept Vieillards" [The Seven Old Men] (*FM* 97). A city of exertion, it teems with beings

perpetually engaged in a variety of activities, mysteriously coordinated, as if in a factory, sustaining the city even as they make it "other." They are at the same time people and *types*--laborers, ragpickers, the elderly, ghost-like apparitions. In "Le Crépuscule Du Soir," Baudelaire associates prostitution with Paris by a subtle connection in its depiction: "comme une fourmilière elle ouvre ses issues" [like an ant-hill, she opens her passageways] (*FM*, 105). As the day ends, prostitutes flood into the streets to earn their money, inspiring a fascinated repulsion in Baudelaire similar to that experienced with the seven old men.

The city as an ant-hill then serves as a suitable location for such marvels as the blind whose eyes "restent levés / Au ciel" [remain raised / to the sky] ("Les Aveugles," *FM*, 103), for old women, "Ces monstres disloqués furent jadis des femmes" [these dislocated monsters who were once women/wives] ("Les Petites Vieilles," *FM*, 100), and for bent old men, each apparently an identical copy of the previous, mysteriously appearing, "Dégoûtant Phénix, fils et père de lui-même" [disgusting phoenix, son and father of himself] ("Les Sept Vieillards," *FM*, 97), for gamblers and criminals, and for prostitutes. Thus, while Baudelaire's poetry may contain allegorical elements, Benjamin notes that his "works are not esoteric" (qtd. in Buck-Morss 222). Antoine Adam, interpreting the emergence of "les sept vieillards," explains the appearance of other similarly phantasmagoric beings in Baudelaire's poetry, for instance the prostitutes mentioned above: "Baudelaire depicts for us one of the hallucinations that does not ignore the lost ones in the desert of the great cities" (382). Baudelaire's interest extends to the lowly as well as the rich, but especially to those most thoroughly themselves, for they offer him "experiences of otherness"

(Sennett, *Conscience*, 123), one way of "transcending the cultural forces" that turn people inward and trap them in themselves (123).

Miller, equally fascinated by the varieties of people visible in the city, depicts those who appear as freaks or as outsiders: his Tante Melia who, as she comes to the end of a block, "leap[s] forward like a reindeer and bite[s] a piece out of the moon" (*Black Spring* 107), and is later admitted to a mental hospital, because "[w]hen people are too good for this world they have to be put under lock and key" (108); his "cunt-struck" friend Van Norden, from *Cancer*, who only wants to lose himself in sex; and a man he meets on the streets in New Orleans, "The Alcoholic Veteran with the Washboard Cranium," who survived the First World War but remains in such a state that he cannot hold a normal job. This veteran exists outside society and declares himself free: "I don't need all the paraphernalia you fellows require. All I carry with me is a toothbrush" (*Wisdom* 112). Miller includes portraits of American expatriates and Asians debauching themselves, "young Gandhi" as Miller calls one Indian (*Cancer* 91), of bums ("Max" in *Cosmological*) struggling to survive, and of prostitutes, Mesdemoiselles Claude and Germaine ("Mademoiselle Claude" in *Cosmological* and Germaine in *Cancer*) with whom he finds pleasure as well as a momentary respite from hunger and walking the streets. Of these figures, only Tante Melia, who is out of touch with reality, hence the modern world, is presented as a truly admirable figure.

Miller's personages are not quite so fantastic as Baudelaire's, since Miller retains much that he had learned from the realist writers like Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson, but both Miller and Baudelaire populate their works with the unusual and the outcast offspring of the city. Neither was blind to the suffering of those they depicted, and beyond witnessing their existence, Miller repeatedly argues they deserve

a better fate, while Baudelaire suggests as much, as we shall see in the next few chapters. We find, then, in Miller and Baudelaire, a dialectical vision of the city's offspring, whose existence fascinates even as the unmistakable misery of it inspires denunciation. Toward the end of *Negative Dialectics*, Theodor Adorno defends "nihilism" which can help shed a positive light on their denunciation: "As long as the world is as it is all pictures of reconciliation, peace, and quiet resemble the picture of death. [....] The true nihilists are the ones who oppose nihilism with their more and more faded positivities . . ." (381). Including these portraits of the more perplexing offspring of capitalism argues that these people are disserved by the economy and that until they are at last included among the beneficiaries the system is fatally flawed.

Much of the imagery Miller uses to describe the United States, and especially New York City, derives from surreal visions replete with nightmarish images, occasionally offering parallels to Baudelaire's Paris: "The white prisons, the sidewalks *swarming* with maggots, the breadlines, the opium joints that are built like palaces, . . . a whole city erected over a hollow pit of nothingness" (*Cancer* 68, emphasis added). In this passage, skyscrapers are recast as "white prisons" where businessmen are confined; crowds populating the sidewalks experience a Kafkaesque metamorphosis and become "maggots"--paradoxically, *legless* parasites; the "opium joints" ornamented like "palaces" may very well be the cinemas where people ingest visions of the good life and turn homeward contented, despite the fact the lives they lead bear no resemblance to those depicted on the screen; and the "hollow pit of nothingness," over which the city balances, intimates a precipitous disaster. The ever-expanding city, growing ever more populous, threatens to one day disappear into an abyss, crashing down of its own dead weight. Miller, additionally, laments the "appalling" monotony

of American cities (*Cosmological* 337), where both buildings and cities appear as exact reproductions of each other, like Baudelaire's seven old men. Most American cities, as human constructions, lack what Benjamin has termed, referring to mechanically reproduced visual art, an "aura": while cities may be more democratic, visually comprehensible to more people, at the same time they forfeit "the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced" (*Illuminations* 221). Since few of the buildings that comprise the American city have ornamentation or have even stood for very long, they do not accrue history, do not evoke or exemplify a bygone era. Baudelaire and Miller therefore share a similar disgust, and fascination, for the city and its byproducts.

Other American cities receive similar if briefer treatment (to that of New York City) from Miller. A cruise downriver, just off the coast of Boston, Miller describes as "following in the wake of a demented giant who had sown the earth with crazy dreams" (*Nightmare* 11). The landscape between western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio, between Pittsburgh and Youngstown, he compares to "an Inferno which exceeds anything that Dante imagined" (28). St. Louis he classifies "a foul stinking corpse . . . like an advertisement of Albrecht Durer's 'Melancholia'" (69). These intuitive or gut responses to the countryside omit the detailed argumentation that often accompany Miller's prognoses. A walk down the streets of Chicago, narrated in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, does incorporate such support, however. Stepping out of the car in the South Side of Chicago, he observes,

A dingy hotel sticking up like a Mayan ruin in the midst of yellow fangs and chalk teeth. Once respectable dwelling places given up now to the dark-skinned people we "liberated." No heat, no gas, no

plumbing, no water, no nothing--sometimes not even a window-pane.
(52)

Chicago, a skyscraper city like New York, contains ruins, where it consigns the workers and the urban poor who do not benefit from modern technology or the much-vaunted American "progress." Just as New York City constituted a nightmare for Miller, so did much of the rest of the country. The virtue of New York City was that Miller had lived there nearly forty years and thus knew it, and hated it, intimately.

Though Miller frequently identifies Paris as the city where he found his freedom, and for him it becomes the center of the world, the "very navel of the world to which, like a blind and faltering idiot, one crawls back on hands and knees" (*Wisdom* 182), Paris is not exempt from the nightmare that Miller often equates with modernizing cities. "Paris is a whore," he writes, voicing evident disappointment. "From a distance she seems ravishing, you can't wait until you have her in your arms. And five minutes later you feel empty, disgusted with yourself. You feel tricked" (*Cancer* 207). You give yourself up to Paris only to realize for a moment that, at bottom, it is just like any other city. The city, moreover, is diseased, for in regions--one must wander away from the seductive monumental Paris to other *arrondissements* to really appreciate Paris--it looks "like a big, ugly chancre" (*Wisdom* 148). This city seems inviting, but only once in its grip do you realize it cannot fulfill the promises it has made and that, furthermore, it is poisoned.

Miller's perspective on the city as wilderness remains ultimately negative, though his disillusionment intimates a frustrated optimism: "the cradles of civilization are the putrid sinks of the world," he writes, "the charnel house to which the stinking wombs confide their bloody packages of flesh and bone" (*Cancer* 182). Cities, the

"birthplace" of civilization and culture, of all that is best in the modern world, contain as well all that is worst. Those who emigrate to the city, as well as those born into the city, signify little more than fodder for factories, sacrificial lambs to industry. Occasionally Miller's bitter disillusion contrasts with Baudelaire's combined fascination and repulsion. Miller fights what he sees as the depersonalizing forces of the city, while Baudelaire remarks these same forces though they likely appear less powerful given the phantasmagoric creatures who populate his poetry.

Where Hawthorne, Melville and Poe considered American cities less nightmarish than their European counterparts, Miller reverses the order, most clearly with respect to Paris, ranking American cities well below European cities. Paris, for Miller, is certainly less nightmarish than what he experiences in America, for in the midst of his American tour in the early nineteen-forties he recalls "flinging [himself] on the bed and deliberately willing to remember something beautiful, something promising out of the past" (*Remember* 300). Despite its failures, in his imagination Miller returns to Paris, to the streets and cafés and monuments of Paris, not to New York City and its skyscrapers, not to America.

Not the City of Dreams

Though Baudelaire once proclaimed Paris a city of dreams, like Miller's New York City it also knew a banal existence that many of its citizens found disheartening. Already in the early eighteen-thirties, facades were removed from some buildings in order to widen many of the very narrow, medieval streets. "From that moment," writes Jean Favier, "Balzac launched his cry, 'the Old Paris is disappearing'" (201). In the middle of the nineteenth century, the city was at times denounced as faceless and

unreadable, and Haussmann's new architecture "the cause or effect of a general loss of meaning" (Hamon 126). Baudelaire's poem "Le Cygne" describes the experience of living in a Paris undergoing renovation, a time when those charged with expanding the city "had not yet demolished the memory of the city" it replaced (Terdiman 176). Baudelaire could still picture the Paris he had enjoyed in the eighteen-forties, before the 1848 revolution and the 1851 rise of Napoleon III:

Je ne vois qu'en esprit tout ce camp de baraques,
Ces tas de chapiteaux ébauchés et de fûts,
Les herbes, les gros blocs verdis par l'eau des
flaques,
Et, brillant aux carreaux, le bric-à-brac confus.
[I see only a shadow of the camp of huts, / This heap of the remnants
of column capitals and bases, / The grass, the large blocks greened by
the water of puddles, / and, sparkling squares, the confused bric-a-brac.]
("Le Cygne," *FM*, 95)

For many Parisians, the experience of adjusting to the new city going up all around, in the midst of the rubble of the old city, was fraught with difficulty: they could only remember the old city and could not yet appreciate the new city, for it seemed to have grown and changed so much that it was now "beyond any conceivable emotional investment"; and it was profoundly new, "a language which had mutated so rapidly that even its native locutors discovered they could no longer speak it" (Terdiman 178). Benjamin notes that while Haussmann might have prided himself on his role in the metamorphosis of the city, for many Parisians "he had alienated their city from them" (*CB* 174). Baudelaire's "Paysage" constitutes a response to Haussmanisation, describing "a landscape of desire, born of the need to escape or remake the disorder of the actual city" (Sharpe 41). The poem that immediately follows, "Le Soleil," counters "the tranquility of 'Paysage'," offering another view of the same experience, that of "the city as a combat zone" (42). The writer-*flâneur* traverses the city, forced to

supply from his memory what is now missing, thus unwillingly transformed into a symbol of the struggle to understand the ever-changing cityscape. And yet, while a large part of the citizenry might suffer in the incomprehensible new city, Patricia Ferguson argues--dialectically--that the "unknowability" of the city provided "a condition of creativity" (93), as the city is now open to new interpretations, can now be written anew. As in the poor people standing outside the new café in Baudelaire's "Les Yeux des pauvres," old elements of Paris stand out in new configurations, giving rise to new sources of poetic inspiration, and thus destruction and construction show themselves to be kindred forces--a somewhat surface example of Benjamin's famous assertion that each work of art is founded upon, or made possible by, some act of barbarism.

Hausmannization took place not in one isolated section at a time but "everywhere and over almost the entire city," such that for those like Baudelaire living in Paris, "[d]estruction and construction dominated the experience of the city as never before" (122). The new city rising up all around became unreadable for many people because, in most European cities, the oldest parts stood in the center with more recent sections rippling out in "concentric circles" toward the outskirts where the newest districts were located (Hamon 128). That order is now inverted, maintains Phillipe Hamon, citing "the criss-cross of adjectives" in Baudelaire's poem "Le Cygne," where the poet describes the city center first and then the outskirts: "'Palais neuf. . . Vieux faubourgs'" (155). The intermixing of the new with the old destabilized previous readings of regions, such that the character of a region was effectively diluted, reduced to a composite.

Despite Rybczynski's argument, presented in an earlier section, that the new Paris incorporated classical architecture, for many residents these new buildings failed to replace the "meaning, substance, and dimension" that had been lost through systematic destruction of large swaths of Paris (Hamon 142). Most of medieval Paris was destroyed. Instead, there was now, in the Paris of the mid-eighteen-sixties and after, a certain uniformity of construction since landmarks--buildings, cafés, stores--that once denoted certain areas--and eras--were gone, replaced by new ones to be learned. Furthermore, where once buildings had been constructed of stone, they were now smeared with a "cosmetic layer" of plaster meant to conceal "the mediocre edifice underneath" (140). More than ever before, there were areas where, row after row, houses appeared the same, adding to the apparent anonymity of the buildings.

Just as Baudelaire could evoke a lost or fast disappearing Paris, Miller could remember New York City at the turn of the century, before it became the monstrosity he later viewed it as: "Once again he saw the sturdy brewery wagons clattering through the open gates, and a teeming pedestrian life marching in through the swinging doors of the cafés that gilded the corners" (*Moloch* 114). Regions of New York had once enjoyed a certain communal flavor, around the turn of the twentieth century, neighborhoods of Germans speaking German, that had since been lost. Miller, too, perceived some beauty in a few buildings, though they are outnumbered by those without appeal. In the mid-nineteen twenties, Miller wrote "[a] paeon to the architecture of the Bowery Savings Bank in Brooklyn" (Jackson 13), publishing it himself as one of his *mezzotints* in 1925, entitled "A Bowery Phoenix." He does not describe the building so much as praise "this edifice which rivals the great Florentine palaces of the Renaissance" (*Mezzotints* 22). He continues,

Its austere elegance and majestic sweep is inspiring. Imagine a luminous basilica lined on either side by noble marble pillars. [...] And in the center of this great oval as pretty a cage for man or beast as one could ask of any architect. (22)

One can already note, however, the beginnings of a sense of the city as phantasmagoria, for the building, compared to a fifteenth century basilica, is figured as a cage, as a phoenix rising "[o]ut of the squalor and poverty of the Bowery," as well as "a luminous Dantesque vision in a crowded thoroughfare" (22). One can detect here another dimension to his appraisal, an underlying repulsion that will become much more prominent.

After five years in Paris, Miller visits a New York City which he now describes much more thoroughly as a hostile place. Miller walks and walks, seeing "no place to sit down--no place, I mean, that looks inviting" (*Cosmological* 344). The city no longer has a space for him or for anybody not immediately employed. No cafés like Paris, few parks to just loiter in. Everything appears dirty and characterless to Miller; no place invites people to relax and enjoy leisure time.

Moving away from the surreal descriptions of city-as-wilderness, Miller laments "the hideous buildings of New York [Where] No stone was laid upon another with love or reverence; no street was laid for dance or joy" (*Capricorn* 68). He sees no evidence of city planning, nothing that suggests love for the city, and argues that the city was not constructed to communicate to the inhabitants anything more than what, at bottom, it was supposed to be--an economic powerhouse. "Nowhere," writes Miller, "do we find a city that was planned for beauty and reverence, unless it be Washington [D.C.]" (*Remember* 395) "But," he asks, "how does Washington look

today?" (395), implying that despite the designers' intentions, Washington D.C. has failed to embody and glorify the goals of the republic.

Most American cities were laid out by surveyors rather than city planners, and Trachtenberg argues that same lack of professional expertise was bought to architecture in American cities: many buildings were designed, not by architects but by "construction engineers" (119). Of the buildings actually designed by architects, many "quoted" a great variety of classical architectures--Greek, Gothic, Baroque--and often the design bore little relation to the actual function of the building or to an expression of American-ness. The effect of such dissimilar designs only "furthered the sense of discontinuity in everyday life," demonstrating that in designing these buildings architects had only succeeded in "confusing their identity with spectacle" (Trachtenberg 119). Sullivan, the architect, devoted many years to decrying the flagrant borrowing of European architectures. "Architecture," he argued, "is an expression rather than a style and is the outcome of certain conditions in a certain civilization" (153). Borrowing wholesale French architecture of the seventeenth century is worse than anachronistic, he claims; it is false, pretentious. "[Y]ou don't recover the spirit of the past," Sennett argues in a similar vein, "by quoting its forms" (164). In the modern city, then, where people are dwarfed by the buildings they work in, where "architecture itself has gone mad" (Miller, *Capricorn*, 69), reproducing itself ad infinitum, the individual is lost, wandering through *terra incognita*, useful only as a worker on an assembly line and a consumer of finished products.

For Benjamin, as for Miller, modernity can be characterized as "hell" (Buck-Morss 96). One reason for this "hell," the hell of New York City or any commercial center, is that cities in America do not grow as a body does; instead, they accumulate--

wealth, buildings, people--like a closet the detritus of a disordered life. Periodically, and indiscriminately, Americans clean that closet, throwing out old items. Doing so, they lose touch with their past.¹² Miller is refreshed by an encounter with a Frenchman who "talked about the past not as a scholar or student of history but as a man remembering something he had lived through" (*Nightmare* 72). The French, Miller infers, tend to express a respect, a kinship even, for their history, exemplified in their desire to preserve historical sections of their cities, while Americans often remain oblivious to their history if it is not first altogether "scrapped" (*Cosmological* 340). Street names can also offer some evidence of the French concern with history. In New York City, especially in Manhattan, most streets are numbered--Fifth Ave., West 48th, and so on. Parisian street-names often came from hotels (rue de Nesle) or the names of families (rue Vivienne) who lived on the streets, from the names of monarchs (Boulevard Henry IV) and cultural figures (avenue and place Victor Hugo, rue Charles Baudelaire), even dates in French history (rue 8 May 1945). True, street names were occasionally changed, and the old name forgotten, but even today walking around Paris you can observe signs that provide the former name of the street, *ancienne rue de . . .* (Favier 128-29). Paris remains an historical text in a way most American cities are not.

Where the French, even after Haussmannization, live side by side with monuments of their history, the American, writes Miller, "awakes in the morning to look out on a virgin continent which has known no history. A clean jump, without transition, from barbarism to the dementia of civilization" (*Aller Retour* 69). The

¹² The a-historicity of Americans is a theme that will be returned in Chapter Two, in a discussion of fashion.

transformation of some regions of America, from largely agrarian regions to industrial regions, sometimes occurred within the span of a generation or two, with buildings quickly and haphazardly constructed. According to James Kunstler, "Modernism did its immense damage . . . by divorcing the practice of building from the history and traditional meanings of building" (59). One might argue that the intensely practical nature of city-building Americans indulge in *is* in the tradition of the historical exigencies faced by the first colonists and the later colonists of the American west. If so, then perhaps once the demands of frontier-life were no longer at the forefront, the continued focus on simplicity and utility, without overt city planning, could be characterized as obsessive-compulsive behavior, if not a byproduct of pure greed. Sullivan writes, "as a people thinks concerning Architecture, so it thinks concerning everything else" (178). Among other criticisms of Americans Sullivan detects in their modern architecture, in the unadorned uncomplicated boxes people construct, he perceives a single-minded focus on "the Dollar You adore it twenty-four hours each day: it is your God!" (187).

Without history, without a sense of the city as a whole--as opposed to marketable parcels of land--there is no sense of *place*, no spot of land that citizens can call their own, and nothing to attach an artist to his or her birthplace. Miller argues, "there is no America! . . . just millions of things unrelated to one another" (*Aller Retour* 73). David Kolb, implicitly agreeing with Sullivan, writes, "[b]uildings embody and help form the distinctive practices and values of a community, and so they are one way of transmitting the lifeworld" (147).¹³ Kolb extends this analysis,

¹³ Kolb borrows the term "lifeworld" from Habermas.

however, arguing "[l]ifeworld meanings are being thinned out, and so places become thinner as well" (147). When cities no longer function as "transmitters," moreover, they are, in a sense, no longer populated by *citizens*, rather inhabitants with little or no connection to the locality.

In the first American cities, even if they were jumbles, the stores were usually family-owned, and the owners, who often lived above or behind the stores, "took pride in their buildings, and they took care of them" (Kunstler 177). As American cities evolved, usually without planning or vision, what had once been the city became a financial unit unto itself, the downtown, "intensive commercial and administrative clusters in a diverse urban setting" (Goldfield and Brownell 299). These regions possessed the "greatest population density" and constituted the centers of "economic activity" (299).

Simultaneous with the rush of urbanization due to rapid industrialization, city populations increased exponentially throughout the nineteenth century, and the lives of the workers were transformed. Where once the artisan had been either self-employed or employed in an enterprise operating with fewer than five workers, and producing finished products, with industrialization came factories and mass production, hence "blue collar" workers, and a widening of "the gap between employer and employee" (Goldfield and Brownell 151). The inner-city, accordingly, came to be, as a result of industrialism and the creation of a new underclass, largely "a city of working class men and women" (151).

In the already overcrowded American city of the late nineteenth century, where space was at a premium and continued growth an economic necessity, "a new physical force was making its presence felt: the skyscraper" (Goldfield and Brownell 211).

For both the rich and the poor in the late 1800s, there was nowhere to go but up. The horizontal grids used to lay out cities in the nineteenth century become vertical grids in the twentieth century (Sennett, *Conscience*, 57). Since city leaders and business magnates generally lived outside the city-center, they had little incentive to create attractive city-scapes, and thus skyscrapers were usually erected with little or no visual finesse.

Though the first one went up in Chicago, so many skyscrapers were raised in New York City that it "became the exemplary skyscraper city" (Rybczynski 153). That symbol of progress and modernity which Miller labelled a "white prison," the skyscraper was also supposed to be, in its unadorned state, inoffensive and democratic, accessible to all. Compared to such architectural monuments as Notre Dame de Paris or Versailles, for instance, structural displays of spirituality in the first case and opulence in the second, symbols of the power of the church and the monarchy, the skyscraper was supposedly intended for everybody:

No longer a needle-capped tower sporting gargoyles, it became a box on the purest Bauhaus terms: flat roof, no ornament, glass 'skin', . . . guaranteed to prevent contamination from the ruinous pretensions of the ruling class. Except that these boxes were the ultimate status symbol of the newest ruling class: the corporate elite. (Kunstler 80)

While it might appear democratic and the architects may even intend such a generous simplicity or a purely functional appearance devoid of overt meaning,¹⁴ the skyscraper is in reality as much a monument to capitalism as Versailles is to the wealth and power of the king, only with fewer robes, as it were. As such, the skyscraper

¹⁴ One branch of Modernism, as exemplified by Viennese architect Adolph Loos, rejected all ornamentation: Loos "wanted to construct buildings and to design objects that were solely functional," since in his view "the evolution of culture corresponded with the elimination of the ornamentation of practical objects" (Marchand 218).

epitomized, ironically, the minimalist element of much of American architecture. But where monumental structures in Europe had ostensible uses--Notre Dame was quite clearly intended for prayer and religious services--"one cannot point to activities that ought particularly to happen on the sixth [or sixtieth] floor of buildings" (Sennett, *Conscience*, 58). Such blanks, however, were not problematic in America, according to Miller, because people did not look for significance: "[h]ow or why a skyscraper was erected [is] thoroughly unimportant. It's there--that's all that matters!" (*Aller Retour* 69). The plainness of the facade of a skyscraper, writes Trachtenberg, extending Sennett's argument, obscures the activities performed in the building, such that they "receded from view, from intelligibility, and from criticism" (119); "we cannot imagine what goes on inside," say Miller's Americans, "and we do not care." Whether aesthetically pleasing or not, whether the simplicity of design is democratic or reductive and renunciative, for Miller the skyscraper is, like the flag, ultimately a symbol that for the rich "things are under control" (*Nightmare* 37). The democratic aura, in the Benjaminian sense, is revealed to be thin, bland, counterfeit.

Amid the raising of numerous skyscrapers, many only slight variations on a formula, occasionally a building such as the fifty-two floor Woolworth Building in New York City would stand out. In the Woolworth Building, "ornamentation and lavishness replaced utility with classical gothic facades eclipsing the simplicity" that characterized earlier skyscrapers (Goldfield and Brownell 213). After a number of years in Paris, however, Miller notes that even this building is banal and resembles nothing so much as "a Nuremberg cheese cake" (*Aller Retour* 37), a caricature of the beauty and impressiveness architecture aims for. Americans, Miller argues, echoing Sullivan's repeated assertion, "have an architectural taste which is about as near the

vanishing point as it is possible to achieve" (*Nightmare* 35). "Nowhere in America," continues Miller, "was there anything comparable to the cathedrals of Europe, the temples of Asia and Egypt--enduring monuments created out of faith and love and passion" (228). Monuments in America are nearly always built with "utilitarian" purposes in mind (228), which reduces their *monumentality*, limits them to finite uses, fettering the imagination, the spirit.

The designs for buildings intended for commercial use, according to Lewis Mumford, "were based on abstract units of space" (438). That is, the designs privileged by businessmen tended to be those that provided the most space and offered the greatest variety of uses, so that "with no essential structural rearrangement the hotel, the apartment house, the department store, and the office building were convertible, one into the other" (438). Ornamentation limited space, increased construction costs, and restricted the variety of possible uses to which buildings could be put. But when Americans began to specialize in high rise office buildings--and "nobody knew how to make them better than Americans" (Kunstler 78)--rather than opening up the downtowns to the inhabitants, they produced "a mass of gloomy houses and business premises in grimy, spiritless cities" (Horkheimer and Adorno 120). Parisian city planners, in contrast, banished skyscrapers to a region approximately two kilometers outside Paris proper, *La Défense*. Relatively few buildings in Paris itself stand taller than six floors, hence the Eiffel Tower is visible from many of the *arrondissements* of Paris. People are not separate from the cities they inhabit, argues Miller. Echoing Sullivan's assertion about architecture, Miller declares, "The landscape in which a person lives does not merely frame the picture; it enters into his very being and becomes a part of him" (*Remember* 332). The city expresses the

resident, and the resident expresses the city. If *place* is thinned-out, then so is humanity, or that portion of it inhabiting the city.

The problem, then, is no longer simply that the city is ugly or unreadable, or that land-owners wish to make as great a profit as possible on their investments, but, finally, that a people divorced from their surroundings are divorced from themselves: "We need to sit down somewhere, to rest, to contemplate, to know we have a body-- and a soul" (Miller, *Cosmological*, 344). As opposed to Paris and many European cities, such places are rare in America, and few of those that do exist are enticing.

Inhabitants of the City: Parks and Leisure Space

Though born into the bourgeoisie and then raised within the military aristocracy (Pichois 3), Charles Baudelaire, in his writing, showed a sympathy for "the underdogs of society--for its victims, its dispossessed, its outcasts, even its pariahs," though he often expressed it "indirectly" in his works (Leakey 28). "Le Désespoir de la vieille" [The Despair of the Old Woman], "Les Veuves" [The Widows], and "Le Vieux Saltimbanque" [The Old Clown], from *Le Spleen de Paris*, depict various broken-down people, human wrecks, who at the same time represent the figure of the poet, who feels himself as much an outcast as they.

Miller asserts a similar affinity to the downtrodden, especially after the years of daily contact: as a manager of the Cosmodemonic Telegraph Corporation (Western Union), described in *Tropic of Capricorn*, he was charged with hiring and firing them. The messengers he employed came from all over the world. They were among

the lowest of the low, walking around [in their uniforms] like auks, like penguins, like oxen, like trained seals. . . and many a one was fit to govern the world, to write the greatest book ever written. When I think

of some of the Persians, the Hindus, the Arabs I knew, when I think of the character they revealed, their grace, their tenderness, their intelligence, *their holiness*, I spit on the white conquerors of the world (*Capricorn* 33)

Miller not only knew people who were, at least when measured on an economic scale, "the lowest of the low," but he recognized their virtues, realizing that the problem was not the people but the scale: they contained much of worth but little or none of it had clear value for a market economy.

Where Baudelaire's conception of the city as ant-hill intimates the great number of individuals one finds there, Miller experiences the city as ant-hill rather differently, as dehumanizing. Worse, the sacrifice of the people described above is pointless. New York City he describes as

cold, glittering, malign. The buildings dominate. There is a sort of atomic frenzy to the activity going on; the more furious the pace, the more diminished the spirit. A constant ferment, but it might just as well be going on in a test tube. (*Cancer* 68)

All the activity--the hustling and the scrambling--in the city, according to Miller, is for naught. Like a car trapped in a snowbank spinning its wheels, the city fruitlessly expends its energy. Fredric Jameson writes of "the ultimate form of the 'nightmare of history,'" which he terms "the fact of labor . . . of the backbreaking millennial toil of millions of people from the earliest moments of human history," a nightmare which finds its exemplar in Miller's New York City, "in horror at the endless succession of 'dying generations,' at the ceaseless wheel of life, . . . for this ultimately scandalous fact of mindless alienated work and of the irremediable loss and waste of human energies" ("Marxism" 162). Employers demand more work and greater sacrifices on the part of workers to increase profits. Outside the factory, the city these workers inhabit is a gloomy cluster of skyscrapers, here and there illuminated in a neon glare, run by

business magnates whose products, manufactured at break-neck pace, contain no real, lasting value.¹⁵

Without any reverence for history, and with profit the primary concern in the city, the individual--the citizen, the worker--possesses no real value, when not engaged in production or consumption, an attitude reflected in the city itself. Mumford notes that while Americans tried to use all available space, leaving nothing vacant for public use, "spacious designs like those of the Place Vendôme [in Paris] or Russell Square [in London], still flourishing after centuries of use, turned out to be far more economical than those that sought only to cover the maximum amount of rentable space" (428). American cities expanded quickly, but focussed on construction of commercial buildings rather than housing for the influx of workers or creating spaces where these workers could spend leisure time. As a result, even with the retreat of the wealthy to the city suburbs and various exclusive communities, cities became still more congested, with even less open space for people, and, consequently, more debilitated. And though in 1840 there was pressure for the construction of public parks, which "underscored the insufficiency of public space in cities," the attempt to rectify the problem was for the most part doomed to failure because "the countryside could not be injected [into the city] in bits and pieces here and there" (Goldfield and Brownell 185). Moreover, parks wedged in a disused corner remain disused, for they lay out of the normal current of human traffic.

Paris has always contained parks, interspersed throughout the city, though under Hausmannisation, despite the addition of *Parc Montsouris*, the *Bois de Boulogne*,

¹⁵ For more on Miller's attitude toward "work," see Chapter Three.

the *Bois de Vincennes*, and the *Buttes-Chaumont*, more parks were destroyed than created--even a sizable portion of Luxembourg Gardens was abandoned to land speculators (Marchand 79). These new parks, modelled on English parks (Napoléon III was an Anglophile), demonstrate that in addition to a certain disdain for Parisians, Napoléon III and Haussmann were also aware of their needs. These four new parks, located roughly along the four corners of the compass, contain walking paths and, in *Montsouris* and *Buttes-Chaumont*, an unnatural (i.e. manufactured) Romantic grandeur. *Buttes-Chaumont*, for instance, contains artificial mountains and an artificial waterfall, constructed with some of the debris from the demolitions. These parks are used, and even if Haussmann raised the mountains, with rocky ledges, they no longer seem artificial or coldly synthetic.

Those who wanted to construct parks in America faced the problem that though the country had been ostensibly founded as a democracy, meaning it was intended to be responsive to the voice of the people as a whole, America has tended to venerate the individual rather than the collective. This tendency is partially due to the fear of collective action, a powerful force which brought the country into existence and might, by implication, take it right back out. While Americans in general valorized the "rugged individual," only a very small fraction of the American population measured up to the ideal. The rest operated in factories, timing their motions to machines, or worked in some other similarly restrictive fashion. The "rugged individualist," however, was exemplified by those who made the journey from "rags to riches," those who lived on the frontier, and entrepreneurs who saw possibilities for making money where others did not. In fact, most virtues in American society relate to obedience (to

God, the law, the bosses) and to productivity (the work ethic). Community relations take a secondary or tertiary position.

Kunstler argues, "to appreciate grand public spaces, a culture had to first esteem the idea of the public realm, and this had not been the case in America" (67), where all available land had instead been quickly divided into parcels and sold without, it is worth reiterating, consideration for the future inhabitants. America, as Miller noted, was a land where people came to take rather than to give, and in such conditions "community" does not naturally arise. In Europe, not only was the interior and exterior design of a building important, but "the space between buildings was as important as the buildings themselves" (39). In this space, people make their way through the city, meet one another, relax, or celebrate any number of holidays throughout the year. Sidewalks, for instance, are not simply routes from one place to the next, one store to the next, but places where people may stop and hold conversations, which often impedes travel and may annoy people unused to such occurrences even as it demonstrates sidewalks possess a public value beyond their utilitarian role.

Since many American cities were quite congested by the early- to mid-nineteenth century and offered little or no place for people to gather, in desperation many escaped to one of the few remaining relatively open spaces: the lush, green cemeteries on the outskirts of the city (Goldfield and Brownell 185). People would play games, enjoy picnics, and/or simply relax in these cemeteries, away from the noise and grime of the city. For a brief time, cemeteries were even "planned as recreational space" though the destruction and desecration of cemeteries soon ended that (185). In an attempt to rectify the congestion problem, a few cities managed to

create parks for the people. Some, Central Park in New York City is perhaps the best model, were relatively successful and much used. In general, writes Miller in the midst of his tour of America, the American park is little more than a "circumscribed vacuum" (*Nightmare*, 59): a patch of green, a bench, a swingset for children.

"[T]here is never an ounce of personality in the park," he reports (59), perhaps because they are often set off in some forlorn corner rather than in some central, convenient location. Such a lacking suggests the parks were added out of a sense of obligation, rather than as a contribution to the life of the city and its citizens, and that city officials devoted as little expenditure as possible of time, money and imagination to their location, design and construction. These parks, then, often constituted a half-hearted gesture towards public space rather than a full-fledged effort to bring peace and a little bit of nature into the lives of harried city-dwellers.

Similar to Miller's reading of skyscrapers as symbols of control by the rich, Trachtenberg sees in American parks not the attempt to bring the country into the city, but instead "the ordering hand of corporate organization, the values of system and hierarchy" (112): parks designed for limited uses, as playgrounds for instance where children sat on swings and parents pushed, were also a subtle attempt to destroy working-class consciousness with an infusion of "middle class norms of hearth and tea table," an attempt to ensure workers did not perceive themselves as a distinct and oppressed class and thus unite and gain a voice, hence power (111-12). The type of people who inhabit these parks, says Miller, are "[t]he American type par excellence, ever ready to believe what is written in the newspapers, ever on the look out for a Messiah. Not a speck of human dignity left. The white worm squirming in the vise of respectability" (*Nightmare* 51)! Parks in the U.S., then, seem to generally fall into

one of two categories, either afterthoughts or levelling attempts by those in power, such that everyone should become, in the most banal sense, an "American."

Revolutionary instincts, should these exist, must be undermined.

Cities, without the space and the quiet afforded people who live in the country, presented a "sometimes painful contrast to the more attractive countryside" (Goldfield and Brownell 184). Their sole purpose, "as centers for business," presented no clear demand for "ceremonial spaces and public structures" (Kunstler 33). We pay a price, Miller notes, for cities designed exclusively for exploitation: "nowhere else in the world is the divorce between man and nature so complete. Nowhere have I encountered such a dull, monotonous fabric of life as here in America. Here boredom reaches its peak" (*Nightmare*, 20). Once more, the blandness of the architecture, the one-dimensional landscape of most cities, unbroken by parks or squares, mirrors the existence to be found there, a reduced realm of human experience, conducive to the single-minded devotion to work and consumption so typically American.

European cities, says Kunstler, evolved over a longer period of time and thus support a wider variety of uses, a wider variety of architectures, and an "overarching civic consciousness" (Kunstler 33). There, cities, more than mere seats for business, are multi-dimensional, composed of a variety of buildings and public spaces "tied together in an organic whole, reflecting the idea of civilization as a spiritual enterprise" (33), rather than a mere pecuniary venture. While on a visit to New York City in 1935, Miller recalls a conversation among artists at a bar where one blurts out, "*all great art is local!*" Such a statement is naïve, in Miller's eyes. "To be local there must be a sense of place, and there must be a whole to which the parts refer" (Miller, *Aller Retour* 72). Not only is there no sense of place, something that arises from

community, but there is no history, or respect for history, as such; this takes visible form in city expansion and the consistent destruction of old buildings rather than renovating or enlarging them.

The initial exigencies encountered by those who settled North America, as well as those that cities confronted in the face of industrialism, can only explain the peculiar construction of American cities, not excuse it. For Miller, even a city as old as Boston "was a vast jumbled waste created by pre-human or sub-human monsters in a delirium of greed" (*Nightmare* 11-12). When Miller compares Paris and New York, despite some of the unfortunate parallels he sees between the two cities--both are experiencing the decline described by Spengler, both have been affected by industrialization, though to different degrees--what Miller celebrates the most about Paris is "the notion of the city as historical text" (Kennedy 146). There is an organic unity to Paris he finds lacking in American cities. Where European cities expanded while preserving large portions of the historic parts of the city, American cities, prey to local industries, usually allowed them to do as they pleased. Miller predicts that sooner or later Americans will learn "whether the ability to make money," which is what their cities are contrived for, "and the ability to survive are one and the same" (*Nightmare* 50). And not merely to survive but to *live*--"[t]hen we shall see the meaning of true wealth" (50).

Much of Miller's criticism, inspired by Spengler and Nietzsche, reflects more than a simple critique of America and Americans but also a vision of the decline of Western civilization. What is happening in America represents only a sign of things to come. Miller accepts Spengler's vision of "the metaphysically exhausted soil of the

West" (Spengler 5) which produces a culture¹⁶ in which "the fire in the soul dies down" (75). Nietzsche similarly perceives a decrepitude in modern human beings, timid followers of slave morality. For modern people, Nietzsche argues, "*The stone is more stone than before*" (*Human* 130), suggesting that even if buildings are constructed to communicate something, and "[o]riginally everything about a Greek or Christian building meant something," now all the modern person sees or looks for is a superficial beauty which is only ever a mask (131). It is body without soul. Often the only reason for ornamentation, in American terms, on a structure such as the Woolworth Building in New York City, was to make it stand out and thus advertise itself.

America, says Miller, could be "a Paradise": "We have only to make ourselves fit to inhabit it" (*Nightmare* 23). Americans seek only to make money and to spend it, and the fact that American cities are largely unlivable reflects, in part, the very limited goals of those who inhabit them. It is now a variant of the chicken-and-egg question: Are those living in cities too mean, too unwilling to rebuild their cities? or are the cities so repressive, so obdurate that they cannot be transformed?

Miller's Paris and the American South

Paris and regions of the American south constitute sites where Miller believes one can discern a sense of place. Paris remains distinctive because of its long history

¹⁶ "Culture" is not used here in the Spenglerian sense but in the sense of "a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our sense and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values--constitutive and constituting--which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming" (R. Williams, *Marxism*, 110).

and the relatively successful attempt to preserve much of the historical city. The American South is another place where, sporadically, remnants of the culture that flourished there¹⁷ before the Civil War can still be seen--especially in New Orleans and Charleston. It is here, in the South, where history lives, where Sherman's march through the South is remembered by some as if it happened yesterday. In this last section of Chapter One, I wish to focus upon those features of cities and city-life that Miller venerates.

Miller's Paris was the Paris of an exile. He went there for "[t]he protective silence . . . , the congenial tolerance of eccentrics and experimentalists" (Baxter 10). As it did for many expatriate Americans, Paris provided Miller the latitude he needed to develop as a writer. While many expatriates ultimately travel in order to develop an appreciation of their homeland, Miller, a sort of unwitting exile as we described him earlier, has no such intentions and indeed experiences no such reconciliation. "This is my world," Miller said of Paris (*Emil* 93), two years into his exile. "I can accomplish things now--the way is marked out . . . I have a direction" (94, ellipses in original). Shari Benstock writes in *Women of the Left Bank* that men and homosexual women were the greatest beneficiaries of Parisian freedom (451). For even if their sexuality marginalized them, in Paris lesbians were left to their own devices and "created their own private places . . . redefining the nineteenth-century salon for their own emotional and intellectual purposes" (451). Though Miller expressed the fear that he might be thrown out of the country for the book he was writing, *Tropic of Cancer* (*Emil* 94),

¹⁷ At least in popular culture mythology. W. J. Cash argues, in *The Mind of the South*, that plantations of the American south that measured up to that depicted in *Gone with the Wind* were a rarity.

and anti-pornography leagues existed in Paris as well as other regions of France, Adrian Rifkin notes that those charged with deciding what did and did not constitute pornography were more likely "to see the complexity of the context of a *délit* rather than its content in the letter of the law" (109). French officials, in short, were more likely to employ common sense or critical judgement than to blindly follow some state-produced guideline. That French leniency, for Miller, was a healthy antidote to American Puritanism. Kennedy writes of the "orienting function of place" (4), and it is in Paris that Miller frees himself from the obligation to produce "Literature" and settles down to producing instead his "gob of spit in the face of Art."

The American Puritanical attitude--as exemplified in the actions and attitudes of an Anthony Comstock suppressing not only what he perceived as simple pornography but also publications on health-related issues such as contraception, menstruation, and venereal disease--articulates a life-denying force whose influence pervades other aspects of American life, leisure time for instance (see Chapter Three). Paris offers a distinct alternative. In a 1933 letter to his friend Emil Schnellock, Miller relates a street scene in which a drunkard makes a spectacle of himself, dancing and singing in front of a café, while

the crowd on the terrasse watches in amusement, an amusement finely differentiated from derision or scorn or disgust. And then, Emil, by Jesus, the curious thing happens that on the other side of the street, a whore who had been standing against the shutters waiting for her prey, suddenly grows inspired, grows intoxicated by the music and by the crazy drunkard's antics too, no doubt, and she lifts her dresses with a grand whoop-la and commenced to do a jig. And there, by God, you have the real spirit of Paris. The man of the streets, the woman of the streets, the open café, the tolerance, the amusement, the wasting of time, the indifference, the common humanity A soft gentle moment which in America would produce a jagged note. (139-40, ellipses in original)

This scene encapsulates for Miller, not only the humanity of Paris and the French, but also the *Joie de vivre* that permeates the culture. In America such displays, Miller contends, would be frowned upon, the joy considered excessive and unmannerly, the drunkard and the whore likely arrested as public nuisances. The reaction of the French is telling, for Miller, reorienting him toward life as experienced by the French, helping to refocus him toward what is real, human, vital, toward what is "in the open street."

That the French not only understand life as something to be lived and enjoyed is underscored, for Miller, by the fact that they admit to the basic needs of life. The outdoor urinals, seen all over Paris in the thirties, symbolize the grounded nature of Parisians. From the perspective of an American in Paris, Miller declares the urinal impressive because it assures him "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" (*Black Spring* 42-3). Miller, ever the *flâneur*, even provides a listing of some of his favorite urinals (44), a testimony to the pleasure he takes in Paris.

Upon his arrival in Paris in March 1930, Miller experiences immediate intoxication. He writes of

wandering along the Seine at night, wandering and wandering, going mad with the beauty of it, the trees leaning to, the broken images in the water, the rush of the current under the bloody lights of the bridges, the women sleeping in doorways, . . .; everywhere the musty porches of the cathedrals and beggars and lice and old hags full of St. Vitus' dance. (*Cancer* 16)

The importance of place, writes Kennedy, is "that we find or know ourselves principally through the attachments we form to a place" (8). The beauty and squalor of Paris jell, for Miller. As opposed to his experience of New York City, the physical

Paris attracts; it is permeated with meaning: "The streets sing, the stones talk. The houses drip history, glory, romance" (*Emil* 18). Putnam, who arrived in Paris in 1926, communicates a similar enchantment with Paris: "This was not a dead past; it was one that lived and breathed" (98). Kennedy maintains Miller's interest in the Parisian past focused either on "antiquarianism" or as it "recorded past instances of injustice" (149). His examples--Charles the Silly (Charles VI), the Knights Templar, Rabelais--point to another aspect of Miller's fascination with Parisian and French history: he liked the fantastic, larger than life stories, reflected in American frontier stories as well, which he would mirror in his fiction with characters, events and descriptions replete with embellishment and hyperbole.

Not only is Paris a city with a long and elaborate history, a history it attempts--for the most part--to preserve, but for Miller it is beautiful. His early letters from Paris, a selection of which are collected in *Letters to Emil*, contain numerous listings of streets he has walked down, sites he has seen, and cafés he has patronized. "At night," he writes in *Quiet Days in Clichy*, "from Montmartre, Paris is truly magical; it lies in the hollow of a bowl like an enormous splintered gem" (66). Paris also has "dreary streets, wide, colorless, insipid streets that might have been transplanted from Brooklyn or Hoboken. Not many, thank God" (*Emil* 39). And Miller criticizes Paris and France just as he condemns much that he sees, especially when looking through his Spenglerian lens and detecting the downfall of the West:

Paris is simply an artificial stage, a revolving stage that permits the spectator to glimpse all phases of the conflict. Of itself Paris initiates no dramas. They are begun elsewhere. Paris is simply an obstetrical instrument that tears the living embryo from the womb and puts it in the incubator. (*Cancer* 29)

In Spenglerian terms, the Paris Miller describes is a *civilization*; it has stopped developing and no longer produces anything new. It is merely a site, like an oven, where something can be brought to final form. Kennedy writes, "[T]he potential function of place . . . inheres in the relation which the self assumes to its surroundings (material and human)" (4). Rather than an inconsistency, then, these contradictory depictions of the city are emblematic of both Miller's ongoing internal struggle with his perceived failure as a writer and a man, and his struggle with Western civilization which he believes to be in decline. "The world is a cancer eating itself away," Miller writes in *Tropic of Cancer* (2), but even that decay, perhaps not as strong in Paris as in America, retains a "nurturing power" (Kennedy 171). Kennedy offers the possibility that "every textual construction of place implies just such a mapping or symbolic representation of an interior terrain" (6). Miller thus exposes both his joy and despair for the world in his treatment of Paris.

Despite this image of Paris as an "artificial stage," seemingly dead, perhaps contributing nothing more than space; and despite the fact that Paris like other centers of civilization is a "charnel house," Miller still waxes poetic when describing the city in "Walking Up and Down in China":

I see the city of Paris ring upon ring of streets; village within village; fortress within fortress. Like the gnarled stump of an old redwood, solitary and majestic she stands there in the broad plain of the Seine. [...] From whatever height, from whatever distance of time or place, there she stands, the fair city of Paris, soft, gemlike, a holy citadel whose mysterious paths thread beneath the clustering sea of roofs to break upon the open plain. (*Black Spring* 192)

Putnam notes the difficulty in resisting the temptation to become sentimental about Paris, in response to "the physical beauty and ultimately unanalyzable psychic charm of a city which for centuries has been the refuge of and the home of exiles" (50).

Though also charmed by Paris, Miller's ambivalent relation to Paris, and to the modern world in general, usually prevents him from succumbing to an uncomplicated sentimentality, the notion that everything Parisian has value simply because it is Parisian. Furthermore, Miller recognizes his status as outsider: "I will never become a European," he writes, "but thank God, I am no longer an American" (*Emil* 94). Paris has served to free him, he believes, from his cultural identity and to spur him on to his work, but it has not transformed him into a Parisian.

France in the twenties and thirties was a cultural mecca, home to painters and writers alike. The Parisian avant-garde, especially the Surrealists, stirred up excitement, even in Miller (Kennedy 151) who would later largely repudiate them in "An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere," because they operated as a movement¹⁸ and "[were] trying to establish an absolute," because they were idealists and he believed their works lacked "*guts* and *significance*" (*Cosmological* 181). Still, for Miller they remain the only truly "stimulating" happening on the horizon in the nineteen-thirties (188).

Most of these artistic movements, in Paris, staked out territory: they frequented certain cafés and avoided others. In order to understand the ferment within which the American expatriates of the twenties and thirties existed--"Paris!" Miller exults, "Meaning the Café Select, the Dôme" (*Cancer* 17)--it is important to understand the function of the café in France. Cafés remain a central meeting place, "the most democratic of meeting places," as Herbert Lottman describes them (35). Whereas Americans generally seclude themselves in their homes, after work, and only

¹⁸ Movements within artistic circles seems to be something typical of most countries. Miller's rejection of movements seems typically American--individualist.

occasionally go out to dinner with colleagues, friends, or neighbors, for many French the café is a daily stop. The French, and the expatriates as well, spend a good deal of time outside the home in cafés:

One could not only meet friends in a café but conduct business there, spend half a day writing letters, or even a book. One needed no invitation to strike up a conversation with a stranger at a neighboring table, and an appointment in a café often replaced an invitation home. (35)

The café is, for Miller as for others, another symbol of the difference between the French and Americans. It demonstrates the more communal nature of the French, as well as the relaxed *joie de vivre* Miller deems missing in America. The people Miller observes sitting at the café, who appear "[s]o intelligent, so indolent, so carefree" (*Cancer* 223), provide a stark contrast to so many Americans who could never relax without a prick of conscience. Many of the Paris letters that comprise the *Letters to Emil* were written on café letterhead, for many cafés had their own paper and handed it out free to customers, an advertisement--certainly--but also an encouragement to customers to remain, acknowledging that work and pleasure can both be public.

In the introduction to *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, Miller writes that when he returned to America in 1940 he "wanted to have a last look at [his] country and leave it with a good taste in [his] mouth" (10). What a difference, for Miller, between the French and the Americans. Where in the French citizen he sees a basic humanity, in the American the most noticeable feature is that "his expression is mild, bland, pseudo-serious, and definitely fatuous. [...] He looks as though he were turned out by a university with the aid of a chain store cloak and suit house" (44-5). Miller notes that while Europe may be older than America and its cities may suffer from

deterioration, "the soul expands. Steadily, like a thermometer rising, the soul expands" (*Aller Retour* 68). It is not crushed by a rigid, puritanical conformity.

In America, and especially in the industrial north, he perceives mental and spiritual decline which flies in the face of the proclaimed energy of Americans: "The fat, puffy, wattle-faced man of forty-five who has turned asexual is the greatest monument to futility that America has produced" (*Nightmare* 46). Rather than a description of a type *dominant* in American culture, though numerous specimens could be gathered that fit such a description,¹⁹ Miller describes a type *expressive* of American culture and, in so doing, reiterates "his refusal to accept much of American life" (Baxter 15). The one bright spot Miller finds during his trip around the country, he concedes, is the South--the southwest and, especially, the Old South, which he declares "is full of eccentric characters; it still fosters individuality" (*Nightmare* 45).

Miller finds New Orleans "the most congenial city in America that I know," for just as he experienced in France, in New Orleans "the sensual pleasures assume the importance which they deserve" (126). "It is," he continues, "the only city in America where, after a lingering meal accompanied by good wine and good talk, one can stroll at random through the French Quarter and feel like a civilized human being" (126). Certainly walking in a section of New Orleans christened "the French Quarter" heightened Miller's enjoyment, for the after-dinner walk with people who love their city functions as a yet another echo, a reminder, of his experience of Paris, suggesting hope remains, however limited, even for America.

¹⁹ Arthur Miller's Willy Loman, from *Death of a Salesman*, might expose such a figure.

More problematic, however, is Miller's notion, after his visit to New Orleans, of the South: "At the rate we are going, in another hundred years or so there will be scarcely a trace or evidence on this continent of the only culture we have been able to produce--the rich slave culture of the South" (131). On the one hand Miller argues there is no American culture, so the fact that he embraces whatever America has produced in the way of a culture should not surprise. In this instance, Miller provides an example of what a culture looks like to those who have never seen one. On the other hand, he seems blind to the very real problems and suffering that split Southern culture. Perhaps Miller's notion of this culture can be ascribed to romantic naïvete, a vision of the Old South still wrapped in its pre-Civil War history and love of land, still producing rugged individuals such as Thomas Sutpen--in William Faulkner's *Absalom! Absalom!*--who stand up to the world and simply do as they please, though, as W. J. Cash writes, these rugged individuals operated in the South within a near "strait-jacket conformity" (88). Little of the Old South was still in existence in 1941 when Miller visited, and Cash argues, in *The Mind of the South* published in 1941, that the general vision of the Old South, with the mansions and the indolent Southern belles sipping mint juleps, only lived up to that picture in a very few instances. But Miller's veneration of the Old South is also partly a result of his notion of "south" and "north" as states of mind, though it is impossible to separate these two notions from American history: "In the South life for its own sake, hedonism, action and contemplation, ideas related to living" opposed to "the northern world [of] idealism, striving, *Idea*" (*Emil* 149-50, capitalization Miller's): the openness of southern peoples contrasts with the reserve of northerners, southern laziness with northern industry.

Miller's approval of the Old South is actually much less all-embracing than *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* makes it appear. In *The Nightmare Notebook*, a facsimile of a notebook he took with him on his 1940-42 trip, he writes much less admiringly of Southerners, describing them as "[p]hantasmal, menacing," and the South as "[p]eopled with assassins and perverts" (n.p.). Charleston is "the first American city which impresses [him] as having charm & character" (n.p.), while Cherokee, North Carolina, home to Native Americans, offers "[g]reat silence. Peace" (n.p.). In fact, most of the positive comments Miller records about the South, in *The Nightmare Notebook*, relate directly to a history that goes back further than most American cities can lay claim to: cities founded in regions first settled by Native Americans, by the Spaniards, the French, or, like Charleston, founded early in colonial times. Still, he describes even an old city like Savannah, Georgia, as "fat and murderous" though "the dream element is still there--but now hideous, distorted, whitewashed by the cruel bleak Baptist spirit" (n.p.).

In choosing to venerate the Old South, Miller demonstrates a decided iconoclasm, for Cash depicts a brutal, racist South--individualist to a point, perhaps, but united as well as divided by bitterness and hatred. Like Fredric Jameson who, dialectically, perceives virtue in collective action of any kind (*Political Unconscious* 290-91), for which he has been uncomprehendingly criticized by Cornel West and others, Miller apparently sees virtue in most any culture with a distinctive character. While Jameson's acceptance of collective action is not undifferentiated, Miller's veneration of what he sees as a unified Southern culture at times appears to be, and it is well to remember Max Horkheimer's instructive remark about such unity as he

looked to Nazi Germany: "Error has no less often united men than truth" (*Critical Theory* 283).

Miller expresses his problem with American culture succinctly in his essay "Staff of Life," from *Remember to Remember*. "What do I find wrong with America? Everything. I begin at the beginning, with the staff of life: bread. If the bread is bad the whole life is bad" (36). Beginning at the beginning means for Miller going back to basics, to what has been a staple of life for humans since time immemorial and to what Americans value. "Americans," he writes, "don't care about good bread" (35). Like their vast cities lacking character and crushing their inhabitants with gloom, the bread Americans eat is "unwholesome, unpalatable and unappetizing"(52); it is, in short, "bread without life" (35). That the breads Americans eat are, above all, filling but flavorless signifies for Miller that "the very core of life is contaminated" (35). Furthermore, American contentment with their bread demonstrates they "have also lost their taste for life. For enjoyment. For good conversation. For everything worthwhile" (36)--for that which he found and praised in Paris. Americans, in Miller's view, prefer the most up-to-date commodities, whether they need them or not, over simpler, more basic necessities. "A plate of false teeth means more to an American than a loaf of good bread," he asserts, suggesting the newest gadgets are more highly valued than those objects with which people come in daily contact (35).

The nearly ten-year period Miller lived in Paris served to focus his attention on America and western civilization, forced him (as it does many expatriates) to come to terms with himself and what he valued. While most expatriates make their peace with America, Miller does not. Though he may not have appreciated bread before he

relocated to France, by the time of his return to America he recognized its value and it became a symbol for him of America's culture infirmity, as evidenced in their cities and, as we shall see, in their obsessive love affair with commodities.

Chapter Two / Cities of Delight and Disgust: the City Spectacle and Consumption

"Yes," I said, "I'm crazy enough to believe that the happiest man on earth is the man with the fewest needs." (Miller, *The Colossus of Maroussi*, 133)

There are times when faith in the future of mankind can be kept alive only through absolute resistance to the prevailing responses of mankind. (Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*, 280)

In *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* and *Remember to Remember: The Air-Conditioned Nightmare Volume 2*, Henry Miller continues an attack on America, begun in *Tropic of Cancer*, as a country that once promised the life more abundant but failed to deliver. American bread, tasteless and filling, composed of flour bleached of its nutrients, "the staff of our unsavory and monotonous life" (*Remember*, 50), symbolizes for Miller everything wrong in America. "Yet," he insists, "millions are wasted advertising it" (36). More specifically, he might have added, millions of dollars are wasted *marketing* it, making it seem palatable with brightly-colored wrapping, through identification with an image, or set of images--relating it to something quintessentially American, the Statue of Liberty or "youth," for instance, cheapening and distorting that with which it is associated--in that way creating desire for the product. With mass production, the availability of a great number of products intensifies competition. Marketing a product solely on any material virtues it may possess is not enough to ensure substantial sales. A product must somehow be associated with something else--through the packaging it comes in, the other goods it is placed among, the spokesperson who lends a name or face to it--so that it makes an appeal to the potential purchaser's imagination. Such an appeal, additionally, tends to

promote repeat purchases among those who identify with the image(s) surrounding the product.

Both Miller and Baudelaire, as noted above, felt alienated from their respective historical periods. The obscenity found in Baudelaire's poetry, writes Susan Buck-Morss, is "a radically new aesthetic sensibility that drew its breath from the 'decadent' sense experience of the modern city" (177), expressing this sense of alienation. The new Paris--forming in the wake of industrialism, as well as Haussmannisation, which made of Paris a "*ville bourgeoise*" (Marchand 93)--becomes the site of greater indulgences, and greater lamentation by people who saw the Parisian enjoyment as extreme, vulgar (88). The 'decadent,' in this instance, includes the sexual and the sensual, commercial appeals to all senses, displays of great wealth amidst raging poverty--the decadent inspiring both profound enjoyment and keen repulsion. Miller, meanwhile, accepting neither the limits nor the excesses of modern culture, indulges in his own provocative unveiling of modern life, returning repeatedly to people engaged in acts privatized by society or expounding upon the carelessness of a system which, as we shall see, maintains its grasp on power with further excesses. In the modernizing city virtually anything can and will be purchased, and in great abundance, due to technological improvements in manufacturing, to new forms of marketing, as well as the large increase in population and, thus, workers.

The industrial revolution, and the simultaneous rise of commodity capitalism, generally affected large cities first, with the effects quickly spreading to the smaller cities and then to the countryside, until finally few or none escaped its impact. Surveying the West in 1919, Oswald Spengler declared, "In the form of democracy, money has won" (379), suggesting that democracy is merely a "cover" for business

and for free enterprise. Though it boasted a peculiar meaning in the years of the Second Empire¹ and serves as a founding myth in America, "democracy" for Spengler, as for Nietzsche, operates as a leveling metaphor with few of the positive connotations its adherents proclaim. Money flows more freely in a capitalist-democratic economy, and governments allow people to vote their leaders into office, thus providing the appearance of freedom and equality, but whether people actually enjoy greater freedom remains an open question. Who ultimately holds power, elected political leaders or private economic leaders?

"The enemy of man," Henry Miller declares, is not germs, but man himself, his pride, his prejudices, his stupidity, his arrogance. No class is immune, no system holds a panacea. Each one individually must revolt against a way of life which is not his own (*Colossus* 82). Much that comprises modern life--work and the cult of the commodity, especially--turns out to be, for Miller, a way of life that is neither his nor ours, but something imposed upon the western world under the rubric of "progress." Guy Debord has called this new society, in the book of the same title, "the Society of Spectacle." He describes a populace directed by capitalist consumption and all that goes with it--commodities and marketing, production and consumption. "The spectacle," he writes, "is not a collection of images but a social rapport between people mediated by images" (16): It has become our culture, the lens through which we see and experience the world.

¹ The French people were periodically called on to re-elect Napoleon III as emperor, though in an 1851 *coup d'état* he had toppled his own fledgling democracy and founded the authoritarian Second Empire. Voting served a symbolic function, that of reaffirming the emperor, and gave a false sense of power to the people.

What Becomes a Commodity

In Chapter One, I argued that the American city, mapped out on the grid pattern, was in reality less a space for people to live and grow than property to be sold. Phillipe Hamon writes that during the era of Baron von Haussmann's dramatic transformation of Parisian topography, Paris itself was reduced to "an object of land speculation," in this way converted into "a plot of land to be developed" (129)--and then turned over to bourgeois businessmen, the sector of the populace that benefited most from Haussmannisation. Commodification tends to both reduce objects to their essences and to magnify them into dreams. The marketing of commodities, consequently, results in a productive tension that leans toward the dreamworld, as evinced in fashion--where a coat is not simply a coat but an *Yves St. Laurent* or a *Christian Dior*, a status symbol at the very least, for the *nouveau riche* a sign of arrival. Paris itself is an example of a commodity, for it is, on the one hand, merely land upon which people live; but it exists also as that enthralling place, where some of the most important monuments in French history stand, where the cultural leaders preside and perform, where the brightest, most colorful lights shine, and the newest and best commodities can be purchased, at ever-rising prices. Most tourists know the city as "Paris"--the place where they can visit Notre Dame, the Eiffel Tower, The *Galleries Lafayette*, the Louvre, or sit in *cafés* drinking tiny cups of strong coffee and watching the world walk by--though the other Paris tugs at them constantly, today in the hooded shapes of women sprawled on sidewalks, hands out, shaking in mute appeals for money.

Though Baudelaire witnessed the Parisian poor and depicted them sympathetically, in a poem like "Le Vin des Chiffoniers" [The Ragpickers' Wine] or in

some of the *Tableaux Parisiens*, Baudelaire's Paris was at the same time a Paris of wealth and splendor. The Parisian streets, often narrow and crowded with horses, carriages, and offal, presented quite a danger for pedestrians, so to protect pedestrians and to encourage shopping and browsing, streets filled with shops were, here and there, enclosed under glass roofs and vehicular traffic prohibited. For Walter Benjamin, these *passage*,² symbols of Parisian abundance and the rising consumer culture, were both "the original temple of commodity capitalism" and "the precursors of the modern department stores" (qtd. in Buck-Morss 83). They represent precursors, as well, then, of the shopping mall, so prevalent in America after World War II and currently making inroads in Europe and the industrialized East. Though the first *passage*, the *Palais-Royal*, dates from 1786, most date from the first half of the nineteenth century, some fourteen constructed during the eighteen-twenties (Favier 221). The *passages* as well as the first department stores came into their prime while Baudelaire was still a young man in the city (Buck-Morss 178).

A number of the Parisian *passages* still exist: two of them, Panorama and Jouffroy (which connects to a third, Verdeau), lie on Boulevard Montparnasse in a direct line with each other. The visitor today can walk down the tiled floors, under the high glass ceilings, finding *cafés*, book, toy and furniture stores, as well as the *Musée Grévin*. Another, on St. Germain, is only covered at either end and boasts an uneven cobblestone walkway linking restaurants, bars, and art galleries. In these *passages* visitors can still escape the noise of the street and often the thick human

² *Passages* has generally been translated as *arcades*, but for consistency with the French and German I will call them *passages* from now on. Most but not all of the *passages*, it should be noted, were glass-enclosed; some were open to the elements, if not to traffic.

traffic as well. One of the more famous instances of the *passage* in literature appears in Louis Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* [The Parisian Peasant], where the *paysan* explores the soon-to-be demolished *Passage de l'Opéra*, a dark crumbling edifice, containing a variety of stores and restaurants, residue of the past in the form of mouldings and old price lists, as well as a bordello.

The *passages*, housing a number of stores each selling a limited number of products, encouraged crowds to wander from one display window to the next. The department store, since it stocked a wide variety of products that had once been sold by separate stores, reduced the need for shoppers to wander from store to store: in the department store customers simply moved from one section to the next, from one floor to the next,³ finding everything they needed and more. Enticing people into one large space, the department store thinned the crowd on the sidewalks and in the *passages*, altering the routine of many in the city, including the *flâneur*. Baudelaire, for instance, "loved solitude, but . . . wanted it in a crowd" (Benjamin, *CB*, 50). Haussmann's renovations, as well as the rise of the department stores, "converted the *flâneur* into a figure of exile" (P. Ferguson 81), a person who no longer knew the city and whose milieu, the crowd, had to a large extent evaporated. The *flâneur's* response to the "urban spectacle," moreover, was to be "dazed" rather than "dazzled" by "a revolution that seemed never to end" (81). Hamon, taking a cue from Benjamin, asserts that "tourists and shoppers" replace the *flâneur* (145), in part transforming Paris from a place where people live and move to a place people might experience but never know.

³ The escalator is a nineteenth-century invention.

The *passages* "were the first modern architecture for the public" (Buck-Morss 144). Not even purchasing-power was required for wandering among the stores and crowds in the *passages*, whereas in the early department store it was sometimes a requirement for entrance. The *passages* most clearly foreshadow department stores as "the first consumer 'dream houses,' placed at the service of commodity worship" (144). Owners and their employees filled the windows of stores in the *passages* with goods to tempt shoppers, as well as those just wandering by in the crowd, into the stores. For someone like Baudelaire who could not always afford to purchase products, the shop windows still presented a reason to escape to the streets. One regret Baudelaire expressed during his three years in Brussels, beginning in 1864, was that he could find "[n]o shopwindows. Strolling, something that nations with imagination love, is not possible in Brussels. There is nothing to see and the streets are unusable" (qtd. in Benjamin, *CB*, 50). Baudelaire clearly recognizes the imaginative possibilities inspired by commodities.

The first department store, *Ville de France*, opened its doors for business in 1844, "in Paris with a hundred and fifty employees on its staff" (Mumford 438). William Leach, whose *Land of Desire* chronicles the birth of consumer culture in America, writes that only well after the American Civil War, in the eighteen-eighties, did department stores begin to open in America, eventually replacing the dry goods stores that had previously provided much the same service (7-8)--only without the modern approach to sales. America, in this instance, followed the lead of Paris. John Wanamaker, one of the first to open a Parisian-style department store in America, travelled to Paris himself several times in the years before the turn of the twentieth century, and later sent representatives there, in order to learn the newest ideas about

marketing and window display design, along with the latest fashions (Leach 99-100). It did not take long, however, to create a consumer public in America.

Commodity Culture and Learning Your Place

Department stores quickly made their niche in the downtown, soon known as "the retail district," such that when "urban residents talked about going 'downtown,' this is the area to which they were usually referring" (Goldfield and Brownell 210). While department stores carved out their own local space within the city, their influence extended well beyond the confines of their stores and the "downtown" they occupied. Wanamaker and others, like J. C. Fields, "translated the new economy into a new culture for many Americans" (Leach 34). Not only did they help change the way commodities were produced and sold, but they "legitimated fashion, fostered the cult of the new, democratized desire and consumption" (34). One might even contend that Wanamaker and others of his ilk helped to distance one generation from the next, visible most explosively in the "generation gap" of the nineteen-sixties; for, if Leach is correct, the preoccupation of Americans after the development of consumer culture is quite different from those who lived before it. Additionally, commodity culture depends upon ruptures, technological breakthroughs and innovative designs in clothes, automobiles and other products, to provide new products, new looks and a sense of difference from what has come before. Each generation, then, can look back to what came before and measure its difference.

Just as Henry Miller laments the near-extinction of the rich and variegated Native American culture, in order that this bland new American culture could take

root, he also laments what was by the middle nineteen-thirties an entrenched consumer culture:

In the windows of the religious shops are inexpensive crosses to commemorate the event[: the crucifixion]. A poor Jew nailed to the cross so that we might have life everlasting. And haven't we got it though . . . cement and balloon tires [inflatable rather than solid] and radios and loudspeakers and whores with wooden legs and commodities in such abundance that there's no work for the starving. (*Cosmological* 44, ellipses in original)

Everything is marketable, from technological developments to religion, and people are inundated with products. One senses here again that Miller perceives unrequited potential, that something good could have come as a result of the new technologies and the new possibilities they released, and laments the failure.

Marshall Berman puts a fine point on Miller's argument when he asserts that capitalism "destroys the possibilities it creates," inspiring "self-development for everybody," hence the democratic aura, while encouraging only those traits that the market can benefit from (96). "[E]verything else within us," he writes, "everything nonmarketable, gets draconically repressed . . ." (Berman 96). The department store and its methods of operation, above all its focus on creating desire for its products, must take at least partial responsibility for the failure of this new consciousness to transform Americans into something approximating the embodiment of their ideals. "We have enslaved ourselves," Miller asserts, "by our own petty, circumscribed view of life. [...] Life demands we give something more [than our lives]--spirit, soul, intelligence, good-will" (*Colossus* 82), little of which is encouraged by the new economy. We are not merely soldiers for the economy, created to consume and produce, Miller reminds his readers.

The French department store, or *grand magasin*, "revolutioniz[ed] both the practice and the psychology of selling," beginning in the eighteen-fifties (Christiansen 111). With the rise of mass production, which made department stores feasible, came the need for prompt turnover of goods. Marketing, the contextualizing of products within the store as well as advertising on billboards and, later, newspapers, intended to ensure such turnover. Benjamin writes that department stores, moreover, "made use of *flânerie* . . . in order to sell goods" (CB 170): owners expected customers to wander their stores, gazing at the products ranged on shelves or hanging from racks. Rupert Christiansen writes that *Au Bon Marché* was "the first to plan its layout so that a customer would be lured from one purchase to another" (113). The task of owners and employees of department stores, then, became to provide a proper context for goods and to incite desire through proximity, scarves near perfume, shirts near jackets and ties and cuff-links.

In America, the department store supplanted the more prevalent dry goods store through employment of "a new powerful universe of consumer enticements" (Leach 20-1), among which fashion would be perhaps the most persuasive. Leach cites a flagrant example of the new "consumer enticements": a great variety of spoons began to appear on the market, designed for a variety of purposes, deemed essential for the "modern" home, though previously one or two types of spoons had served. Through marketing, "[a] multitude of goods were produced to satisfy needs that no one knew they had," writes Leach (16). Debord understands such a practice as "the second industrial revolution" and the flip side of alienated labor: "alienated consumption" (40). Potential purchasers were made to feel the lack, the absence of a product they had never known, through shiny surfaces and advertisements assuring them of the

necessity of the new products (especially hygiene products as Miller repeatedly notes), through associations between these products and some ideal homemaker or business leader or other object of admiration, as well as promises that the new product would simplify or in some way improve life. "The industrial revolution," for Utopian theorists like Fourier and others in France in the mid-nineteenth century, "seemed to make possible the practical realization of paradise" (Buck-Morss 81). These theorists envisioned in the near future an abundance of goods accessible to all, as well as a decline in the need to work to survive. Miller, however, rejects the desire for new products while agreeing on the goal: "We don't want better surgical appliances, we want a better life" (*Colossus* 82).

There were those who criticized the new manipulative features of department stores, not least of whom were the owners of dry goods stores put out of business. One criticism put forth by Walter Weyl, a theorist who otherwise welcomed the new economy, was that amidst all this plenitude, all this democratizing of desire, languished people who did not and could not benefit. Writing in 1912, he warns:

We are developing new types of destitutes--the automobileless, the yachtless, the Newport Cottageless. The subtlest luxuries become necessities, and their loss is bitterly resented. The discontent of today reaches very high in the social scale The end of it all is vexation of spirit. (qtd. in Leach 243)

Those who cannot purchase the new necessities are thwarted, while those who can often indulge in "alienated consumption," constantly seeking to acquire the latest emblems of modernity. Capitalist culture should not be characterized by a sense of plenty and of satisfaction, but by a sensitivity to what one did not yet own and might never possess. An unfortunate side-effect to the democratization of desire, then, was

frustration and even bitter disappointment, when people without means shared some of the same desires as those with means.

Leach further explores an argument, first put forth by sociologist Thorsten Veblen, that "business focussed desire toward consumption of goods [essentially passive] and away from productive labor and the ownership of land [active]" thus "shrinking the possibilities of the universe, not expanding them" (232). Encouraged to be passive rather than creative, people generally succumbed to the circumscribing of their realm of experience. They become an audience who must be dazzled--by stores and lighting, newspaper headlines and politicians; they are no longer artisans who bring finished products into existence or a public who must be convinced solely by material benefits.

Finally, writes Alan Trachtenberg, the apparently "magical appearance of goods" on the shelves of a store as well as the focus on the "private use" of goods, "disguised links between goods and factories" and the fact that certain goods were the product of "a particular mode of production" (133). "The factory," Trachtenberg asserts, "lay as a hidden presence within the store" (134), a sort of pit in the plum that was and is the commodity dreamworld. A suit, displayed on a mannequin, in a display window strewn with other such items, caressingly lit by strategically positioned lights, invites viewers to imagine how good they could look and how this suit might change their lives rather than to muse upon who produced it and under what circumstances. Workers when not on the job become consumers, consumption of commodities helping them to forget the way they spend their days or nights.

America and Americans underwent great changes due to the advent of consumer consciousness, Leach contends, a consciousness directly attributable to the

new department stores and to mass production. To demonstrate just how profound the change was, he reports on a Frenchman, writer André Siegfried, who made a series of visits to America in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Siegfried had felt comfortable in America in the early years of the new century, sensing that it "still seemed linked to Europe and 'the West'"--its department stores, after all, were modelled on the French ones; but in the years following the First World War, writes Leach, to this Frenchman "the country seemed strange and foreign, a change he attributed to the rise of mass production and mass civilization and to a remarkable shift in what Americans considered 'morally valuable'"--their "standard of living" and appearing to live up to it (266). What was new was not, however, the "rise" of either mass production or mass civilization, for both had been in evidence at the turn of the century; rather, both phenomena were finally clearly visible as important, even determining forces in American life after the First World War. As a consequence, Americans now seemed to be encouraged to behave in conflicting ways: on the one hand, at work they were to be responsible, consistent, employing self-discipline; in the marketplace, however, they were to let themselves go, buy on impulse, live for the moment--which "opened the door to waste, indulgence, impulse, irresponsibility, dreaming, or qualities thought of as nonwestern" (Leach 107)--qualities (as we shall see in Chapter Four) generally disdained as unproductive.

Department stores became "a prime urban artifact of the age, a place of learning as well as buying: a pedagogy of modernity," writes Trachtenberg (131). In the *passages*, first, but certainly most successfully in the department stores, people began to grasp their roles in the new economy. For the first time, they "apprehended themselves as *consumers*" rather than "mere users of goods" (130), *consumption*

intimating both that a product will be used up, necessitating replacement, and that the consumers are passive, uncreative, with nothing to offer in exchange for a product but money. The great variety of products flooding the market "taught families what they needed," and "the symbolic as well as practical function of things" they discovered as they browsed (132). From fashion they apprehend the "modern 'measure of time'" (Buck-Morss 97), how long something remains "new," how long a season lasts, and when it is time to move on to a new fashion. Advertisers, furthermore, aimed their products at discrete groups, divided by age, sex and color, and it was important for consumers to know which group they fell into in order to measure up to modern societal expectations, to not lag behind the times.⁴ Debord introduces merchandise in his discussion of Spectacular Society as "our old enemy who knows so well how to appear at first glance something trivial and self-contained, while it is, on the contrary, so complex and so filled with metaphysical subtleties" (35). The worth of a commodity, often, is difficult to assign due to the variety of values inscribed in it.

The new economy also taught people not only about their role within the economy but about their relationships with others: "People knew one another as debtors and creditors, salesman and customers, employers and employees, and above all as competitors" (Benjamin, *CB*, 39). Though neither Leach nor Trachtenberg make this argument overtly, one can look at this development in the new culture and see in its rise the parallel demise of the family and of community, so lamented by conservatives. Not only are people competitors for products, but they are also

⁴ The 1950s sitcom "The Honeymooners" depicts Ralph Kramden's miserliness, as well as his relative failure within the American economy, by focussing on the fact he still has an ice-box, though refrigerators had been available for two decades.

separated into a variety of categories for advertisers to appeal to--and, it must be added, their enjoyment of these commodities most often takes place within the house rather than in a public place.

That "Keeping up with the Joneses" remains a cliché descriptive of American culture demonstrates not only that alienated consumption still occurs but also that the competitive nature of consumer culture prevails as an ingrained and divisive, rather than unifying, force within American culture. For Henry Miller, the focus on "having things," this "monomania," as he calls it, provides a false comfort. As the American people "embellishes its meagre, stultified life by the adoption of telephone, radio, automobile, tractor, et cetera, the meaning of the word communal becomes so fantastically distorted that one begins to wonder what is meant by the phrase 'human community'" (*Colossus* 123). Bill Bryson writes that the "intention" of the Viennese designer of the first American shopping mall, Victor Gruen,

was not to create a new and more efficient way of shopping but to re-create in America something of the unrushed café-society atmosphere of European city centers. Shopping centers--or *shopping towns*, as he preferred to call them--were to be gathering places for the neighborhood, focal points of the community where people could stroll and meet friends, dally over a coffee and only incidentally shop. (255)

Except for some elderly who gather at malls in the morning for exercises, or the occasional groups of youths on a Friday or Saturday night, Gruen's vision has failed. Most of the people who go to a mall do so solely with the intention of purchasing something. People may have greater access to their neighbors and peoples from other lands, but only as disembodied voices or pictures, so their relationships with others diminish and experience is flattened.

Manipulation and Circulation

Western economies had at one time been one focussed on producing commodities rather than profits. Spengler argues that the shift, from "quality" to "quantity," presents another sign of the decline of Western culture (404). Individual craft had been devalued in favor of greater production. By the turn of the twentieth century, the American economy, simultaneous with many other Western economies, "had evolved" into a highly competitive "system preoccupied with 'making profits'" (Leach 18). Workers become invisible as brand-names assume greater importance, and people become shoppers, consumers.

Leach's contention, corroborated by his use of letters, speeches, and trade publications spanning the years in question (1880-1930), is that this change in consciousness as well as in business operations was neither accidental nor fated. Owners of department stores and their managers devised dream worlds of elegance and fashion to move goods, to keep the factories of mass production running, and to insure greater profits in the next year. He quotes a speaker in the early nineteen-twenties exhorting her audience of sales representatives, "Sell them their dreams" (298). She continues, "[P]eople don't buy things to have things. [....] They buy hope--hope of what your merchandise will do for them" (298). Store layout, shop-windows, the persuasive voice of the sales representative, all function as facets of the "mass seduction . . . to guarantee turnover" (298) through creation of desire. Christiansen similarly and summarily relates, "As *Au Bon Marché*⁵ served, so it also seduced" (113).

⁵ *Au Bon Marché* was the leading Parisian department store in the eighteen-fifties and -sixties.

For Miller, though, department stores signal decline rather than prosperity: "All department stores are symbols of sickness and emptiness, but Bloomingdale's is my special sickness" (*Capricorn* 205). These stores signify "sickness and emptiness" to the extent that they satisfy largely illusory desires, unrelated to physical or a deeper-level of psychological well-being. That people now feel the need to buy "hope" only illustrates for Miller the dissatisfaction they otherwise suffer in their daily lives. Furthermore, these psychological needs, assuaged by "alienated consumption," often remain superficial, created by advertisers who feed off the insecurities and vanity of people to market a variety of deodorants, teeth-whiteners, mouthwashes, and perfumes; the more pressing needs, for communion with other people, for personal growth, for a better life free of worry and exhausting work, for instance, seldom receive full attention. Bloomingdale's symbolizes the worst of consumer culture, for like much in New York City it is an extreme form of what can be found elsewhere.

Manipulation underlies most aspects of department stores, from the design of display windows to the glaze spread on goods with interior lighting. Window displays, in the *passages* and the dry goods stores, were little more than windows jammed full helter-skelter with goods. Shoppers were expected to enter the store to purchase goods they needed and could not, themselves, produce. Christiansen maintains that *Au Bon Marché* was the "first shop to understand the attractive power of a window display" (113). Since displaying products in window arrangements required an artistic eye, in order to present the products in a seductive context, it is in shop-windows and various other forms of marketing that "art is brought into the service of commerce" (Benjamin, "Paris," 146). Attracting people to window displays could be of great importance because sheer numbers of customers crowded around a

commodity "enhances [the commodity's] attractiveness to the average buyer" (CB 56).
Desirability breeds desirability.

Writing of American department stores, generally modelled on the French prototype as we have seen, Trachtenberg argues that these stores, with respect to their goods, were intent upon "cultivating both their desirability and their consumability" such that there was constant turnover in the stores and constant need on the part of consumers (130). Shop windows were henceforth designed to do "more than visually focus goods" (Leach 66); they were organized to contextualize goods, to relate an article of clothing, for example, to an image of luxury and thus to draw customers into the store. "'Associate the goods with people and events,' one retailer said, and not [as had dry goods stores] with 'the idea of buying and selling: in this manner you command attention'" (66). William Chapman Sharpe describes the aura surrounding a commodity as its strongest selling point (64), though at times it might be eclipsed by mass production. This need to sell at a high rate "brought about a *reenchantment* of the social world"⁶ (Buck-Morss 253) meant, as Christiansen noted earlier, to "seduce." L. Frank Baum, best known as the author of classic fantasy tale *The Wizard of Oz*, worked as a merchandiser before earning fame as an author. Leach remarks of him: "No one was more sure . . . that people could be *persuaded* or *tricked* by [display] windows into buying goods" (59, italics added). Dreams, then, were just one more instrument, like mass production, in the hands of consumer capitalists.

Used wisely and suggestively, dreams led to purchases. Advertising, in general, becomes "symptomatic of the transformation of information into propaganda"

⁶ The Enlightenment should be understood as an attempt at a *disenchantment* of the world, an awakening from myth and superstition to rationality and reason.

(Buck-Morss 144), another example of the change in consciousness wrought by consumer culture. In such a society, only information that leads to some sort of approved action is privileged, clearly an illustration of the "bottom-line" mentality that prescribes immediate direction--in this case, a purchase.

For Charles Baudelaire, twenty-three when the first *grand magasin* opened its doors, the commodity is not a repository for dreams. According to Buck-Morss, he represented "private dreams as hollowed-out as the commodities" (182). In "Le Mauvais Vitrier" [The Poor Glassmaker] for instance, the crazed narrator, furious that the glass the workman offers is clear rather than colored, that it will not alter "la lourde et sale atmosphère parisienne" [the stifling and dirty Parisian atmosphere], brutalizes the man and yells after him, "La vie en beau! la vie en beau!" (*Paris Spleen* 88)--exhorting him to, through his product, make life beautiful. Few products, of course, can perform that function; a well-made coat, however--no matter what it looks like--can, in winter, make life a little more bearable.

"Radio, telephone, cinema, newspaper, pulp magazine, fountain pen, wrist watch, vacuum cleaner or other gadgets ad infinitum? Are these," Henry Miller asks, "the baubles that make life worthwhile?" (*Nightmare* 29). In *Tropic of Cancer*, he criticizes an Indian, Hari Das, who answers that question with a resounding "yes": "he has been contaminated by the cheap idealism of the Americans, contaminated by the ubiquitous bathtub, the five-and-ten-cent store bric-a-brac, the bustle, the efficiency, the machinery," mistaking all these *things* for the good life (93). While these gadgets may in some cases reduce the workload of the purchasers, they cannot, on their own, make life better. They are "hollowed-out" promises. These items are not an end in themselves, as many believe, but a means to an end, to the good life.

Those who ran department stores, in the early years of twentieth-century America, took it as one of their projects to educate consumers, as we have seen, but educate them such that they begin to share the same dreams of the good life. Edward L. Bernays, who, beginning in the nineteen-twenties, helped department stores promote their products, argued that one of the duties of promoters involved "regimenting the public mind" (qtd. in Leach 320). Writes Leach, "Trained 'intermediaries' like [Bernays, believed they] had to intervene to interpret reality for the public. They had to provide 'truthful' information and to connect the various 'publics' back together again into a 'cohesive' whole" (320). It is creative truth, truth designed to stimulate desire as well as to make customers feel good about a purchase, that people such as Bernays have in mind when they say "'truthful' information." Though information, as Benjamin notes, is open to "prompt verifiability," information must also "sound plausible" (*Illuminations* 89), short-circuiting any investigation, any employment of imagination, on the part of the listener, reader, or viewer.

What Hari Das and other foreigners (as well as most Americans) fail to see, according to Miller, is how the American Dream has been vulgarized. Toward the end of the nineteenth century the American government began working hand in hand with business, and "corporate business now orchestrated the myths of America" (Leach 378), propagating a wide variety of myths--the land of opportunity (while at the same time bankrupting small businesses), the land of plenty (though people starve on the streets and artificial shortages drive up prices as well as desire for goods), and the classless American society (at the same time employing "class" to create desire and sell goods). In his 1941 anti-war tract, "Murder the Murderer," Miller attacks one of the most sacred of sacred cows:

The dream of golden opportunity still clings to the name America no matter what part of the world you may go to. It is regrettable that we, the American people, have fostered a false interpretation of that dream and thereby helped to further poison the world. (Miller *Remember*, 166)

America, Miller argues, has not been made better through commodity capitalism, though outsiders often perceive it to be better simply because its stores are filled with commodities. Commodities alone do not improve life. Just as factory owners do not acknowledge labor as "alienated," so outsiders do not see consumption as "alienated."

The American and Western capitalist revolution, for it is ultimately a revolution, is exported and infiltrating and changing other cultures, though at the very source, in America, there is widespread dissatisfaction occasioning but little action in response, save repression of labor unions, the white-washing of history, exhortations for further purchases. The misconception of America as a land of opportunity and a land of plenty is, for Miller, lamentable. In *Moloch*, he writes that the American religion is capitalism and without it the country would disappear. Not so for India, he argues, if India lost its religion (*Moloch* 156). Miller's point seems to be that more unites a country like India, history and community among other bonds; America, meanwhile, is held together by the dreamworlds that have become its sole religion, but these dreamworlds are hollow, obscuring the competition, the lack of community, the lack of empathy, the despair.

The New Dance--Fashion

One of the most visible dreamworlds business created is fashion--fashion as a function of designers rather than stores, fashion as an escape (Leach 91). It is also one of the greatest prompts to "alienated consumption." Paul Mazur, writing in 1927,

notes that not only are clothes vulnerable to the whims of fashion, which he terms "style", but "everything from automobiles to washing machines reeks of the instability of style" (qtd. in Leach 312-13). Fashion is most often conceived as an incarnate entity to whom all are vulnerable; however, fashion is as open to calculation as the design of a window display, and those who lead the way quite clearly want that their products should be *consumed*, if not by the purchaser then by time. "'The way out of overproduction,' wrote one fashion expert [in 1909], 'must lie in finding out what the woman at the counter is going to want, *make it*; *then* promptly drop it and go on to something else to which fickle fashion is turning her attention.'" (Leach 94) "Fickle fashion" coerced in another direction, insuring future purchases. Dorothy Shaver, a well-known merchandiser in the twenties and thirties, leads the way in a 1937 radio address:

Last spring we were casual, given to poses and worries, restless, unhappy--and our clothes accurately reflected our state of mind. This spring we are more natural, more poised, more correct, more serene, happier. [...] We are more romantic about our personal relationships--more interested in our family life. (qtd. in Leach 316)

The mood Shaver attempts to plead into existence is, doubtlessly, reflected in some way in the clothes she wishes to sell. Leach reports a retailer in 1908 acknowledging that fashion "imparts to merchandise a value over and above its intrinsic worth," loading "with special desirability goods which otherwise excite only languid interest" (91). Fashion, and the accompanying copy, must inspire interest, hence purchases; but in order to maintain that interest, and to keep customers returning, the object of inspiration--along with the adjectives and the slogans describing the product--must frequently change.

The new fashions unveiled each year "celebrated novelty rather than recurrence," writes Buck-Morss (98), which is largely true. Seasons recur as does the need to follow the new fashions unveiled for each season. Such repetition, however, comes to seem natural rather than forced: everything changes and must continue to change. In Aragon's *Paysan de Paris*, "la marchande" is open to ridicule because her clothes are out of date and the shape the suit provides is no longer considered attractive: "La jupe est large, et plus courte qu'on ne les fait aujourd'hui, au goût de 1917 environ, coupée en forme, faisant la taille ronde [the skirt is large and shorter than those made today, to the taste of about 1917, cut in form, making the torso round]" (107). Fashion, as unsympathetic as any paid executioner, dictates that "nothing can be worn which is out of date" (Leach 92), as that would be akin to a sign of failure, that one was unable to keep up, that one was not industrious.

A nineteenth-century figure who might seem to stand as a sort of advertisement for fashion and yet who attempts to undermine fashion and bourgeois culture in general, by pushing fashion to its limits, is the dandy.⁷ The dandy, as described by Jerrold Siegel in *Bohemian Paris*, seems to have been largely a British and French phenomenon. For two years, in the early eighteen-forties, Charles Baudelaire adopted a dandyesque dress, and at various points in his life he espoused dandyesque views (especially in notes for his memoirs, *Mon Coeur mis à nu*). A typical misapprehension, writes Pamela Genova, is that the dandy was a one-dimensional figure, fashion's clothes horse as it were (80). Some dandies saw their actions as a

⁷ Earlier figures have been claimed as dandies, but both Genova and Siegel focus on the dandy as a nineteenth-century figure, with precursors and descendants. For more on the dandy, see chapter four.

"stand against the most powerful currents of [their] time" (Seigel 106)--among these currents, the consumer culture of mid-nineteenth-century Paris. Genova depicts one dandy as dressed in "an irritatingly elegant, inscrutable disguise of paisley and lace to upset and negate the tranquil banality of bourgeois culture" (78). Such elegance in the appearance of a dandy, going well beyond the limits of good taste, signifies a rebellion against fashion, by accentuating its superficiality, since it was often blindly and complacently followed by the bourgeoisie and its imitators.

Christiansen characterizes shopping to keep up with fashions as "an intoxicating pastime" rather than a necessity (113),⁸ a great change from the experience of shopping in dry goods stores or, to a lesser extent, the *passages*. For Miller, that people imitate the ads and are blown hither and yon by the winds of fashion demonstrates that the advertisers have won: "It's a victory for the editors and publishers, for the cheap illustrators and the inventive advertising gentry. No more sales resistance. It's a pushover" (*Cosmological* 341-42). Fashion, through advertising, transforms people, so that they now eagerly do as instructed. Their defenses are largely broken and new habits--shopping for new clothes every season, discarding outdated technologies for the latest improvement, however minor or major--are adopted.

Fashion becomes "the modern 'measure of time,'" accelerating consumption, but Benjamin considers fashion, much as Fredric Jameson envisions collective action and

⁸ "Intoxicating" brings with it the notion of addiction, which has become common currency in America, with terms like "shopoholic" and the related expression, "Shop til you drop." Such behavior was encouraged by department stores, for it meant continuing purchases, while the down-side of such behavior, repossession of purchases or bankruptcy, was tacitly disapproved of as disgraceful.

Henry Miller the American South, as replete with utopian possibilities, an optimism Miller does not share: "Fashion is the eternal recurrence of the new," Benjamin writes. "Are there nevertheless motifs of redemption precisely in fashion?" ("Central Park," 46). Fashion, for Benjamin, seems to presage a future markedly different from the present world, for if styles of clothes constantly change then perhaps people, too, might change. The cult of the new resulted in constant flux and just might expand beyond commodities to lead to decisive positive change. Marx, according to Berman, views the accomplishments of the bourgeois class in a similar light. "They had proved," he maintains, "that it is possible, through organized and concerted action, to really change the world" (Berman 94). Hence, in a number of the accomplishments of the consumption economy, opportunities presented themselves, forces for change emerged, when cut off from the limited goal the economy forced upon them. Unfortunately, fashion, as Benjamin notes, is also the eternal return of the same, so the flux that inspires his optimism may be, at least in part, illusory.

Fashion led to at least two developments in American and French culture, developments more fully visible in Miller's time than Baudelaire's, due to the expansion of consumer capitalism. One of the benefits of fashion, according to many people in the early twentieth century, was that it made Americans alike through standardization--and that signified *safety*. "If only Americans would desire the same goods and dream the same dreams, we would have nothing to fear from anarchists," Leach summarizes (243). With continuing immigration it is likely that fashion and regulated desire were understood as tools of integration. The essentially competitive nature of commodity capitalism seems here to be discounted, or perhaps goes unrecognized, in favor of its unifying dimension. It is possible to interpret

Baudelaire's poem "Les Sept Vieillards" as a figuration of the crowds the *flâneur* observes; due to fashion and the rise of mass production, the people in the crowds become less and less distinguishable as they begin to dress alike. The "sept vieillards" could then stand as a symbol for "the mass production of culture in the form of consumable objects" (Trachtenberg 150), which serves to mould people into groups unified by surface characters (their age, sex, class or build), into a distinct population with similar desires and goals. These various groups become defined and hence reduced to the products they consume and the outward appearances they affect.

A second development, and one that has had great repercussions in American and French culture, as well as Western culture in general, a development intimately tied with fashion, is the rise of the cult of the new. A movement, spawned by the rising consumer culture of late nineteenth century America, called itself the Mind Cure,⁹ and like the Utopian theorists in France, it responded optimistically to the new culture of consumption, confident that capitalism would solve all problems. These people, in the figure of one of the leading exponents of Mind Cure, Samuel Patten, "translated an already clear American tendency (of seeing everything 'new' as inarguably good and everything 'old' as insufferable) into a theoretical law of civilization" (Leach 238). Just as old buildings were constantly demolished and replaced, "novelty" preferred to "recurrence," so too old clothes must be replaced.

Fashion entails continual change, perpetually looking for the "next big thing"-- in display windows, newspaper advertisements, films. There were others, however,

⁹ Mind Cure might be considered a counterpart to the New Age movement, only without the overt religious mysticism. The most apparent characteristic of the group is the importance it placed on positive thinking as a means to improvement.

who perceived that what they called "consumptionism was encouraging Americans to shed respect for 'wisdom' and 'the continuity of life' and to exalt the 'new and improved' and 'the young'" (268). Fashion and the cult of the new enables people to escape history, even (or especially) the most recent history (Buck-Morss 98). Miller, however, asserted his independence of this cult of the new, the new-and-improved, the standardized:

Living in the midst of a world where there was a plethora of the new I attached myself to the old. In every object there was a minute particle which particularly claimed my attention. 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, or gave it a date, attracted and endeared it to me.
(*Capricorn* 55)

Miller rejects that which is new and detached--from time, from workmanship--in favor of the unique, the personal, the grounded in time. Part of the continuing relevance of Miller's sensibility lies precisely in the persistence of this cult of the new.

Consumption as Optimism

The optimism that seemed to accompany fashion, as exemplified by the cult of the new, developed into an optimism that seems peculiarly American, part of its "youthfulness," underlying its "rags-to-riches" stories, supported by its inventors (Thomas Edison, Henry Ford) and its heroes (Charles Lindbergh, boxer Jack Johnson), exemplified in its music (Scott Joplin, Glenn Miller)--and cinema, as we will see. The Mind Cure group believed "that real 'happiness' could be had largely through money incomes and consumption," through earning enough to take part in the capitalist economy, and "not through satisfying labor or a stake in the community," since workers produced nothing of their own, contributing only toward an end product, and

often had little contact with their neighbors (Leach 244). Consumption can be envisaged, then, as an opiate, "assurance . . . of immunity from poverty, insecurity, the increasingly degraded status of the manual worker" (Trachtenberg 135). Importantly, the Mind Cure folk believed that labor--the actual fact of working eight or ten or twelve hours a day--would be forgotten, perhaps the way a child forgets a spanking, through distractions: the joys of purchasing more commodities. This new culture seemed to "[promise] a lifetime of security, well-being, and happiness" (Leach 111).

But Baum, whose works were thoroughly informed by Mind Cure beliefs, illustrates the shortcomings of the movement, demonstrating that it is essentially a surface-oriented movement, unwilling, even afraid, to open itself to experience.

"Baum," writes Leach,

broke the connection between wonderment and heartache. People could have what historically (and humanly) they had never had: joy without sorrow, abundance without poverty, happiness without pain. Like the other mind curers, Baum rejected that side of life--the suffering side, the growing-up side--that made the other side worthy of respect and affirmation. (252)

Classics such as Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* would be gutted, would lose the power of their description of the human experience, if such a one-sided view of life had informed their construction. Henry Miller observes the same shallow optimism that Leach does and responds to it in much the same way: "The American ideal is youth--handsome, empty youth. [...] Americans are *not* young and fresh in spirit, but senile; their humor is hysterical, a reaction born of panic, of a refusal to look life in the face" (*Wisdom* 51-2). Americans, Miller argues, are immature, unaware of their past and fearful of (not just *for*) the future, unwilling to "look life in the face," to make sense of it and take responsibility for trying to ameliorate it.

Miller acknowledges that the optimism of Americans tends to be admired, but he perceives a certain "cheapness" or vulgarity in that optimism, especially that inspired by commodity consumption: "More and more [America] seems to me like the madame of a whorehouse elbowing her way to the bargain counter" (*Emil* 57). The whorehouse madame, figured for the spirit of American youthfulness, presents a sharp contrast with the self-perception of Americans, for she is old and fat rather than young and sleek, like the new cars Americans identified themselves with and proudly drove; with her powder and rouge she is obvious and repulsive, decidedly not chic or glamorous; she is brutal and undignified rather than cool and seductive. Worse still, like greedy and acquisitive Americans, she is cheap with what is not hers--the bodies of other women, the labor of anonymous workers. Furthermore, figuring a bordello--the site of the commodity made flesh--for capitalism, serves to underline the fact that all people, under consumer capitalism, become commodities, just as the prostitute is, selling their labor, whether in a factory, an office, an art studio, or a classroom. In "Le Mauvais Vitrier," Baudelaire had already demonstrated the hollow promises spawned by commodity capitalism, aware even in the eighteen-sixties that goods alone could not bring happiness, a lesson that has yet to truly sink in to western consciousness.

The Peculiar Character of Advertising

Fashion, whether embodied in a particular designer or simply an aura surrounding commodities, must somehow make its presence known, while at the same time maintaining a "veil [on] the commodity character of things" (Benjamin, "Central," 42), so it does not appear too vulgar. Leach, referring once again to Veblen, explores

the peculiar character of the advertising that developed in order for merchants to both create an awareness of their product and a desire for it--as well as to preserve the "veil." Merchants, Veblen insisted,

promised "personal prestige and status," a high level of "personal well-being," "keeping touch with the times"--all "irrespective of any inherent merit in the goods." They operated in the realm of "intangible" reality and of the "magical arts" (Leach 232-33).

A new service industry arose around department stores and consumer culture, an industry of advertisers who aimed to harness dreams, such that advertising and fashion became inextricably bound within the dreamworld of commodity capitalism. With fashion as a nexus between the commodity and the dreamworld, producers were ensured of continuing purchases, if only advertising could perpetuate the commodity's position.

In one of his *Mezzotints*, "If You're Dying, Choose a Mausoleum," Miller responds satirically to an undertaker's advertisement in the *New York Times*, as he does so selectively quoting from the accompanying text (Jackson 13). Miller begins by suggesting mausoleums will be of only short-term interest, by referring to other products he perceives as fads (but which have since proven their longevity): "First we had the rubber tire epidemic, then the chewing gum splurge," Miller writes, "and now the undertaker is having his orgy of publicity" (*Mezzotints* 24). Miller points out the mixture of hype and rationality in the ad:

He is hailed as "the director of a humanitarian movement." Like the cafe proprietor before New Year's, he urges a lagging public to "act to-day, do not delay." You make your reservations for a cool, marble crypt just like you do a room in a hotel. He says: "You must admit that death is the final victor." (24)

"Ugly fellow," Miller determines, "this humanitarian director" (24). Following the advertisement, Miller contrasts the various forms of burial, and the concomitant horrors, to "MAUSOLEUM ENTOMBMENT": "when you place the loved form in the mausoleum you know it will be in the dry" (24). "It is," Miller assures his reader, "as sanitary as cremation and as sentimental as the church-yard, this method of burial. Other methods belong to by-gone ages" (24). Miller's satire is evident throughout, but this *Mezzotint* incorporates many of the features characteristic of successful advertisements--assuming an appropriate mood (here somber, in the face of death), emphasizing the modernity of the product (it does not belong to "by-gone ages") as well as its humanity, and demonstrating the improvements of this new product over the old one(s). His satire also makes manifest the absurdity and obscurantism at work in advertisements, for preservation of the body of the deceased in no way prolongs life or improves it, though the advertisement is meant to make one feel that somehow it does.

Such advertisements were certainly not unique to America, but found throughout western civilization. Advertisements were everywhere in Baudelaire's Paris. *Au Bon Marché*, as a progenitor of much that we associate with department stores, was the first store to place a full page advertisement in a newspaper (Christiansen 113). But advertisements also appeared out-of-doors, pasted or painted on the walls of buildings, the sides of cabs, on benches in parks as well as bus and train stations. As already noted, Haussmann's changes bewildered many Parisians, but concurrent with these physical changes to the city were changes resulting from industrialization as well as the rise of consumer culture.

Terdiman indicates that just as Haussmann was in the process of defamiliarizing the city of Paris, with a rash of destruction and construction, so "the complication of urban reality was increasing"--a noticeable feature of which was the swelling "circulation and distribution of goods and messages" (180). As manufacturers produced greater numbers of goods, competition for unloading these goods on the public assumed ever greater importance. The duty of citizens of the city became to *consume*: "Consumption emerged as the hidden purpose of cities," Trachtenberg declares (139). This "consumption," in turn, serves "as a perpetuation of the corporate form of private ownership of production" (139). Through purchasing goods one supports, or maintains, the status quo.

Art, as already noted, was called into service through advertising. A whole new set of artists, called "commercial artists," arose around advertising.¹⁰ Where Benjamin first conceived of "printing [as] having found a refuge in the book," he sees in the advertisement that printing "is pitilessly dragged out onto the street by advertisements (. . . that) force the printed word entirely into the dictatorial perpendicular" (qtd. in Buck-Morss 268). This image of printing "dragged" into the street is reminiscent of the old Puritan punishment of putting moral and criminal offenders in stocks or pillories to expose them to public revile. Just as the exhibition of those transgressors called for a public reaction affirming the (moral) order, advertisements require similar responses--in the world of consumer capitalism that signifies a visit to a store, a purchase.

¹⁰ Miller never tired of pointing out that *commercial* artists were the only ones in America who could make a living as an artist. Serving big business, in Miller's view they had bartered their souls.

Advertisements, themselves, were often the object of revile. Hamon reports that Parisians across the political spectrum decried the ubiquitous advertising found in Second Empire Paris. Reactionary Louis Veuillot protested:

Among the many passions of democracy, none is more prodigious and more widespread than the need for conspicuous display; and the baseness it inspires is its greatest success: pretentious signposts, *advertisements*, grotesque and impudent charlatanism, theater--all of this is of a piece; a nation of democrats is a nation of *ham actors* (*histrions*). (Hamon 127)

Veuillot raises his complaint implicitly against the levelling effects of democracy and explicitly against what the all-pervasive advertising seems to signify, a land of plenty, a reassurance that life is better. He also complains, however, that the commodity has taken on flesh, in the form of people selling their image in support of their product: idiotic grinning faces juxtaposed with a variety of products. The superficiality of such advertising, the vulgar "hawking" of products, inspired repulsion in some quarters.

Yet commercial artists knew that in order to attract customers they needed "striking pictures," for just as we have seen with fashion, these pictures "gave 'life' and 'meaning' to otherwise meaningless or lifeless objects" (Leach 54). Trachtenberg writes that advertising's decisive power lies in its ability "to disguise the character of consumption, to make it seem an act different from a merely functional, life-enhancing use of an object" (135). Owning and using a particular spoon, designed for a particular function, becomes a statement, one that every upstanding couple wants to make. Advertisements are designed "to make habitual the identification of products with something else, with ideas, feelings, status" (135)--that spoon, for example, provides evidence of membership in a particular class, proof that if nothing else, one's

kitchen is truly modern, which argues for the success of that particular family within consumer capitalism.

A point worth reinforcement is that those behind this new consumer culture were quite conscious of the manipulative nature of their actions, and it is in advertising, perhaps, that their awareness is most evident. Advertising expert Emily Fogg Mead, in 1901, characterizes the successful advertisement: "Everyone reads it involuntarily. It is a subtle, persistent, unavoidable presence that creeps into the reader's inner consciousness" (qtd. in Leach 48). This "subtle, persistent, unavoidable presence," however, proffers more than information on a product's existence; it makes a claim (occasionally supported by an argument) that this particular product is the best of its kind on the market, if not the only kind.

Not only can readers and pedestrians see advertisements everywhere they look, but these advertisements demand engagement on the part of the viewer. They are irresistible as well as, for some, overbearing. Miller regards advertisements as little more than pure *hype*, as we say today:

Everything is better, cheaper, tastier, saner, healthier, lovelier than ever--if you believe in the advertisements. Everything has become more stupendous, more colossal, more this, more that. And yet everything is the same. It's marvelous. We've gotten beyond the superlative--we're in the higher mathematics now. (*Cosmological* 340).

Miller announces here that the vaunted novelty of so many products is mere willfulness rather than factual. Few products are sold humbly, except those--like restaurants advertising "home cooking"--proud of their humility. For the most part, Miller is saying, advertisers climb over one another to declare their product the latest and the greatest. Advertisers try to differentiate their products from their competitors; they attempt to inflate slight variations, to make a product appear "marvelous,"

miraculous, so that these minuscule differences seem of utmost importance: "And yet everything is the same," even if there is more of it.

Baudelaire describes a similar experience, though one not overtly related to advertising, in his prose poem, "Le Gateau," from *Spleen de Paris*. In a foreign (and, clearly, backward) country, a black man watches the narrator cut a piece of bread and mutters, "*gateau*," cake. When the narrator offers the man a slice, other natives suddenly appear and fight for that one piece of "cake." The narrator, seeing the piece of bread reduced to dust, experiences sadness that there are people for whom bread, rather than a staple, is a treat--cake. Among various themes in the poem (one can cite the unequal distribution of goods), the power of naming is of most interest here, related to advertising, for bread, renamed "cake," increases in value and becomes something worth battling over, even to the point of destroying the actual portion of bread.

Just as "private use" of goods tends to obscure the laborers who produce them, so the hype in advertisements also conceals the laborer. During his years at Western Union telegraph company, Miller witnessed the degradation of messengers who were worked to death in order "that American people may enjoy the fastest form of communication known to man, so that they may sell their wares more quickly, so that the moment you drop in the street your next of kin may be apprised immediately" (*Capricorn* 72). Consumers are aware only of the service or commodity, and do not see the worker who produced it--even if they are workers themselves, for work becomes a trade-off and is further discounted: I work why shouldn't they? What becomes most important, for advertisers and consumers alike, is the connection between a product and a dream world, escape.

Lighting and Spectacle

The theme of "Paris as 'spectacle,'" characterized by the depiction of the city "as an endless adventure and feast for the eyes," appears repeatedly in French literature of the nineteenth century and "is basic to the more optimistic side" of French literature depicting the city (Prendergast 183)--appearing as well in the work of such a critic of modernity as Émile Zola. In Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames*, the name of a department store as well as the title of the book, the *grand magasin* is depicted as a paradise for the senses. Before even entering the store, Denise, a young woman from the provinces new to Paris, is smitten:

Il y avait là, au plein air de la rue, sur le trottoir même, un éboulement de marchandises à bon marché, la tentation de la porte, les occasions qui arrêtaient les clients au passage.

[There, in the open air of the street, on the sidewalk, was an avalanche of inexpensive goods, the temptation of the door, the sale items that stopped shoppers in the entranceway.] (Zola 13)

For this young woman, such a sight is overpowering: the cascade of goods causes her to forget the reason she is even standing there in front of the store, a rendez-vous with her uncle who will offer her a job. "The consumer," writes Debord, "becomes a consumer of illusions. Merchandise is that illusion effectively real, and the spectacle its general manifestation" (44). The need to market and to advertise, to emerge from the clouds of competition, inspires a spectacle, in the Debordian sense certainly, but also in a more literal sense.

An important element of the spectacle, and "one of the most precious commodities," as well as one that began to appear wherever commodities were sold, was lighting (Prendergast 183), gas lighting at first, but by the turn of the twentieth century, electric lighting. This lighting was at first limited to diffuse interior lighting

and the equally important street lighting, with the result that the "increased safety in the city made the crowds feel at home in the open streets even at night" and so "the shops in the main streets did not close before ten o'clock at night" (Benjamin, *CB*, 50). The glass-enclosed *passages* benefited from lighting, not merely because lighting allowed the night crowds to peruse the windows of stores, but because they emitted a bright, attractive glow, that lit up the night sky, and drew further crowds of shoppers.

Once lighting became practical, it was used to illuminate both the interior and exterior of many commercial establishments, department stores as well as cafés and other businesses, as well as to focus attention on display goods. Just as actors are lit-up on stage to center attention, or kept partially in the shadows at moments to stimulate the audience's interest, so goods too could benefit from stage lighting to draw the attention of passersby. While some might appreciate the lighting as a safety feature as well as an aesthetically pleasing technology, Baudelaire viewed the lighting spectacle as yet another "hollowed-out dream." Paris as a lighted spectacle, as theater, constitutes the surface (tourist) experience of "Paris." In "Les Yeux des pauvres," the lights of a new café attract not only the rich, as well as those of the middle income, but also the poor who cannot enter and drink or dine but only gaze at the edifice, dazzled and hungry, enjoying the spectacle at one remove, receiving none of the material benefits of the spectacle, at best only a figurative warmth.

Buck-Morss writes that Benjamin understood Baudelaire's poetry as an attempt to rip "apart the harmonizing pretensions of the mythic phantasmagoria that was just then congealing around the commodities" (Buck-Morss 182). In "Central Park," Benjamin asserts: "Tearing things out of the context of their usual interrelations--which is quite normal where commodities are being exhibited--is a procedure very

characteristic of Baudelaire" (41). A product and the condition of its manufacture are resolutely separated, as we have seen, and offered in a new context, that of the commodity dreamworld. Baudelaire, reversing that trend in his poetry, reintroduces the poor worker to the streets of Paris glowing with the lights of the café.

The lighting is meant to attract only paying customers, as if these people comprise the only worthy inhabitants of the city. But while the cafés may appear incandescent and promise sensual fulfillment, they do not satisfy the (materialist) desires of all. Reintegrating the poor into "spectacular" Paris, Baudelaire exposes the "hollowness" of these new mass dreams. He delineates the distance between the bourgeois couple, seated in the "dazzling" café looking out, and the poor man with his two sons, all of them dressed in rags and standing in the dusty road, looking in. The poor are overwhelmed by the splendor of the city: "How beautiful it all is! All the gold of the poor world must have found its way onto those walls," the narrator reads in the eyes of the father (Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen*, 52-3). But the poor can only look on as outsiders, the eldest son recognizing that the café is "for people who are not like us" (53). Through their eyes, Baudelaire makes the city a brightly-lit phantasmagoria rather than a fantasy-come-true or a fantasy-made-matter. The narrator of the poem empathizes with the poor but comes from another world, one more accurately represented by his companion who wishes to drive these people out of her sight. These poor, like the hungry children of Arthur Rimbaud's poem "Les Effarés" who stand silent in the snow watching a baker make bread (103), yearn so strongly that they can almost taste what they desire. The older boy realizes, in just this failure, their distance from the spectacle, like the hungry children in Rimbaud's poem who turn from the frosty window and shiver in the cold.

Baudelaire, in a prefiguration of Rimbaud, reinserts the poor into a scenario that has either forgotten them or deliberately excluded them from consideration. The narrator in Baudelaire's poem reports that the woman who accompanied him to the café wishes the *garçon* would force the three ragged people to move on--she would exclude them too--so that they would no longer compel her to acknowledge their presence and their suffering, hence the inequality of city life, and to thus reduce her enjoyment. In this way, Baudelaire tears "things out of the context of their usual interrelation": The urban poor present a contrast to the bright lights of commodity capitalism, a whole class who do not benefit from the "plenty" and of whom, for that reason, the bourgeois are fearful. The glow on the streets should provide only comfort, evidence (like the skyscrapers in New York City) that "things are under control," but it cannot do so because all is evidently not well. The urban poor refuse to remain hidden.

The spectacle produced by lighting hits new highs, or lows as some complained, with the sculpted light advertisements in Times Square, many of which in the nineteen-twenties, due to a technological innovation, were "in perpetual motion" (Leach 339). Leach describes Times Square as "the country's most spectacular expression of the commercial aesthetic, a pictorial environment packed with giant images, money, and people on a massive scale" (339). More, bigger, brighter--people, advertisements, buildings--all signify success or excess, depending on whether one buys into the new culture or rejects it. Another lighted avenue, Broadway, for Miller, "looks exciting, even magical at times, but there is no fire, no heat--it is a brilliantly asbestos display, the paradise of advertising agents" (*Clichy* 7). As with Baum and his surface-oriented works, so too the lighting spectacle of advertisers is *only* color. The

lighting, electrical and thus by its very nature "hot," is tamed by the display designers, no longer providing "heat"; to someone not part of the consumption culture, it lacks a figurative warmth as well. It becomes simply another advertisement.

Even as Times Square and Broadway and other regions were inundated with colorful flashing lighted advertisements, the French and the German governments put restrictions on "the spread of such 'spectacular' advertising" (Leach 343).¹¹ In Paris, any "product advertised had to be 'sold on the premises'" (343), in effect drawing a customer into the store. Leach quotes an anonymous Parisian of 1928, who asserted, approving the new French law, "Paris is proud to be known as the City of Light, but she wants it to be intellectual rather than electric" (qtd. in Leach 343). Despite the haughtiness of this Parisian, it is possible to agree with the argument to some extent: the intellectual "light" would at least constitute a more personal production than the business-produced and -controlled light. Just as Miller perceived the department store as a symbol of emptiness, so too others understood "Times Square and Broadway as symptoms of 'spiritual failure'" (Leach 346), as zones overwhelmed with lighted advertisements such that, as Lewis Mumford argued, they are "mere distractions that take our eyes off the environment, instead of instruments which would help us to mould it . . . a little nearer to human hopes and desires" (qtd. in Leach 346¹²). In the discussion of *flânerie*, in the last chapter, I described how both Baudelaire and Miller imprinted their moods on the passing architecture, but in regions dominated by the lighting spectacle, the walls become slippery, opaque and *flâneurs* can no longer

¹¹ Billboards, which clutter American highways, are noticeably absent from their European counterparts.

¹² In Stearns, Harold, ed. *Civilization in the United States*, 8-9.

"mould" their city since they often cannot get beneath the colored glow to the edifice beneath it.

Physically, the department store is itself a spectacle. One of the few buildings in America whose design consciously employed elaborate and ornamental architecture, the glitzy department store represented an attempt to impart an aura of elegance and necessity to goods through a shower of "sparkling lights," especially in display windows where goods were organized into "artful arrangements" (Trachtenberg 131) so that, along with the lighting strategically splashed on the outside of the building, the spectacle culminated in a showcase attracting shoppers. The largest department stores were an "emporium of consumption," writes Trachtenberg, that contained "not goods alone but a *world* of goods, constructed and shaped by the store into objects of desire" (130). The promise of the exterior, then, is in theory fulfilled by the interior. For Miller, though, the lighting spectacle comprised nothing more than hype, just like any other advertisement:

The sky's choked with illuminated merchandise, every single article of which is guaranteed to be pleasant, healthful, durable, tasty, noiseless, rainproof, imperishable, the *ne plus ultra* without which life would be unbearable were it not for the fact that life is already unbearable because there is no life. (*Black Spring* 123)

The lighting spectacle that greets shoppers as they walk on the sidewalk is only an added exclamation point to the puffery that surrounds, that constitutes advertising and has almost come to constitute life, at least for those who buy in (literally as well as figuratively) to the life of commodity capitalism.

"There are two things in life," Miller writes in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, "which it seems to me all men want and very few ever get (because both of them belong to the domain of the spiritual) and they are health and freedom" (29). People

do not want to be tied down to a job, Miller asserts, exhausted and demoralized by hours of meaningless labor. Similar to the disappointment experienced by Baudelaire's narrator in "Le Mauvais Vitrier," Miller recognizes the dashed hopes raised by consumer capitalism: "La vie en beau!"

For Buck-Morss, as for Benjamin, the *passages*, which came into being contemporaneous with the shift toward the modern consumer economy, represent "[a]ll of the errors of bourgeois consciousness . . . (commodity fetishism, reification, the world as 'inwardness') as well as (in fashion, prostitution, gambling) all its utopian dreams" (39). The *passages* tended to channel the public's attention on commodities and the personal satisfaction that followed purchases, but they also offered the possibility that people could change their lives in a more profound way than can be accomplished with the purchase of some commodity. Department store owners learned from the way the *passages* operated, while at the same time they also developed new forms of marketing, and incorporated and extended the art of shop window design and strategic lighting--on goods and as advertisements.

The *passages* were, furthermore, a precursor of the skyscraper, that fortress of the corporation, in that they were "the first international style of modern architecture" (39). "By the end of the nineteenth century," writes Buck-Morss, *passages* "had become the hallmark of a modern metropolis (as well as of western imperial domination)," appearing not only in Paris, London, Vienna, Berlin, Rome, Moscow, but even in Africa and South America (39-40). The Paris *passages*, then, represent the first step towards a mass, in the sense of world-wide, culture, a progression that continues today with the spread of American chains *McDonalds* and *Pizza Hut* and products such as *Nike* running shoes and *Coke*, a progression that promises to make us

equal as well as alike no matter what country or background we happen to come from, something Miller fought against.

The Media Spectacle

Along with the mass production of "baubles," as Miller calls them, signifying how unimportant many products are, and the showcases that house these "baubles," comes the mass production of media, viewed as "the democratization of culture, distributed as miraculously as Christ's multiplying food, [so] they too become fetishes" (Buck-Morss 120). Fetishes, certainly, these products of the mass media, but of doubtful utility.

With greater access to books and the arrival of cinema, with more sources of information--newspapers, the radio, the telephone, (and perhaps television, which was only a novelty in the early 1940s)--was more information available? According to Miller, writing in 1941, before America joined the Second World War, the answer is no. "What do we actually see and hear today?" he asks rhetorically. "What the censors permit us to see and hear, nothing more" (*Nightmare* 44). Parisians experienced a similar state of affairs under the Second Empire where the government exercised significant press censorship until Napoleon III relaxed censorship laws in 1868. Besides the literal censorship (of certain poems in Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* and the entirety of Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn*, for instance), there is information that never makes it out of the board rooms of governments and corporations, as well as a denial of some information that does. But there is also a form of censorship inherent in commodity capitalism--the censorship of

what will not bring in maximum profits, what is unpopular or unpalatable, what provokes strong reactions that might result in a loss of revenue.

Rather than risk financial loss, the mass media seek to provide one thing for all, "so that none may escape" (Horkheimer and Adorno 123) and all may be pacified, if not satisfied. In the middle nineteen-thirties, journalist James Rorty made a journey around America, similar to Miller's 1940-41 trip that resulted in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, and sensed that "'mass production of a mass culture' was stronger than ever. Indeed, there were 'no other unifying bonds in America'" (Leach 382). The commodity spectacle and the entertainment industry, as well as the information and the images available to Americans through the various media, which like other commodities benefits from mass production, unites Americans, helping to mould them into *Americans*. These various media portray Americans to themselves, describing their likes and dislikes, their daily routines, their needs and goals.

In nineteenth century France, *physiognomies*, books devoted to the "types" one might see in the streets of Paris (the *flâneur* the subject of one book, the ragpicker the subject of another), excited much popular interest by depicting Parisians to themselves, depicting the varieties of people that might possibly be seen daily. Honoré de Balzac, writes Patricia Ferguson, incorporated these figures into his books (83), which he gathered under the title *Le Comédie humaine*. Adapting the subject matter of this literature, these people from various walks of life, to the genre of the *physiognomie* effectively turned the subject matter into something that could be "consumed passively, pleasurably, and directly in its dream form" without "'refunctioning' the communication apparatus into a tool that will make it possible to wake up from the dream" (Buck-Morss 144). The beings described in the *physiognomies* become non-threatening for

the most part--different, perhaps, but not quite *other*, setting them outside a context that might provoke a response.

Benjamin attributes to these *physiognomies* "a thoroughly limited vision" due to an almost willed ignorance of many of these people's real lives (CB 38), a shortcoming familiar to Engels who decried the incomprehension of the bourgeoisie in the face of the English worker's misery. A similar appropriation through genrefication is at work with other literary productions (romance, realism, detective story, science fiction) as well as with cinema (where one can watch, among other things, action adventure films, romances and historical romances, courtroom dramas, as well as simple comedies and tragedies) where action is quite often so contrived that it discourages questioning that might provoke the notion that the day-to-day world might be otherwise.

While what follows may at first appear tangential, we will return to the idea of art forms that encourage passivity in the viewers in a moment. I will explore essays written by Baudelaire and Miller dedicated to art forms outside literature to examine and interpret their own work--and their world. Baudelaire's essays on the visual arts, his *Salons*, examined paintings by a variety of artists and offered arguments about painting, such as the need to focus on the modern world, that informed Baudelaire's own production. Miller, similarly, found cinema to be of great interest and, indeed, inspiration, especially avant-garde cinema, which turned from simple realism to challenging fundamental perceptions of reality.

Baudelaire, in his *Salon de 1859*, argues that the simple presentation of reality is not truly artistic. In his discussion of photography,¹³ he faults the disreputable art form for nakedly reproducing reality, claiming that such reproduction fails to inspire dreaming or surprise because there is no human soul in evidence--only occasionally the form (*Ecrits* 288-89). Photographic reproduction carries to the extreme what is for Baudelaire one of the more troubling currents in modern painting, that of exact reproduction of nature: "Il n'y a pas de plus grande jouissance ni de plus beau triomphe qu'une copie excellente de la nature [There is no greater joy and no more beautiful triumph than an excellent copy of nature]" (292). Baudelaire attacks such a narrow notion. "Et cette doctrine," he continues, "ennemie de l'art, prétendait être appliquée non seulement à la peinture, mais à tous les arts [And that doctrine, the enemy of art, affects to be applied not only to painting but to all arts]" (292).

Many viewers of paintings, Baudelaire believes, want merely the immediate and superficial shock of the new, the beautiful, rather than the shock that educates, and operate under a misconception: "Parce que le Beau est toujours étonnant, il serait absurde de supposer que ce qui est étonnant est *toujours* beau" [Because the Beautiful is always amazing, it would be absurd to suppose that the amazing is always beautiful] (288). Baudelaire suggests that some realistic painters respond to the inability of a sector of the public to "sentir le bonheur de la rêverie ou de l'admiration (signe de petites âmes)[sense the joy of dreaming or of admiration (a sign of small souls]", so they employ "des moyens étrangers à l'art [inartistic means]" (288). These artists

¹³ Baudelaire's judgment of the new technology is not very perceptive, offering what seems a reactionary response to a new medium rather than a well-developed and informed opinion, but it does present a useful foil for his theories on painting.

provide superficial, short-term satisfaction, what we might today call "sensationalism," without truly engaging their imagination or that of their audience.

Arguing that imagination is "the queen of the senses," Baudelaire writes, "elle crée un monde nouveau, elle produit la sensation du neuf [it creates a new world, it produces the sensation of the new]" (293). But Baudelaire does not esteem the imagination simply for the sake of the new. Imagination, beyond the banal conception of creation, forms part of the intellect, "contient l'esprit critique [contains the critical spirit]" (295). As an example, he provides the following:

D'un savant sans imagination? Qu'il a appris tout ce qui, ayant été enseigné, pouvait être appris, mais qu'il ne trouvera pas les lois non encore devinées.

[An intellectual without imagination? He has learned all that, having been taught, could be learned, but he will never discover laws still unknown.] (293)

For Baudelaire, imagination provides the means for generating "correspondences" between events, beliefs, or concepts that were previously regarded as unconnected, and he does not believe that photography, since it merely reproduces reality, can inspire the imagination. In Baudelaire's estimation, most photographers are failed painters unwilling to devote sufficient time to developing their talents and their imaginations in that art (289-90). The true artist would seem to be one who actively transforms content, marking it indelibly, thereby making an argument about reality, about the world.

Though painting and cinema are different art forms, they have both become commodities and have had, at different times, a wide audience. Certainly as commodities, before the age of mechanical reproduction, paintings were not nearly as accessible as movies; even so, the general public still had access to paintings in

exhibitions. More importantly, however, both art forms share a complex relation to reality--should they reflect, comment upon, ignore, or improve upon reality?--even troubling the concept of reality itself by the very visual nature of the media--is reality only what we notice, what we personally see, hear, or sense, or is it something somehow much broader? Both painting and film can freeze a moment and call into question human perception, human constructions of reality.

Cinema, as a cultural production that came of age just when Miller was making his first attempts at writing, in the early nineteen-twenties, just might epitomize the commodity. Like the *passages* and the department store, the cinema emerged as another venue where dreams were offered for sale; like them, too, cinema became an educator, often provoking new fashions as well as instructing viewers on "new goods" (Leach 272).¹⁴ The movie theaters themselves were considered dream houses, even more literally than department stores. Siegfried Kracauer calls them "picture palaces" and "optical fairylands" (323). Referring specifically to Berlin theaters, but making an argument with wider applicability, he claims "the architectural setting tends to emphasize the dignity that used to inhabit the institutions of high culture" (327).

As opposed to the static nature of the painting in the exhibition hall, the fluidity of motion pictures envelops the viewer who is continuously tempted by the unfolding of events, asking "what will happen next?" Just as with the founding of America and, later, with commodity capitalism, the cinema is a sphere where Miller yet again perceives unfulfilled potential. He cites Luis Buñuel, director of *Un Chien andalou* and *L'Age d'or*, as "the man who really made me discover myself" (*Emil* 94),

¹⁴ *The Truman Show* (1998), starring Jim Carrey, emphasizes the advertising element of movies.

the man who "made me realize what I wanted to say, and how to say it--that is, *with courage* (101). "Like any other art," Miller writes, "cinema has in it all the possibilities for creating antagonisms, for stirring up revolt" (*Cosmological* 49). But the "dignity" of the new "picture palaces" works against such "possibilities": to show a truly subversive film in such a locale would be, like performing a striptease in church, inappropriate. Buñuel's films were shown, often to hostile audiences, but usually in small venues like *Cinema 13* in Montmartre, dedicated to art, rather than the large cinemas, before being censored.

There are, for Miller, alas, few filmmakers with Buñuel's courage. The cinema becomes another sphere of American life, and of Western life in general, that Miller comes to decry. "For the first time in the history of art," writes Miller in "The Golden Age," an essay on Buñuel, "the mob has dictated what the artist should do. For the first time in the history of man an art is born which caters exclusively to the masses" (*Cosmological* 49). Miller recognizes, of course, that it is not the "mob" but the businessmen with their fingers on the public pulse and an eye on the cash receipts who ensure that the new art is completely responsive to the public, or to what they prepare the public to want and to expect.

Similar to Baudelaire's lament about crowds who look to be surprised at exhibitions of paintings, Miller deplores the public fixation on

plot, action, character, analysis, etc--all this false emphasis which characterizes the literature and drama of our day--[and which] simply reveals the lack of these elements in our life. We want plot because our lives are purposeless, action because we have only an insect activity, character development because in turning in upon the mind we have discovered that we do not exist. [...] In short, we demand of art a violence and drama because the tension of life has broken down; we do not find ourselves opposed to one another in any primal sense, certainly *not as individuals*. (*Cosmological* 67)

Films must make up for the short-comings of life--the fact that so much time is spent in work, the fact that there are not always happy endings or even endings at all sometimes-- rather than dramatize them, comment upon them. Furthermore, Miller argues that viewers need "primal" action because their contact with one another as competitors for products tends to negate their existence as individuals. The films themselves, too, lose that individual appearance, each coated with the same pleasing features as another in order to continue attracting a wide audience. "Giving the people what they want" emerges as a democratic idea, but as an example of the "levelling" so much decried by Nietzsche, Spengler, and others. Baudelaire notices a similar phenomenon in painting:

Cette race, en effet, artistes et public, a si peu foi dans peinture, qu'elle cherche sans cesse à la déguiser et l'envelopper comme une médecine désagréable dans des capsules de sucre.

[That multitude, in effect, artists and the public, have so little faith in painting that they ceaselessly search to disguise it and envelop it, like a disagreeable medicine, in capsules of sugar]. (*Ecrits* 286)

Baudelaire is half-right here, when he perceives a lack of "faith in painting."

However, the flip side is a lack of faith in a public willing or able to understand the work of the artist, willing or able to engage with a piece and come to terms with it.

Artists succumb to the desire for popularity, and produce works that please rather than speak, works that are *affirmative* rather than alternative or oppositional, in Raymond Williams' use of those last two terms.

This same lack of faith appears doubled, trebled, or quadrupled in the cinema. Horkheimer and Adorno, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, assert the strong resemblance between movies, writing that the difference between a production by "Warner Brothers and Metro Goldwyn Mayer," or any large-scale Hollywood film factory, "is basically

illusory" (123). "What connoisseurs discuss as good and bad points serve only to perpetuate the semblance of competition and range of choice" (123). Few directors really attempt to produce a film that is dramatically different from another Hollywood production. Miller argues that such a reluctance to push against expectations restricts the art form, much as for Baudelaire the use of inartistic shocks cheapens a painting: "In every art the ultimate is achieved only when the artist passes beyond the bounds of the art he employs" (*Cosmological* 54). Buñuel is one of the few people who makes such an attempt:

The world must be turned upside down, ransacked, confounded in order that the miracle may be proclaimed. In "L'Age d'or" we stand again at that miraculous frontier which opens up before us a dazzling new world which no one has explored. (54)

The cinema that Miller supports, however, goes well beyond the dictum of the New Critics, "Make it new." Films must also go out on a limb, challenge the audience to examine their own lives just as the artist must while engaged in the act of creation. These productions cannot be "capsules of sugar." Max Horkheimer, in "Art and Mass Culture," writes that the "inhospitable works of art, by remaining loyal to the individual as against the infamy of existence" work against the harmonious front that Hollywood and other media would propose, combatting "the happy countenance" (Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*, 278), for both Horkheimer and Miller, echoing Spengler, view "harmony as a delusion of decay" (279).

Hollywood directors, such as Orson Welles, occasionally strive "against the tricks of the trade," but they do so infrequently and with such restraint that their "departures from the norm are regarded as calculated mutations," gestures that evince an awareness and even respect for the rules, "which serve all the more strongly to

confirm the validity of the system" (Horkheimer and Adorno 129). When few people are willing to truly and consistently challenge the limits of a medium, a certain sameness, a certain surface quality becomes characteristic of the medium. Films become easy to read, meaning the action, the dialogue, and the viewer responses can become quite predictable.

Moreover, movies often progress at such a high speed, cutting from one scene to the next, that "there is no room left between them for even the slightest contemplation" (Kracauer 326). The audience only has time to mark "what happens next" and to react. "No independent thinking must be expected from the audience: the product prescribes every reaction: not by its natural structure (which collapses under reflection), but by its signals" (Horkheimer and Adorno 137). The plot, Horkheimer and Adorno argue, is craven and specious, only a vehicle for signals which will inspire audience reaction, signals which include the laughtrack, the appearance on the horizon of the Indian or the Man in Black or the Man in White, or the ubiquitous pie of slapstick films.

Films operating outside the narrow periphery often become the object of public ridicule and police prosecution, as was *Un Chien andalou*. Miller writes, "[I]t is the great virtue of Buñuel that he refuses to be enmeshed in the glittering web of logic and idealism which seeks to mask from us the real nature of man" (*Cosmological* 58). The logic Miller writes of is that which toes the straight and narrow, offering no surprises and leading in no tempting antisocial or irrational directions that might serve to confront people with themselves and their lives. "Any logical connection calling for mental effort is painstakingly avoided" (Horkheimer and Adorno 137), because, in the view of those who oversee the Culture Industry, the worker goes to the theater to

relax, to forget, rather than to muse upon the injustices of life. Like "realist" painting, cinema encourages passivity in the viewer.

But films do have an educational as well as an experiential purpose. "The tragic film," for Horkheimer and Adorno, "becomes an institution for moral improvement" (152). The fatal flaw in a character serves as a warning for viewers. The death of a character "confirms the powers of the ruling institutions" (Kracauer 302). In a preface to a book critical of Hollywood, a preface later rejected by the publishers,¹⁵ Miller quotes some of the restrictions the Hays Office imposed on filmmakers. Many of these rules are vague and have, not surprisingly, nothing ostensibly to do with illegal activities; rather they are educational--insuring that no "wrong" lessons are learned. For instance,

1. No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrong-doing, evil or sin. [...]
3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation [...]

The sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld. Pictures shall not infer that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing. [...]

The treatment of low, disgusting, unpleasant, though not necessarily evil, subjects should be subject always to the dictate of good taste and a regard for the sensibilities of the audience. [...]

Ministers of religion in their character as ministers of religion should not be used as comic characters or as villains (*Sunday* 45-6).

Miller describes these and other codes as "whitewash and revelation proceed[ing] in a contrapuntal fugue" (46). The "whitewash" is over life as we know it, for "films refute what life would make one believe" (Kracauer 300), while the "revelation" involves demonstrating the lessons that, through the Hays Office, the government

¹⁵ The rejection of the preface may have been a result of its lack of focus toward the end rather than its fulminations against Hollywood.

wants viewers to learn. As is evident from the strictures suggested and imposed by the Hays Office, filmmakers are encouraged to present an uncomplicated world, one where good is rewarded and evil punished, a world that contrasts with the experience of most or all viewers, but helps to ensure future docility on the part of the viewers.

Hollywood actively works to transform actors and plots into "dope," as well. Miller recites a "familiar" complaint of French actors when they go to Hollywood, "They always want to make us over" (*Wisdom* 49). Horkheimer and Adorno, too, note a preference for a certain type in Hollywood, "for Mickey Rooney" over "the tragic Garbo" (134). Actors who appear to be like everyone else, rather than themselves, who do not stand out as "other," seem to be the preferred commodity of Hollywood. Movie viewers are here subtly (or not so subtly) instructed that conformity in appearance as well as behavior is preferred. "It is the American vice," Miller says, echoing Nietzsche, "the democratic disease which expresses its tyranny by reducing everything unique to the level of the herd" (*Wisdom* 49). Just as scripts must not seem to challenge the accepted wisdom of societal norms, for fear of inspiring audiences to question, actors must not stand out and thus engage the viewers, for such an engagement might serve only to make them aware of the mediocrity of the material or of their lives.

Movies, however, also function as surrogates for the viewers. "The death [in a film] that confirms the power of the ruling institutions," writes Kracauer, "prevents a death in the course of a struggle against these institutions" (302). Those contemplating revolt can witness fellow rebels on the screen receiving just recompense for their antisocial behavior, possibly death or punishment leading to a renunciation of defiant ways. The culture industry serves to "incorporate" viewers, to show them the error of

antisocial ways as well as the likely outcome, thus "taming revolutionary and barbaric instincts" (Horkheimer and Adorno 152).

When real misfortunes are displayed on the screen, misfortunes that cannot be denied, or that in this instance are not denied, society dresses them up "in romantic garb so as to perpetuate them, and lavishes pity on them because here it doesn't cost a cent" (Kracauer 295). As an example, Miller might have chosen the starving American artist who has refused to sell out to commercial interests, suffering and perhaps dying for art because art, if it is not in the service of big business and not accepted by the art establishment, has virtually no value in American or Western society. Exposing, for a moment, suffering of some kind serves as a sort of release valve for the viewers, reducing the need to call for actual change.

Though once there had been a number of avant-garde movie makers, by the early nineteen-thirties, Miller writes, "there remains only the mass production of Hollywood" (*Cosmological* 47) or what Horkheimer and Adorno term "the stone of the stereotype" (148), still-born films so underdeveloped they can only be differentiated one from another with difficulty. There are only certain themes that the Hays Office and, perhaps, even the public wish to see depicted on the screen. Workers, possibly, do not wish to be reminded of their misery. The government certainly does not want them reminded, and we are often socialized to distinguish entertainment from education. "Pleasure always means not to think about anything, to forget suffering even where it is shown. Basically it is helplessness" (Horkheimer and Adorno 144). Horkheimer and Adorno assert, however, that what these viewers are escaping is not (or not only) the day to day drudgery they experience in their lives, "but from the last

remaining thought of resistance" (144). To laugh at a comedy or cry at a tragedy is to be complicit with societal forces.

Movies, moreover, in their great number but limited thematic range, "reveal how society wants to see itself" (Kracauer 294). Kracauer notes that recurrent themes in films argue for a particular perception of society, one that society itself wishes to put forth, and that it "is much too powerful for it to tolerate any movies except those with which it is comfortable" (Kracauer 292). Belief in the virtues of quantity, in the land of plenty, is important for those who do not have much at all but can only dream of acquiring more. They invest themselves spiritually in this economy, and to realize it is all worthless, that it does not and cannot satisfy, is to open a great hole in the center of existence.

Just as Baum wishes to simplify human experience, divorce the happy side of life from the bitter, in movies "the nonsensical at the bottom disappears as utterly as the sense in works of art at the top" (Horkheimer and Adorno 143). Thus, as a commodity, movies serve, like other media, as a "dope which is worse by far than opium or hashish" (Miller, *Nightmare*, 34)--for at least with hashish and opium you recognize it *as* dope and the intoxication lasts for a discrete interval. Movies break down resistance, put bandages over wounds, assuaging the symptoms though not the sources of distress.

The narcotic side of movies, finally, serves yet another vital function within the capitalist economy, that of a "prolongation of work" (Horkheimer and Adorno 137). Not only are the viewers subtly educated about the values of their society, so that all become alike, but they are to be further offered "an escape from the mechanized work process" in order to "recruit strength . . . to be able to cope with it again" (137).

Miller writes of the necessity of the cinema, given the life of the average worker: "I cannot imagine the robots of this age being without a cinema, *some kind of cinema*. Our starved instincts have been clamoring for centuries for more and more substitutes. And as a substitute for living, the cinema is ideal" (*Cosmological* 50). Working in factories of mass production has transformed people into robots; the lives they see unfold on the screen offer surrogates for the lives they do not and cannot lead. Without the spectacle, their lives might be unbearable because unescapable, but because of the dream palaces, because of the commodity dreamworlds contrived and ever-changing fashions displayed in department stores, display windows, advertisements, because these particulars, among others, become our "course on modernity," people become more passive and more alike.

Lands of Disgust

In the years leading up to the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian war, in which the French were ingloriously routed, England's Queen Victoria received a letter from her daughter Vicky, who had married a Prussian prince, in which Vicky criticized Paris, and France in general, for its spectacle culture:

It would be well if they would pause and think that immoderate frivolity and luxury depraves and ruins and ultimately leads to national misfortune. Our poverty, our dull towns, our plodding, hardworking *serious life* has made us strong and determined, is wholesome for us. (*qtd. in* Christiansen 162)

It is an open question how "hardworking" Princess Vicky was; certainly she was no factory hand or farm laborer, nor did she work in an office. Still, her criticism echoed that of citizens of other countries as well as that of many French who believed the French capital had reached the pinnacle of decadence (as it were), seeking enjoyment

in sensual indulgence and luxury goods. French culture since the opening of the *passages*, but certainly under the Second Empire of Napoleon III, like American culture between 1880-1930, experienced profound disruptions; some people encountered an expansion of possibilities in the developing capitalist economy, while most found themselves drawn ever more persistently into the drudgery of factory work. The "frivolity" that many complained of in Parisian culture is certainly conceived of as escapist in nature--cabarets and bars and brothels as much as the department stores.

Just as Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and many others looked to Paris for literary success, Miller recognizes that in 1941 people around the world still looked to America as the new world, a land where dreams come true, but that recognition troubles him profoundly:

they see cinemas which look like palaces; they see department stores with manikins dressed like princesses. They see the glitter and the paint, the baubles, the gadgets, the luxuries; they don't see the bitterness in the heart, the skepticism, the emptiness . . . which is eating up the American worker. [...] They want a way out; they want the lethal comforts, luxuries. (*Nightmare* 33)

The commodities that comprise the dream world retain only their brittle, saccharine surface--they are "hollowed-out." Rather than truly improving life, they refocus attention on acquisition, repressing a general public awareness that life could be otherwise, that life should be other than what it is. These comforts that the American worker and American family venerate are "lethal," finally, because of the sacrifice required in order to acquire them--long hours of often hard, repetitious work. What these workers have acquired, however, after all that work is what *anyone* with money can have. The most noticeable feature, then, of mass production is its "leveling element," a "leveling" that does not seek to make everyone equal, but lowers

standards of expectation, which become fixated on commodities rather than things of a more intangible nature, like happiness or job satisfaction.

Miller writes, in *Tropic of Capricorn*, "If I am against the condition of the world it is not because I am a moralist--it is because I want to laugh more" (305). He despises "the American way of looking at things" which he characterizes as "utilitarian" (*Nightmare* 157) or even "futilitarian" (42). The commodity-consumption culture has, for Miller, transformed people into beings who seek improvement only through increased purchasing power. Americans, he believes, echoing Louis Veuillot's complaint invoked earlier, are "spiritual gorillas, . . . food and drink maniacs, success mongers, gadget innovators, publicity hounds" (157). They are spiritual sleepwalkers obsessed with functioning in their new economy: "All is goods, weights, facts, measurements, prices--*and bargains*, of course" (*Remember* 314). It is a decadence and an indulgence comparable to that which Princess Vicky, and many others, ascribed to the Parisians.

While what is "unique" in Benjamin's *Passagen-Arbeit* is that it "takes mass culture seriously," both "as the source of the phantasmagoria of false consciousness" as well "as the source of the collective energy to overcome it" (Buck-Morss 253), Horkheimer and Adorno are not so sanguine. "In an unjust state of life," they write, "the impotence and pliability of the masses grows with the quantitative increase in commodities allowed them" (xv). The money workers earn turns out to be, in popular culture terms, hush-money.

Where Baudelaire was aware that commodities alone, in great abundance, were not going to make life better, Miller realizes that people themselves *are* commodities, and not in the obvious way that a prostitute is, but in the way anyone is who sells

labor for money. Moreover, as an employment manager for the Cosmodemonic

Telegraph Company (Western Union), he saw firsthand the exploitation of workers:

The whole system was so rotten, so inhuman, so lousy, so hopelessly corrupt and complicated that it would have taken a genius to put any sense or order into it, to say nothing of human kindness or consideration. I was up against the whole system of American labor, which is rotten at both ends. (*Capricorn* 19-20)

But what then is his position?--Miller is neither boss nor telegraph deliverer. "I was the fifth wheel on the wagon and neither side had any use for me, except to exploit me" (20). In fact, he claims, everyone is being exploited (20).

Benjamin asserts, somewhat optimistically, that once a person understands that "as labor power," he or she "is a commodity," other commodities lose their appeal (*CB* 58), and thus we might have one root of Miller's rebellion. Miller refused to accept his "commodity" status, refused to maintain his status as peon and thus rejected the importance of commodities and work. In doing so, he finds himself on the periphery of American, and western, culture.

Chapter Three / Out of Step: Miller, Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Disobedience

My real enemy is organized society. *I want everybody to be like myself*--in spirit at least. I am not an enemy of *man*: I am an enemy of stupidity, bigotry, patriotism, injustice, callousness. I don't need to kill anybody to establish my way. I can assert myself even under the conqueror's heel. (Miller, *Hamlet* 163)

Henry Miller vehemently expresses his dissatisfaction with modern life in his critique of the city, as well as with one of the more conspicuous features of the modern city, the commodity spectacle. While, in Miller's view, the number and variety of goods serves to anaesthetize people, consumer capitalism also makes its mark on the city in other ways--the skyscraper is perhaps, along with outdoor advertisements, the most visible stamp.

Miller's attack on the city and the modern world is not limited to these emblems of modernity. Other, perhaps less tangible, targets of his rebellion appear with regularity throughout his works. Among the most important of these targets, I include American (indeed Western) notions of the role of money, work, and war in society. Miller's beliefs can be characterized as anti-bourgeois or anti-middle class, but he tends to simply react against society (or "civilization" as he most often terms it) in general, especially in America, as consciousness becomes less class-based or regional and more mass-based, resulting in part from the proliferation of mass media made possible by technological advances such as the telegraph, telephone, radio, and (later) television.

These media have, according to Richard Sennett in *The Fall of Public Man*, tended to create a public, but one more interested in determining who is really and truly a member than in taking any collective action. Miller prefers to that the freedom of the individual--his conception relying on what Raymond Williams has

problematized as "a bourgeois version of society" (*M&L*, 86-7), that of the individual who either stands up against society itself or who strikes out in his or her own direction, oblivious to or unaffected by society--a freedom such as Miller experiences in microcosm riding his bicycle, exploring the city and the countryside, a two-wheeled *flâneur*. In *Plexus*, he describes the camaraderie he experienced with other riders in the cool early morning hours of spring and summer when, pacing the six-day racers, he enjoyed a camaraderie made less and less possible in an era marked by inordinate consumption and competition, where people are more likely to look upon each other simply as competitors rather than companions on the journey that is life.

From Baudelaire to Rimbaud

Up to this point, I have in large part explored Miller's critique of modernity using the works of French poet Charles Baudelaire (especially Walter Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire's works) as a complement to Miller's critique. There is one important way in which Miller and Baudelaire differ, a discrepancy which links Miller with yet another nineteenth-century French poet. Miller believed that through his work he could change the world, specifically the Western world: If his readers followed his example, incorporated some of his attitudes, they might "throw off the chains which bind them" (Miller, "Fragment," 82). Without accepting the world, Baudelaire did not really believe that he could change it, writes Enid Starkie, or that there was another vision with any validity beyond the one available when fully awake (117). His rejection of hashish and opium as alternative sources of true vision

illustrates this latter point.¹ Arthur Rimbaud, alternatively, "would not accept the conditions of human life, but intended to alter them himself" (117). In a letter to Georges Izambard, one of the *Voyant* [Seer] letters, Rimbaud writes, "Il s'agit d'arriver à l'inconnu par le dérèglement de *tous les sens*" [It is a question of arriving at the unknown by a disordering of all the senses] (Rimbaud 313). Like Miller he believed there existed another world behind that available daily, though in a rather more metaphysical sense than Miller, and he seemed certain he could reach this other world.

Miller sought to encourage his readers to look beyond the facts, to see the forces that linked and animated the world they took for granted, the daily world he so roundly criticized. Rimbaud wished to advance even farther, to become a seer, to move beyond the rational world, and to fundamentally change it. In the second of the *Voyant* letters, to Paul Demeny, dated March 15, 1871, he declares that poets are neither fully awake nor "in the plenitude of the great dream" and have yet to create anything worthwhile; but from now on, Rimbaud asserts, poetry "*sera en avant*" [will be in advance] (Rimbaud 314-18)--and he, Rimbaud, will lead the way.

In his study of Rimbaud-as-hooligan or holy terror, Benjamin Fondane argues that what Rimbaud wanted was "an immediate, catastrophic occurrence that would change the conditions of this world" (92-3). Rimbaud's desire for revolutionary change parallels Miller's desire for "more and greater catastrophes" to transform modern civilization, to wash away the dead wood and pump new life into what remains. Among other specific concerns that will be addressed in this chapter and the next, Miller has in common with Rimbaud the desire to change the world, and seeks to

¹ See Baudelaire's *Les Paradis artificiels*.

effect such change through rejecting the old, outdated literary forms, thereby initiating new perceptions of the world. As with Miller and Baudelaire, there are important differences between Miller and Rimbaud, but these differences once again serve to highlight each writer's stance.

Fondane argues that while Baudelaire was "the first true and conscious adversary of the bourgeois . . . that literature and general consciousness had known," he also "died and lived a Catholic" (79). Rimbaud, meanwhile, uncompromisingly willful as both Fondane and Starkie describe him, chalked "'Merde à Dieu!' ['Shit on God!'] on the walls of the church of Charleville" (Fondane 79), rejecting God. Leaving aside the question of the maturity of Rimbaud's behavior² (in itself a bourgeois concern perhaps) as well as the question of the death-bed conversion to Christianity (whether it happened or not, how a death-bed conversion might change our interpretations of Rimbaud and his work or if it should), his rebellion has a violence, at times, that Baudelaire's lacks. Rimbaud's is a generalized attack on bourgeois society that finds few parallels in Baudelaire, but whose spirit we can detect in Miller's declared attitude toward God: "I had no more need of God than He had of me, and if there were one, I often said to myself, I would meet Him calmly and spit in His face" (*Capricorn* 9). Such rejections of God need not be read solely on a literal level. They might only signify a rejection of the typical Christian God: "the one," as Starkie describes it, "supported by the bourgeoisie, the God of Capitalism, the God

² Rimbaud once showed his contempt for current literary forms at a poetry reading where, as the poet came to the end of each line, he audibly punctuated it with "Merdre!" [Shit!]. Such disruptive behavior prefigures Dada, and demonstrates a desire to combat bourgeois notions of propriety.

who demanded eternal sacrifice" (238), a God who differs but little from the capricious Homeric gods.

Rimbaud's poetry, though at times concerned with the experience of the city and of bourgeois life, differs greatly from Baudelaire's and is more difficult to cite as cultural criticism. The weakest chapter of Marc Blanchard's study, *In Search of the City: Engels, Baudelaire, Rimbaud*, is that dedicated to Rimbaud, chiefly because Rimbaud's poetry resists interpretation and many of his poems (especially those collected in *Illuminations* to which Blanchard almost invariably refers) consist of a series of images, often unexplored, rather than one image that is dramatized--as in Baudelaire's "A une passante," for instance, where the poet probes sentiments evoked by a passing face in a crowd. Rimbaud does not, as Engels does with Manchester or Baudelaire with Paris, construct a vision of one city, in *Illuminations*, so much as telescope a variety of cities, from different eras, from around the world, into one city, in "Villes (II)"³ and "Villes (I)," offering alternative versions of the past, present and future, moving away from what he saw as the prisonhouse of Realism. Miller and Baudelaire more realistically depict the modern world in their criticism of it, though as we have seen they frequently employ fantastic imagery as well. Like them, though, Rimbaud deplores the city, sensing that the "suprahuman sprawl of the modern city destroys the perspective, and the importance, of the human" (Ahearn 297).

It is generally agreed that Rimbaud abandoned poetry at twenty-one. Despite his youth, Rimbaud presents a serious demeanor interspersed with frequent exceptions,

³ Where for instance he draws together the Allegheny mountains of North America, Libya, English sprites and Greek divinity, along with a street in Baghdad (259-60).

sometimes ironic if contemptuous, sometimes, such as in this fragment from

Illuminations, almost childlike:

J'ai tendu des cordes de clocher à clocher; des guirlandes de fenêtre à
fenêtre; des chaînes d'or d'étoile à étoile, et je danse.
[I hung cords from clock-tower to clock-tower, garlands from window
to window, gold chains from star to star, and I dance.] (255)

Rimbaud, here, offers a picture of freedom and joy, an apparently naive even Edenic vision of life. It seems clear that if Rimbaud rejects much in life, he still finds something to celebrate.

Miller, too, often appears quite serious and yet his sarcasm, exaggeration, and humor suggest alternative release valves for pent-up bitterness. Outside of several of the prose poems in *Spleen de Paris*, Baudelaire's gravity is distinct from the more varying contributions of Miller and Rimbaud who, feeling less betrayed by the world, *can* dance. All three, however, share a pronounced rejection of bourgeois standards.

Rejecting Bourgeois Ways

In their literary productions, Miller, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud disregarded so-called standards of good taste. All three offended notions of propriety--Miller with his descriptions of sex and his "anti-Americanism," Baudelaire with his blasphemy and depictions of lesbians, and Rimbaud with his use of scatology and slang. While Baudelaire's subject matter may not have always been conventional, his poetic form (the sonnet predominates) remains within conventional bounds,⁴ despite the novel

⁴ Prose poems, as a form, are not original with Baudelaire. Sainte-Beuve and a number of other French poets of the early nineteenth century had already experimented with prose poems. Prose poems were certainly less accepted, but they were also less audacious by the time Baudelaire began experimenting with them.

characterizations (a street that screams), and the fantastic, occasionally arcane imagery he employed. Miller and Rimbaud, on the other hand, share a predilection for street language, as opposed to the more prevalent, and proper, literary language, which even Baudelaire had begun to abandon. Miller's topic is the street and he labors to faithfully depict it and the crowds that inhabit it by employing street language. Starkie notes that before writing the poems that comprise *Illuminations*, Rimbaud's poetic innovation consisted in his "daring use of vocabulary" (211). One of the innovative features of Kristin Ross's study of Rimbaud is her use of Alfred Delvau's 1883 *Dictionnaire de la langue verte*, which records working class slang, in order to provide alternative, perhaps more authentic, readings of many of Rimbaud's poems.

None of these three writers comes from the same station in society. Baudelaire, son of an aristocrat and the adoptive son of a distinguished military officer, came from the highest rung and Rimbaud, whose mother was a petit-bourgeois landowner directly descended from peasant stock, the lowest--which provides one, though unsatisfactory, explanation of the difference in their poetic language. Each, according to their biographers, was raised with bourgeois notions of proper behavior and attitudes and goals, and all three rebelled, recognizing the stifling constraints they would have to endure should they accept bourgeois ways.

In "À la Musique," Rimbaud expresses his contempt for the bourgeois who congregate in the center of the town, in the "Square où tout est correct" [square where all is correct/appropriate] (95), where landowners with pince-nez glasses point out to each other the mistakes of the band. In all their finery, "Les gros bureaux bouffis traînent leurs grosses dames / Auprès desquelles vont, officieux cornacs" [the fat wheezing bureaucrats escort their fat wives / next to whom they walk, officious

elephant-guides] (95). In this poem, the bourgeoisie seems not only ridiculous and repulsive, but also complacent, calmly filling their pipes and adding, superciliously, "vous savez, c'est de la contrebande" [you know, it's contraband] (96). Still, there are young girls in the square, and as he has clothed himself carelessly, like a student, the girls find the young poet attractive. The poem's conclusion unites decided antipathy toward the bourgeoisie in the square with attraction for the young girls who may in fact be daughters of the bourgeois class, such that his "désirs brutaux s'accrochent à leurs lèvres" [brutal desires snatch at their lips] (96), as if through a fierce kiss he wishes to punish and to inflame the girls and the bourgeoisie.

Such a specific rejection of a class finds no place in Miller's work, except for those on the very highest rungs of society, those who simply exploit the labor of others. By the nineteen-thirties, Miller has come to believe that the bourgeoisie are no less exploited than those in the classes below them. Miller, on the whole, rejects practices and behaviors, manifestations of values inimical to a full enjoyment of life, no matter which class espouses them, especially since, due to incorporation, all classes more or less proclaim many of the same values.

According to biographer Robert Ferguson, Miller's mother "was anxious to promote in her small son the virtues of industry, thrift, and respectability" (6). But like many other artists, such as the Romantics in England and many French artists of the nineteenth century, Miller rejects these typically bourgeois values. The term "bourgeois" is certainly, as Gordon Wright notes, an "amorphous" word that is descriptive not of one narrow class but, instead, a range of classes (168). Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin provide an overall description of the values upheld as bourgeois: "reason, order and progress, perseverance, self-reliance and disciplined conformity to

the standards of good taste and action" (42). To this list should likely be added "patriotism," though Janik and Toulmin might have sought to include patriotism under the last rubric, "conformity to standards of good taste and action." Duty to one's community and country demand the respect of the bourgeois as well. So-called normal families, in America and in the West, tend to value these traits and seek to pass them on to their children, so that these children become members in good standing of society. In rejecting bourgeois ways, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Miller fall out of favor with their society, expressed in the cases of Miller and Baudelaire with a ban on certain of their works, in the case of Rimbaud with a shunning from literary Paris. Implicitly, when not explicitly, they offer alternatives to the dominant society.

One of the first connections Miller makes between himself and French poet Arthur Rimbaud, in his study of the poet entitled *The Time of the Assassins*, occurs through the figure of the "cold, critical, proud, unforgiving, and puritanical" mother (12). Early on, Miller learned that the bourgeois conception of generosity, exemplified in charity, often had limits that made little sense. He records that when he saw his mother (a figure described by Miller and his biographers alike as a harsh and unfeeling woman) giving something away, he ran off to his bedroom eager to find something to contribute. Often he returned with

a bright new toy, a pair of boots, a drum, because I was too surfeited with possessions. "Oh no, Henry not *that*!" I can hear her say. "That's too new!" "But I don't want it any more," I would insist. "Don't talk that way," she would answer, "or God will punish you." (*Plexus* 60)

Comments Dearborn: "To Henry, material possessions began to seem suspect--useless trappings--and the accumulation of them would remind him of his mother and the rigid meaningless values she endorsed" (26). Early on, the acquisitive strain which, with

the rise of consumer capitalism and the department store, was becoming so much a part of the American and Western way of life, a signifier of progress and success, caused Miller to question the values informing his culture.

Starkie relates that Rimbaud called his mother "La Bouche d'Ombre" [Mouth of Darkness], "after the ponderous metaphysical poem by Victor Hugo, on account of the weighty and religious nature of her frequent utterances" (84). James Lawler suggests that Rimbaud's poem "Le Bateau ivre" [The Drunken Boat] exists in part as a "rejection of a cold mother," so the journey can be understood, at one level, as one of escape (9). Neither Miller nor Rimbaud ever reconciled with his mother, a sign perhaps of the strength of their respective rebellions against the restrictions and judgements of the mother figure, for both mothers embodied, or attempted to, the bourgeois values they sought to impart to their sons.

Miller also characterizes his family much as Rimbaud does, and this characterization reflects an attempt to expose the true nature of the family beneath its bourgeois pretensions. "My people were entirely Nordic," Miller declares early in *Tropic of Capricorn*, "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. [...] In my bitterness I often search for reasons to condemn them, the better to condemn myself. For I am like them too As I look back on my life it seems to me that I never did anything of my own volition but always through the pressure of others. (11)

Beyond their faults, Miller seems to acknowledge the social forces operating to form individuals, aware that acts often express a response to stimuli rather than some

ultimate notion of choice and individualism. His rebellion, furthermore, represents a reaction against his family rather than a simple declaration of identity.

Similar to Miller's denunciation of his family and himself, in "Mauvais Sang" from *Un Saison en Enfer*, Rimbaud writes,

J'ai de mes ancêtres gaulois l'œil bleu blanc, la cervelle étroite, et la maladresse dans la lutte. Je trouve mon habillement aussi barbare que le leur. Mais je ne beurre pas ma chevelure.

Les Galois étaient les écorcheurs de bêtes, les brûleurs d'herbes le plus ineptes de leur temps.

[From my Gallic ancestors, I have slate-blue eyes, the straight forehead, and the ineptitude in battle. I consider my dress as barbaric as theirs. But I do not butter my hair.

The Gauls were skinnors of animals, burners of herbs--the most inept of their time.] (196)

Without simply rejecting the family, both Miller and Rimbaud regard their forebears as exemplars of failure and describe them in strong terms: Miller's ancestors are "idiots" while Rimbaud's are "the most inept of their time." Neither writer excludes himself from this judgement.

Both in fact implicate themselves in the family failure, while at the same time distinguishing themselves, making a triumph of their failure to conform to the genetic infirmity. Miller claims that he "inspired distrust," and he "fomented discord . . . because I always exposed the stupidity and futility of everything" (*Capricorn* 16). Rimbaud, breaking with his peasant past, proclaims that unlike his Gallic ancestors, "Je ne me vois jamais dans les conseils de Christ; ni dans les conseils des Seigneurs,--représentants du Christ" [I never see myself in the teachings of Christ; nor in the teachings of the priests--representatives of Christ] (197)--perhaps only the beginning of the differences enunciated, implicitly, throughout *Une Saison en Enfer*. In this

instance, Rimbaud places himself outside bourgeois religion and outside the duties such a religion requires of its followers.

Those who tend to appear most respectable also suffer at the hands of Miller and Rimbaud. Following his contact with general managers and vice presidents at Western Union as well as those who come to him seeking a job, Miller argues with himself about the need to modify his views of humanity: "[Y]ou need to get rid of your false notions about humanity. You have to realize, Henry me boy, that you're dealing with cutthroats, with cannibals, only they're dressed up, shaved, perfumed, but that's all they are--cutthroats, cannibals" (*Capricorn* 102). Despite outward appearances of bourgeois respectability, Miller recognizes that at heart people remain the monsters they have always been, that civilization has not fundamentally altered or improved their character. In like fashion, Rimbaud recognizes in those supposedly most admired that they receive respect only by virtue of their title; deep down they are no different from Miller's cutthroats and cannibals:

Marchand, tu es nègre; magistrat, tu es nègre; général, tu es nègre;
empereur, vieille démangeaison, tu es nègre.

[Merchant, you are a nigger; magistrate, you are a nigger; general, you
are a nigger; emperor, old rash, you are a nigger.] (200)

The epithet "nigger," in 1872 as today, signifies ignobility and servility, and Rimbaud thus asserts that the most respectable are on par with, if not worse than, the uncouth, even Napoleon III, "the emperor" who conceived of himself (or at least attempted to present himself) as a respectable bourgeois. In France, from 1830 forward, the bourgeois class begins to take over the government (Wright 169), so Rimbaud's denunciation of the class takes shape as a rebellion against the pre- and post-Paris

Commune governments. Bourgeois pretention, for Miller and Rimbaud, serves only to obscure the contemptible human spirit which underlies it.

Miller maintains, and this is true of Rimbaud as well, that "the demon of revolt had taken possession of me at an early age" (*Capricorn* 16). Revolt against typical bourgeois concerns will center these two writers in such a way that Miller rejects the need to work and accumulate all the so-called necessities of life, and Rimbaud affirms the Paris Commune of 1871, which Kristin Ross describes as "a revolt against deep forms of social regimentation"--against the "hierarchical divisions" that characterized life under Napoleon III and the Second Empire (5).

Fondane writes that Rimbaud rejects the choice of good versus evil, conceiving it as "the absolute proof that we are not free, that there is not the least freedom in the category of the real" (112). This good/evil binary Rimbaud attributes to Christianity to which he also attributes the rise of Monsieur Prudhomme (Rimbaud 219)--a figure for the bourgeois who seeks only to know that which will maintain him right where he is, who seeks only to remain respectable. *À propos* of M. Prudhomme, Miller writes, "Let a man but dress differently from his fellow creatures and he becomes an object of scorn and ridicule. The only law which is really lived up to whole-heartedly and with a vengeance is the law of conformity" (*Time* 29). Neither Miller nor Rimbaud conceives the western individual as free, and both sense the need to move beyond the categories of good and evil. Miller claims that in the Middle Ages, "Men and women [were] storming heaven with their sexual apparatus. Was it immoral? Who cares? The constant presence of death gave men and women an insatiable hunger for life" (*World* 60). Questions of good and evil, of morality and sinfulness, pale in comparison to the importance of individual freedom, to the enjoyment of life, and

most often function solely as restraints, though not invariably in ways that will make life safer or better.

Just as Miller's primary concern is the individual rather than the collective, Rimbaud's attempt to become a *voyant* signifies an attempt to maintain "individuality" which, according to Ross, he sees as under attack by the consumer capitalist culture (102), already entrenched in France by 1870 and exemplified by bourgeois conformity in purchasing. Whereas capitalism appeals *to* individuals *as* individuals in order to persuade them to purchase products, simultaneously, because it also relies on high sales figures, it attacks individuality--enticing whole classes of individuals to purchase the same products, often in the name of individuality (102).

According to Ross, the capitalist attack on individuality, disguised as "ordered disorganization," works counter to Rimbaud's "raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens" [reasoned disordering of all senses], because it serves in essence only to mystify the relations at work in the capitalist economy *vis à vis* the worker-commodity-consumer-producer relationship, rather than to clear the slate as Rimbaud attempts to do. She argues, moreover, that Rimbaud's new vision opposes "what capitalist development is at that moment defining (in the sense of setting the limits) *as* human, *as ordinary* perception" (102), therefore opposing as well what Walter Benjamin has called the "attenuation of experience." The connection between a thing and its use, for instance, must be transparent, in order to encourage the purchasing of products; experience itself must be quantifiable as well as capitalizable. Rimbaud's illuminations serve to distance the individual from that economy, to set the individual outside the bourgeois world.

The attempt to reorganize one's vision of the world, to enunciate new values and new behaviors, naturally causes frictions. Both Rimbaud and Miller behaved in ways that surprised and, occasionally, offended those around them. Rimbaud, in his time in Paris with French poet Paul Verlaine, through his bold pronouncements (criticisms of Parnassian poetry and poets, for instance) and uncouth actions (refusals to bathe, destruction of other people's property), behaviors untainted at that point by consideration for others, made enemies of virtually all those he encountered. In the "Mauvais Sang" [Bad/Evil Blood] section of *Un Saison en enfer*, Rimbaud's harsh narrator dramatizes the bitterness of his attacks:

À qui me louer? Quelle bête faut-il adorer? Quelle sainte image
attaque-t-on? Quels coeurs briserai-je? Quel mensonge dois-je tenir?--
Dans quel sang marcher?
[Who should I attach myself to? What foolishness should I adore?
What idol should I attack? What hearts will I break? What lie must I
hold?--In what blood walk?] (199)

Rimbaud exhibits little respect and, in fact, a certain seriousness, in his intention to scandalize those around him. While his youthfulness may help explain his behavior, the poetry of *l'art pour l'art* inspired his contempt in the same way that "Literature," as we have seen, raised Miller's ire. The Parnassians, like those devoted to "Literature" in Miller's day, were behind the times, complacent, and/or self-satisfied like Rimbaud's Charleville bourgeoisie.

Miller's rebellion against bourgeois values appears in the expressed attitude of the narrators of Miller's books, who are not unmoved by considerations for others but often present themselves as such. Miller's narrators can be conceived on one level as *hard-boiled*, a term often applied to Ernest Hemingway's narrators, among others, who affect a certain toughness and evince a thorough unsentimentality, as if sentimentality

were simply a weakness. Miller himself rejects the label as restrictive. "I don't like that hard-boiled attitude," he writes in a letter, "--it's *inhuman* again. [American artists] don't want to be emotionally susceptible to anything, and that's cockeyed" (*qtd in* Dearborn 179).

Miller's narrators often violate bourgeois sensibilities, especially when describing a sexual encounter; in other situations they might be just as offensive while remaining, as Miller says, "susceptible." For example, when narrator Dion Moloch reports the death of his friend Hari Das, a friend asks,

"What are you going to do?"

"Me? Nothing."

....

"You don't seem to care very much," Blanche observed.

"Care? What do you mean? He's dead now."

"Well, aren't you going to look after his body?"

"I certainly am not. With death my interest in Hari Das ceases."

(*Moloch* 131-32)

Upon learning of the death of his friend, Moloch affects complete indifference--no tears, no acceptance of the duty imposed upon him by the deceased. In short, Moloch shows absolutely no willingness to "do the right thing."

The telegram he has received states there are no known relatives and that Moloch has been entrusted with the task of seeing the body properly buried. Moloch's wife Blanche, and friends Prigozi and Stanley, react to his renunciation of this duty with astonishment. Prigozi accuses him of acting "rather cold-blooded" (132). Instead of observing the social niceties that friendship would seem to demand of him, Moloch refuses to acknowledge any further duty to Hari Das. Criticized by those surrounding him for his attitude, he finally retorts:

"Who looked after him when he was alive? Who fed him and put a roof over his head? None of you weeping willows! You hadn't much use

for him, then *You, Prigozi* . . . you talked a lot about letting them shift for themselves, these Hindu bastards. My sympathetic little wife here treated him like a scavenger . . . she was afraid that the neighbors would catch sight of him blowing his nose in the gutter. He was a boor . . . he laughed too noisily. And he didn't bathe often enough to suit her royal highness." He looked at them scornfully "Suddenly he's converted to a cadaver. Immediately tears, lamentations, eulogies. Can't do too much for him . . . *for the corpse.*" (132, ellipses and italics in original)

For Moloch, treating people with respect and helping them as much as possible while they are alive demonstrates much more meaningful concern than performing the proper rituals when they die. Moloch disparages society's refusal to aid the living: "society shows more ingenuity when it comes to getting rid of stiff," he says bitterly (133). When a corpse is treated with more tenderness and thoughtfulness than was shown the living being, societal values once again appear profoundly skewed.

Beginning with his first lesson, then, at the hands of his mother, on the conflicted nature of modern values (Christianity and giving in opposition to Capitalism and accumulating), Miller begins to rebel. Soon he realizes what Max Horkheimer has expressed so compellingly: "Truth can make no pacts with 'prevailing customs.' It finds no guiding thread in them. In the era of witch hunts, opposition to the public spirit would have been moral" (*Critical Theory* 284). Miller rebels against the consumer culture that grew up with him and flourished all around him, seeing in its depths forces profoundly inhuman. Rimbaud and Baudelaire reject that culture as well, in varying degrees, due to their different personalities, historical situations, and social circumstances.

Money and the Borrowing Instinct

Tenderness and consideration are two sentiments Miller finds noticeably absent in his relationship with his mother as well as in other interpersonal relationships. In bourgeois culture, these sentiments, though expected facets of the mother-child relationship as well as of most relationships between people, often disappear due to the myriad of new forces--work-related problems often resulting in greater marital strains, frustrated desires in the marketplace, greater split between the public and private life--making themselves felt in the industrial era. Growing up in a strict, middle-class German household (where German was often spoken), Miller rebelled not only against the actual heartlessness of the bourgeoisie but, more specifically, against their repressive and puritanical values, especially as embodied in attitudes toward sex (monogamy as well as the "hush-hush" attitude) and work. Miller also experienced a troubled relationship with money, not simply because he seems rarely to have had enough, but because of the difficulty in obtaining it outside the normal channels of intensive daily labor.

In American history, when elementary school students read Benjamin Franklin's plans for self-improvement, they come across such succinct morsels of wisdom as, "A penny saved is a penny earned." Franklin's exhortation from the mid-eighteenth century, at odds with the consumer culture of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America in which Miller grew up, and where credit begins to play such an important role (Leach 124-27), emphasizes the importance money already played in a society where bartering still accounted for a substantial percentage of transactions. Money, thus, exists early on as an important facet of American culture, one that Miller denounces and attempts to revalue.

Miller and Rimbaud share a similar experience of money but also dramatically part company. Miller's second wife June (Mona, in his fiction) had a talent for raising money, while Rimbaud attached himself to Verlaine who, though not wealthy, at the time needed no job in order to live. Both Miller and Rimbaud experienced difficulties in Paris due to lack of money; but whereas Miller lived mostly in large cities and as an adult had to fend for himself, the young Rimbaud, born in the country, lived much of his life, until leaving for Africa at age twenty-one, supported by either his mother or Verlaine and so was less dependent upon his own income than was Miller. Both writers occasionally benefited from the generosity of patrons as well; Anaïs Nin underwrote Miller for nearly a decade, and, much less substantially, both Verlaine and Théodore de Banville offered Rimbaud money. Still, nothing in Miller's history compares with Rimbaud's experiences in Africa, where he struggled to accumulate a fortune. Starkie writes of Rimbaud, "no sum of money was too insignificant to earn or to accept, no sum too small to save" (387). It was, she asserts, the "Ardennais peasant strain" making itself manifest (387).

As opposed to bartering, where equivalent is traded for equivalent, "[m]oney is a *socially accepted* general equivalent" which assumes "the role of general equivalent, and excludes all other commodities from that role" (Bottomore 337). As a socially-accepted equivalent, it serves as medium for a variety of social relationships, especially buyer-seller, debtor-creditor and employer-employee (339). "The role of the state in managing money must thus be seen as a managing of these social relations as well" (340). Rebellion against money, or an attempt to devalue or re-value it, thus constitutes an act of revolt against the state.

Just as counterfeiting constitutes one such rebellion against the state, the easy acquisition of money envisaged by Miller constitutes another, for through borrowing one attempts to extricate oneself from the state-managed flow of money. Importantly, for Miller borrowing also constitutes an attempt to liberate himself from the necessity for work. Robert Ferguson, in fact, describes Miller's seven years with June in the nineteen-twenties as "ceaseless, baffled searching for a way of making money without getting trapped by a job" (122).

Miller's most considered pronouncement on money is his 1938 essay, "Money and How it Gets that Way," written in response to a query from Ezra Pound, "asking me if I had ever thought about money, what makes it and how it gets that way" (*Stand Still* 119). Miller responded with an essay that contains a mishmash of satire, history and nonsense, in addition to pithy statements on money, evaluating the role it has come to play in society. "In fact," he writes, "when we search for a counterpart to the role of gold in human life, we can adduce nothing equal to it in obsessive persistence unless it be man's continuous and uninterrupted preoccupation with the navel (128). Focussing on money steers people away from living, Miller asserts, compelling them to obsess on something that in itself bears very little value and which does not ensure happiness. One might view money, in that way, as a commodity (one that provides access to others), for money promises happiness, if we can only have enough of it, but on its own it does not really deliver. Money, it turns out, is as hollowed-out as other commodities.

Money does, however, inspire the formulation of truisms such as those Benjamin Franklin contributes, and Miller tries his hand at one: "To have money in the pocket is one of the small but inestimable pleasures of life. To have money in the

bank is not quite the same thing, but to take money out of the bank is indisputably a great joy" (141). Clearly Miller does not take money seriously, except perhaps when in dire need of it; he refuses to believe it merits as much reflection and energy as it tends to receive. To the proposition "Thinking in money generates money," proclaimed by an unnamed "late German philosopher,"⁵ Miller opposes, "Thinking in money generates nothing but confusion" (142). Money acts primarily as a distraction. An escape from the necessity of earning it or using it just might lead toward "the life more abundant."

On a more reflective note, Miller identifies the dominant attitude toward money in America and the West--money (like sex)⁶ as something sacred--when he writes, "'Neither a borrower nor a lender be,' said the good Shakespeare" (*Sexus* 61-2). But anyone familiar with the *Tropics* and other works by Miller knows that he quite often and unapologetically finds himself in the position of needing to borrow money, especially during his initial period in Paris, narrated in *Tropic of Cancer*. Less often Miller finds himself in a position to lend money. In *Tropic of Capricorn*, for instance, he claims that while working for the *Cosmodemonic Telegraph Company*, charged with hiring and firing messengers, he sometimes borrowed money to give it away to the broken-down people who came to him seeking a job. "If I was asked for a dime I gave a half dollar, if I was asked for a dollar I gave five" (27), he writes, suggesting he always gave five-fold what was requested. Such generosity does not tally with his

⁵ The unnamed "late German philosopher" is Spengler, see Spengler p. 408.

⁶ I could draw an elaborate comparison between Miller's attitudes toward money and sex, but I believe it would simply conclude with the notion that both should be alternately devalued, so that they are not so significant, and revalued so that their potential for bringing communal pleasure becomes the focus.

professed habitual lack of funds, but it reveals an awareness, possibly based on his own experience with borrowing, that what was asked of him was only the bare minimum, a sum thought by the petitioner to be less likely to inspire rejection, but an amount that would merely prolong the misery rather than extricate the person from a specific predicament.

Rimbaud's later obsession with making money is well-documented in Starkie's biography--as is his charity. She quotes one of his former employers, Pierre Bardey, who wrote after Rimbaud's death that his charity was "probably one of the few things that he did without disgust and without a sneer of contempt" (388). With Miller, we see the easy-come, easy-go attitude toward money, while with Rimbaud there is "lavish charity" (388) despite the fact that "no peasant ever used his body more hardly, nor lived in a more miserly or penurious manner" (387). Miller's apparent light-heartedness toward money contrasts sharply with Rimbaud's combination of avarice and thoughtfulness.⁷

In *Sexus*, Miller provides his most complete theoretical, and practical, statement on borrowing, indeed a veritable primer on the subject (60-1). He concludes with the notion that the best "lender is the realist who knows that tomorrow the situation may be reversed and the borrower become the lender" (61), a theory supported by Friedrich Engels' contention that it is the poor, rather than the bourgeois, who give alms to the poor, "who know from experience how it feels to be hungry, and

⁷ Rimbaud's purported involvement in the slave trade certainly complicates this discussion of his attitude toward money. Starkie's biography of Rimbaud asserts that while gun running and the slave trade usually went hand-in-hand, Rimbaud dedicated himself to gun running, while his partners handled the other, more distasteful trade (381).

are liable to find themselves in the same situation at any moment" (120). Miller claims, furthermore, that *he* "never insisted on being repayed" (*Sexus* 61), for the haunting shame of knowing you owe somebody takes some of the joy out of borrowing as well as the joy of seeing the person in the streets. Insisting on repayment simply changes the nature of the act of lending, making it less charitable and unselfish.

But Miller tries to downplay the whole issue of "borrowing," finally, arguing that everybody, at one point or another, finds themselves in the position of potential lender and potential borrower. Because it is a universal experience, he writes, everybody should give to the utmost:

For men on earth, borrowing and lending is not only essential but should be increased to outlandish proportions. The fellow who is really practical is the fool who looks neither to the left nor the right, who gives without question and asks unblushingly. (62)

Certainly Miller seeks to provoke his readers here, but the exaggeration--"the fool who looks neither to the left nor the right"--serves to underscore the restraint with which the bourgeois class conducts itself, when giving alms, for the fool at least *gives*. Furthermore, though this incitement to bestow money on those in need can be understood as self-serving, as wish-fulfillment, given Miller's begging letters in the nineteen-forties while he composed *Sexus*, it can also be interpreted as envisioning change: Money emerges desacralized and as plentiful as fresh air. People might then begin to constitute a community connected by Christian bonds of giving and receiving.

At least, such may be his intention. Even so, the money-world has such a grip on the average citizen that living on money borrowed or accumulated through begging

or busking⁸ fails to eliminate the need to *use* money to acquire necessities. Thus the escape from the consumer/producer relationship, within the capitalist mode of production, is never quite effected and is at best only partially achieved with respect to such money-mediated relationships as worker/supervisor, for instance, where friends or passersby merely serve as unofficial replacements for the factory owner or the office manager. Miller, regardless, prophesies a future where money will only exist if there are people "still foolish enough to believe in money" (*Remember* 414). Since money has only socially-constructed value, it rests with people to decide whether money remains a functioning element of society or not.

Miller's narration of his difficulties with money, in both *Tropics* and *The Rosy Crucifixion*, illustrates his rejection of some of the most basic--hence, enthroned--values of Western culture. "Man is dominated by the making of money," writes Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, "by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life" (53). Miller's dismissal of money as something to be *earned* plays an important supportive role in his renunciation of the commodity spectacle and, equally, the work ethic, for the focus upon accumulating money encourages people to work, whether they receive any satisfaction from their work or not. It prompts them, in effect, to stifle themselves, to devalue themselves, to be, in Nietzschean terms, life-denying. The end of Rimbaud's poetic production, for instance, appears to coincide with the necessity to earn a living, though which inspired which, if such a connection can even be drawn, remains unclear.

⁸ Performing on the street for money.

A Most Depressing Thought

In the West, work has generally become accepted as a duty, the customary responsibility of good Christians, and responsible citizens, to daily deliver themselves over to productive labor: labor that results in some commodity or part thereof or labor that can be sold as a service (waiting tables or street-cleaning, for instance). The Puritan work ethic--founded upon the notions that "God helps those who help themselves" (Weber 115), that "to work is to serve God" (De Grazia 45), and that there is great merit in submitting to both religious and secular authority (Weber 178)--promises material and spiritual rewards (especially the second) for those who virtuously devote themselves to their "calling," as Weber describes the new conception of daily labor in the nineteenth century. Despite its religious sanction, and the necessity of functioning within a money-economy, acceptance of wage labor, more specifically alienated wage labor, has been challenged in American literature, if only implicitly, at least since Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and, in French literature, implicitly again, since Henry Murger's *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*.

During the transition to consumer capitalism, however, the owners of factories, mills, and mines often complained that work habits were not sufficiently developed, that workers were rather undependable and resistant to the new system taking shape (Thompson 392-93). As Weber describes it, "A man does not 'by nature' wish to earn more and more money, but to live simply as he is accustomed to live and to earn as much as is necessary for that purpose" (60). A worker, before and even during the transition to the new economy, preferred to earn enough money to survive for a period and to then quit working, a mind-set at odds with the capitalist system.

In Europe, before the rise of the great, industrial cities, which followed large-scale migration from the country to the city (see Chapter One), "[t]he deference of the countryside," according to E. P. Thompson, "was rooted in bitter experience of the power of the squire rather than in any inward conviction" (386). The work ethic, however, impressing people arriving in the city with the importance of self-discipline, impelled them, in time, to become their own overseers, to provide that "inward conviction" (393). In their repeated support of the work ethic, especially strong in America and England, church leaders of many sects performed a great task for struggling industrialists, preaching "the idea that faithful labor, even at low wages, on the part of those whom life offers no other opportunities, is highly pleasing to God" (Weber 178), though the teaching has never quite fully caught on in the West. In France, for instance, rejection of work has been a constant, so that even today graffiti such as the following renouncing work can be seen: "*Work is to life, as gasoline is to the ocean.*" The implication being that alienated wage labor is harmful, deadly, unnatural. Jack Kerouac's hoboes, too, in *On the Road*, live on the margins of society and outside the routine of daily work, travelling the midwest by "hopping" freight trains or hitch-hiking. They are free, but most people are not.

In high capitalism, it is generally a given that people must labor in order to survive, that (as Max Horkheimer describes it) they must yield to "natural" forces, i.e. the economic forces that sustain society but are assumed to be quite beyond its (society's) control (*Critical* 86). Workers, accordingly, acquiesce to the work ethic, heed the bosses in their places of employment, and in so doing maintain their respectability (as well as their anonymity), as good workers, within the larger society. Horkheimer observes that both workers and owners claim to submit to blind economic

necessity, with the workers further "acknowledging the power and authority of the employer"; however, while this economic necessity represents "for the worker a pitiless fate," it constitutes for the owner "the condition for his control": "economic necessity," therefore, functions to the owner's benefit (86).

Writers such as Upton Sinclair have depicted the life of the worker in the factory (or the slaughterhouse in the case of *The Jungle*), but Miller's position as hiring manager brings him, as we have seen, into contact with both sides of the labor equation. All except for those at the very top are exploited, Miller no less than the messengers no less than the vice-presidents, though some are at least better-paid. Miller depicts even his appointment, as hiring manager, as a blatant act of exploitation. Refused for employment as a messenger for the *Cosmodemonic Telegraph Corporation* (Western Union), his purse empty, his pride wounded, a wife and baby at home, Miller decides not to take "no" for an answer. At the corporation's head office, he speaks with a vice president who, to Miller's surprise, listens eagerly:

I realized that by some accident I had really been instrumental in doing him a service. [...] Soon the assistant general manager was called in and asked to listen to my story. By this time I knew what the story was. I understood that Hymie--"that little kike," as the general manager called him--had no business pretending that he was the employment manager. [...] It was also clear that Hymie was a Jew and that Jews were not in good odor with the general manager (*Capricorn* 18)

From a somewhat vulgarly exploitative scene, like the one related above, to that of a worker hired to perform some task every fifteen seconds for between eight and sixteen hours a day, is not so far as it might at first glance seem. Workers submit to "blind economic" forces as well as to other forces operative within a society--racism, misogyny, anti-semitism--as reflected in their predominantly white male bosses and, just as often, their paychecks. Women and children have often been sought as

replacements for men in certain industries, especially the clothing industry, because they could be paid less.⁹ Miller recognizes the exploitative side of wage labor, that the product or service is exalted at the expense of the worker, who is only pushed to ever greater productivity, and condemns such an imbalance.

Oswald Spengler observes that "in the eighteenth century [work] loses its derogatory implication in all languages" but only because "*work* becomes the great word of ethical thinking" (411). This change in attitude, described by Weber as well, concomitant with the rise of capitalism and with factory labor, helps inaugurate the decline of work as predominantly skilled labor, as craft, into work as semi-skilled and unskilled labor, as well as unadulterated drudgery. As Karl Marx describes it in *Capital*, "it is not the worker who uses the means of production, but the means of production which use the worker" (383). Thus begins alienated wage labor.

Workers no longer actively create products, and, while many celebrate the notion of work, a wide range of trades once performed by artisans (who formed a class above workers and peasants)--cobblers, tailors, blacksmiths, vitriers, and many others forgotten today--die-out almost entirely, the former practitioners usually sinking into the working class. With industrialization, workers begin to tend machines that dictate their motions. They become, as it were, tethered to these machines which determine the pace of the work and prescribe if and when breaks occur, since the machines must be constantly attended. During the transition to the new economy, many "rebelled against the notion of week after week of disciplined labor" (Thompson 392), when earlier they had enjoyed the freedom of earning enough to get by and then turning to

⁹ See Engels, p. 165, for an early example.

other pursuits, such as working on a farm during harvest (393). They enjoyed variety and resented being forced, by "economic necessity," to tend a machine, month after month, year after year.

Spengler concludes that in this age of decline it is only because of machines, finally, that humans become "precious" (411)--factory machines as well as telephones and typewriters. Just as the relationship between product and worker is unequal, so is that between human and machine. "The machine works and forces man to cooperate," writes Spengler (411), a sentiment Henry Miller might have had in mind when he wrote, "Machines are expensive; human lives are cheap" (*Remember* 38), especially when often what is required of the worker is a few repetitive motions while the machine performs the more sophisticated tasks. Miller deduces that in our era "[o]nly the machine has burgeoned" (89). Like the machine, people are important only for the roles they play; in and of themselves they possess little value, especially when they lack highly sought after skills. Where machines have evolved technologically to become better producers of commodities, people have not--or certainly not as quickly. As unskilled laborers, they are easily replaceable.

Occasionally Miller appears to share, unwittingly, the same attitude toward unskilled or semi-skilled workers--their easy replaceability--that he laments. His biographers present his employment history as checkered at best. He experimented with a variety of positions, though with the exception of the job in his father's tailor shop (where he worked collecting unpaid bills) and later as hiring manager for Western Union, none lasted very long. The list his biographers present contains less colorful jobs than those Miller himself claimed in the conclusion to the collection of stories and essays entitled *The Cosmological Eye*:

dish-washer, bus boy, newsie, messenger boy, grave-digger, bill sticker, book salesman, bell hop, bartender, liquor salesman, typist, adding machine operator, librarian, statistician, charity worker, mechanic, insurance collector, garbage collector, usher, secretary to an evangelist, dock hand, street car conductor, gymnasium instructor, milk driver, ticket chopper, etc. (367-68).

Nearly half of these jobs could be classified as white collar jobs, but some that do not fit within that category are so far from qualifying (garbage collector for instance), that they seem to insinuate a certain amount of shame involved with admitting to office jobs on the part of one who claimed to be a child of the streets. Beyond an attempt at self-mythology, this list also demonstrates (1) the wide variety of skills he imputed to himself, and suggests (2) that he conceives of skill as something to be learned with little difficulty and shrugged off at will. Additionally, this list can be grasped as an indication of the struggle a person must endure in order to survive in a thriving, driving but ultimately hostile environment--the willingness to tackle a variety of jobs, to expose oneself to a variety of interpersonal situations (librarian and newsie, for instance) as well as either more or less respectable but physically demanding jobs (grave digger, dockhand).

In short, a person must be willing to swallow his or her pride, undertake despised work, shrug off personal desires and submit. This "surrender" of sorts is diametrically opposed to what Miller means when he writes that in Paris he "gave up the ghost"--in Paris he "touched bottom. Like it or not I was forced to create a new life for myself" (*Cosmological* 2). It is this new life that was responsible for enabling Miller to shake off the shackles of respectability and "Literature" and allowed him to speak in the voice which is recognizably Miller. On the other hand, there are those, perhaps less fortunate, less consumed by dreams, who when they touch the muddy

bottom and fear they are about to be sucked under find it in themselves to take on a job that others would rather not tackle--janitor, door to door salesman--jobs in which the person feels in some way exposed and, possibly, demeaned. These positions, examples of alienated wage labor, for Miller, the consumer economy alone cannot recompense. The singular joy in purchasing some product cannot, for very long, eradicate the memory of humiliation.

While *work* loses its "derogatory implications" for the theorizers of work and of society, for those in the nineteenth century with the leisure to pursue such notions in the abstract, those actually engaged in work, the laborers who sweated in factories and mines twelve to sixteen hours a day, usually six days a week, were certainly less sanguine. The life of French factory workers during the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century was manifestly "subhuman" (Wright 171). Workers toiled an average of fifteen hours a day, and yet even with the entire family working often could not, because of low salaries, exorbitant rents, and the high price of foodstuffs, support themselves: "a supplement from private charity was common" (172). The government of Paris, moreover, found itself forced to pay the state tax of more than half its inhabitants because they lacked the means to pay it themselves (Marchand 28). And the life of workers in Paris differed but little from their *confrères* in other countries: "If Karl Marx had written *Das Kapital* in the Bibliothèque Nationale rather than in the British Museum," asserts Wright "he might have buttressed his argument with French examples just as appalling as those which he drew from official British surveys" (172). Not only were they poorly paid, but work was often dangerous. In America, where the situation was no better, even as late as 1904, "27,000 workers were killed on the job, in manufacturing, transport, and agriculture" (Zinn 319), a statistic which

demonstrates that many laborers still worked in dangerous conditions, even if more and more laws were being written to protect them.

Ross notes that in France, along with the rise of work as an ethical imperative, as well as work consisting of a fixed set of motions prescribed for a set number of hours, the rebellion against this new ethic¹⁰ was rendered a crime--vagabondage. The dandy's rejection of work (Genova 76) underscores the class element of this law, for dandies, while flaunting their uselessness, were not punished for they generally came from the upper classes and had *means*. Charles Baudelaire, who never held a job per se and often hid from creditors, never faced the charge of vagabondage. The law against vagabondage, moreover, exists as "a pure creation of penal law, a word of repression," writes Ross, because "technically, vagabonds have not violated any laws (except laws against vagabondage)" (57). Throughout the nineteenth century there was a surge in arrests for vagabondage, such that "[b]etween the years 1830 and 1896 convictions for vagrancy (vagabondage) increased sevenfold in France" (56). Most of those convicted, she reports, "corresponded to the ritualization of the entry into the work force at the end of school" (56). In other words, many working-class youths, aware that once beyond school age they faced only years of unending labor in a factory with very little hope of ever achieving financial security, rebelled. Many of these vagabonds would, no doubt, have joined Arthur Rimbaud in declaring, "Jamais nous ne travaillerons" [Never will we work] (176). They left home to escape a life they knew would be filled with misery--certainly not, in Henry Miller's terms, "the life more abundant."

¹⁰ "Striking" was already illegal.

In the depression years of the middle nineteen-thirties, when the work situation for those who had it was generally (though certainly not always) much improved over that existing a hundred years earlier, due to gains usually effected by labor unions¹¹

Miller describes the struggle of American workers:

Men are struggling for the right to work! It sounds almost incredible but that is precisely what it amounts to, the great goal of civilized man. What an heroic struggle! Well, for my part, I will say that whatever else I may want, I know I don't want to work. (*Cosmological* 157)

Miller's concern lies not so much with the fact of working, for if nothing else people must feed themselves, so much as with the energy with which they go about attempting to insert themselves into a system that aims only to exploit them while giving them as little as possible in return.

Sebastian De Grazia argues American business executives often work the longest hours of anyone (131), but that their jobs are social, involving contact with others in intellectual as well as informal settings where work can be jointly accomplished (135). The executive "enjoys his work," writes De Grazia, which is varied and well-compensated financially (135). The same, however, cannot be said of the factory worker whose work requires greater and greater concentration, with each technological advance, which "lessens the chance for social relations on the job" (60), a development which helps to explain why "mass-production workers . . . have a higher rate of absenteeism and quitting the job than other workers . . ." (83). Factory jobs isolate workers from each other and force them to perform actions which fail to provide any enduring satisfaction.

¹¹ Such gains included the eight hour day and the five day work week.

One further connection between Miller and the American South, which relates back to French rebellion against alienated wage labor, is that in the South one finds, according to W. J. Cash, "the assumption that the first end of life is living itself," though mill workers and tenant farmers in the south worked as hard as anyone else (384). On the whole, Miller concedes that people have bought into the work ethic and have yet to begin questioning the necessity for work--for wage labor--as currently conceived. Were they to do so, the proletarian class might possibly become the revolutionary class Marx prophesied.

Rimbaud, as we have seen, rejects work, but also those who devote themselves to work: "Maîtres et ouvriers, tous paysans, ignobles" [Masters and workers--all peasants, all ignoble] (196). Rejecting both sides of the system, Rimbaud suggests that both are connected and degraded by the need to produce profits and merchandise. It may be that Rimbaud's more realistic appreciation of what it takes to learn a skill and to be a skilled worker, to be a cobbler for instance, is revealed in his poetry. While Miller claims to have held a variety of jobs, many of which his biographers do not support, Rimbaud writes, "Quel siècle à mains!--Je n'aurai jamais ma main" [What a century for hands!--I will never have a hand] (196). Workers perform their trades by hand so, in Rimbaud, the hand comes to represent the skilled or semi-skilled hand that performs the work. That Rimbaud will never have a hand, thus, suggests he will never have the skills necessary to successfully perform a trade.¹²

¹² His assertion, that he will never have a hand, may also be a comment on his own literary production, that his project as a *seer* has not measured up to his own conceptions.

Miller, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud, as part of their renunciation of the bourgeois values they were raised to honor, reject the importance of work, more specifically of work that is not theirs, alienated wage labor. Such a rejection, in favor of literary work, raises the issue of the type of work esteemed in western society--generally that activity which produces low wages for the worker and substantial profit for the owner, resulting from exertion on the part of the worker, especially the worker in the factory or sweatshop.¹³

For Spengler, work associated with machines, impersonal and repetitive work, unskilled or at best semi-skilled, represents yet another sign of the decline of a *culture*, petrifying into a dead, fossilized *civilization*¹⁴ (412). Each technological development, moreover, reduces the worker's task, while requiring greater concentration. Development, too, of the division of labor, especially as embodied by Frederick Taylor's "scientific management" even further dehumanized the laborers, ensuring that they were "interchangeable" like screws manufactured to precisely the same length and width (Zinn 317).

Nietzsche and Marx problematize "work" under capitalism in a similar fashion, viewing it as, in part, an attack on individuals *as* individuals. In *The Dawn* (*Morgenröthe*), Friedrich Nietzsche, whose philosophy influenced Spengler (Spengler 38n), views the "glorification of 'work' and the tireless talk of the 'blessings of work'"

¹³ Because of the class he came from, Baudelaire never faced the prospect of wage labor until faced with the fact that several years of "dandyism" had seriously depleted his inheritance. Even then he rejected it, declaring he would only devote himself to literary work.

¹⁴ Here, I use the italicized terms as Spengler does. For Spengler, stasis equals death (a very capitalist notion that serves, perhaps, to date Spengler's work). A civilization, then, is a culture that has stopped growing, has died.

as mere mystification that conceals fear for "the danger of dangers: the individual" (*Portable* 82). Work that serves to mask the person operating the machine, as opposed to trades or metiers in which a person can make a mark within a community and gain some sense of accomplishment (hence self), alienates the worker from his or her product, and serves one purpose: "it keeps everybody in harness and powerfully obstructs the development of reason, of covetousness, of the desire for independence" (82)--in essence, of that which marks a person as an individual. The force workers daily expend on their assigned tasks is energy directed away from "reflection, brooding, dreaming, worry, love and hatred"; in its place it "sets a small goal before one's eyes and permits easy and regular satisfactions" (82). Wage labor, then, performs the role of "police" (82), keeping workers in line, ensuring they do not begin to yearn for something, beyond what the system provides for them, and exercise their will attempting to attain that "something."

Marx appears to view the alienation of labor somewhat differently, perhaps a little more broadly. Workers are alienated from the product(s) to whose construction they merely contribute one element or one motion; from those people around (either co-workers or the capitalists who employ them); and even, in an argument that reflects Nietzsche's above, from themselves since their work demands just enough concentration to require their attention, forcing them to repress distracting thoughts; the final product, then, bears no insignia of their participation (Bottomore 9-12)--hence the magical appearance of products on shelves. If workers, through internalizing the Puritan work ethic, can police themselves, can repress desires or accept delayed satisfaction, so much the better for the system and its beneficiaries, who will reap ever greater rewards. As a (self-) defeated class, workers are much more manageable.

Miller, upon his return from France in 1940 where he has spent ten years devoted to work--writing¹⁵--and where he has finally established a reputation, arrives in America the same way he left: "that is, penniless" (*Sunday* 63). With little hope of earning any money from books unpublished and unpublishable in America, he must find some other source of income. "Perhaps I would have to take a job," he observes, "--a most depressing thought" (*Nightmare* 12). It is a "depressing thought" not only because of the exhausting routine wage labor requires, but because it would take him away from the work he believes to be truly his--writing--but for which he can earn very little money without sacrificing those features that make him distinctive.

The value attached to wage labor, and work in general, is often based not on what is produced but on the potential income. Miller's mother exemplifies such thinking when she asks, "'Can't you write something like *Gone With the Wind* and make a little money?'" (*Sunday* 64), as if he should write to order. Miller repeatedly argues that commercial artists earning great sums of money on commission receive praise and the trappings of material success, while the real artists such as Vincent Van Gogh, making no money yet producing works of art communicating their particular vision, receive during their lifetimes only condemnation (*Plexus* 61-2). The commercial artist (illustrator, graphic artist, copy writer, or someone who caters to the general public) is *working*, while the other is at best only dreaming, a judgement Miller explains by declaring that Americans are "*against* art--real art" (*Emil* 156), perhaps because it does not seem useful, possibly because art often makes its audience

¹⁵ Miller was employed at times, in Dijon as an English teacher, in Paris at the international office of the Chicago Tribune as a proof-reader, but neither job led to long term employment or seriously disrupted his writing.

uncomfortable, or maybe because it demonstrates that some people, at any rate, are doing what they want to do rather than "leading lives of quiet desperation" as Thoreau once described it (in which case the American attitude toward art would signify "bad conscience"). But, Miller asserts, "I will write what I want, how I want. Fuck them!" (156): it is this attitude that differentiates Miller from the commercial artist and the wage laborer.

Rimbaud dismisses the glorification of work:

La vie fleurit par travail, vieille vérité: Moi, ma vie n'est pas assez pesante, elle s'envole et flotte loin au-dessus de l'action, ce cher point du monde.

[Life flourishes in work, an old/passé truth: Me, my life is not heavy enough, it takes flight and soars far above all action, that cherished rationale of the world.] (202)

I am not serious enough to work, Rimbaud seems to say; I'm too loose, too flighty, too poetic. He feels himself free of societal expectations or requirements, unable and unwilling, at this point, to bend himself to the acquisition of a trade or the repetitive motor skills required in a factory, and the resulting limitation of possibilities.

Ross, who sees reflected in Rimbaud the ideas about work current during the brief lifespan of the Paris Commune, notes that Rimbaud's "*horreur de tous les métiers*" [horror of all trades] signifies a rejection of more than the notion of wage labor, "that the narrator refuses the very structure of work, the social division of labor itself that in the nineteenth century is beginning to be pushed to the limits of overspecialization" (50).¹⁶ Rimbaud, in his poem "Les Effarés," seems to present a

¹⁶ Marx describes the decline that follows intensive specialization: "The tailor, the locksmith, and the other artificers, being now exclusively occupied in carriage-making, each gradually loses, through want of practice, the ability to carry on, to its full extent, his old handicraft" (*Capital* 205).

less certain picture of work. In one version he depicts a bread-maker apparently enjoying his work, producing loaves whose smell ravishes the souls of hungry children looking in through a window from the cold outside. While he works, the baker "Chante un vieil air" [sings an old song] (Rimbaud 104). In an alternative version, however, the baker "grogne un vieil air" [groans/grunts an old song] (104n), signifying a less harmonious relation to his work: gone seems to be any pleasure or contentment, the singing merely a way of passing dreary hours. Perhaps where bread-making, and other crafts, had not yet been transformed into factory-type production, the baker still took some satisfaction in making--in creating--loaves of bread. With rising populations in cities and technological development, however, bread making would soon be one more form of drudgery involving little skill and more tending of machines that would mix the ingredients, knead the dough, and then divide it into loaves.

Just as in Miller's attempts to renounce money, his refusal of wage labor manifests itself, as well, as a rejection of outside authority over his existence, an authority that, whether economic, legal, or self-imposed (in the form of the Puritan ethic), attempts to constrain individuals. The ideology of the isolated, self-contained individual with freedom to choose, but who must still acknowledge economic necessity (Horkheimer, *Critical*, 76), is exposed as sham in the face of workers' true "powerlessness amid an anarchic inhuman reality which is rent by contradictions" (79). Rather than attempt to make sense of this world and find a way out of the impasse, the misery that is often the worker's lot, the good worker or citizen must without question accept the situation as he or she finds it. Whereas once circumstances could be attributed to "God's decree," now "all real situations are brute facts which do not embody any meaning but are simply to be accepted" (78): there is no narrative here

becomes the new law. But Horkheimer warns that rather than accepting or even adapting, as many workers might prefer to believe, "they *submit* to the authority relationship" (89, emphasis added).

To refuse wage labor, however, is not to embrace inaction. The *flâneur*, as we have seen, appears to be lazy but is in fact an observer, a sort of proto-detective. Henry Murger, in *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*, presents Bohemian artists of middle nineteenth-century Paris who reject the notion of life scheduled around wage labor, and who practice instead their various arts, finding in that lifestyle, despite frequent bouts with hunger and homelessness, the life more abundant; Greenwich Village Bohemians of the nineteen-twenties¹⁷ and the nineteen-fifties (the "Beats") will, similarly, try to exist outside the workaday world.

Both Miller and Baudelaire seek the means to devote themselves to the labor of art, often through payment for their artistic labor. Rimbaud, however, raises the stakes farther, rejecting even the need to constantly present evidence of artist production. Ross writes that for Rimbaud "[l]aziness . . . constitutes a kind of third term outside the programmed dyad of labor and leisure" (61). For the artist, dreaming, letting thoughts and ideas shoot in and out of consciousness, signifies a kind of replenishment of the sources of creation. The Surrealists, in the first manifesto, describe human beings as essentially dreamers (Breton 13), when they are given the chance to dream. The either-or logic that defines an employed person as a worker and the unemployed person as lazy constitutes nothing other than a false binary, revealing more about what

¹⁷ Miller expresses, in *The Rosy Crucifixion*, his contempt for these figures, though without clear explanation.

a particular society values than what a person or group of persons is actually accomplishing.

Rimbaud's assertion in *Un Saison en enfer*, "La main à plume vaut la main à charrue" [the pen-hand is as worthy as the plow-hand](196), aggressively proclaims the comparable value of artistic production with that more respected production within the market economy. "Laziness," concludes Ross, "hides an activity not subordinated to certain necessities, an activity that is not the everyday action of subsistence or industry" (54), which is not to say that such activity has no value, only that it is not *valued*--much as gold was of inestimable value to the Spaniards but only of ornamental value to the Aztecs.

Miller, reversing the work ethic, characterizes the typical submission to the necessity of wage labor as laziness, protesting against "people who make work a fetich because they have no other way to occupy their minds" (*Cosmological* 344). What Horkheimer designates *submission* to "economic necessity" Miller might describe as a refusal by most people to take part in defining the boundaries of their lives, a refusal to determine for themselves their particular work, even, finally, a fear of themselves--a fear of living *up* to their own hopes and expectations rather than *down* (to the work ethic). Miller criticizes, especially, the smallness of life Americans tolerate--and the work ethic symbolizes much that is small-minded in Americans. For those who find satisfaction in the parade of commodities, "who live vicariously through newspapers and the movies" (344), writes Miller, it does not really matter who they submit to as long as they submit.

Thompson, following Weber, perceives the church encouraging just such blind submission, arguing that injunctions arising from British Wesleyan conferences after

the French Revolution echoed earlier mandates from Martin Luther. He quotes several of these Lutheran injunctions, of which the following: "God would prefer to suffer the government to exist, no matter how evil, rather than allow the rabble to riot, no matter how justified they are in doing so" (Thompson 399). Unconditional submission, as advocated by many branches of the church, apparently offers people a sense that they are behaving properly, even virtuously, for otherwise they stand to gain little from a sorry state of affairs. Whether they surrender to the church or to Hollywood, they surrender. In Miller's view, however, such submission should be characterized as a defeatist rather than a realistic response or sign of strength. It may even be described as nihilistic since such submission involves the denial of any action that might improve the lives of the workers, unless (or, perhaps, *even if*) it is deemed useful within the capitalist economy.

In the following passage, Miller describes submission to "the company" as well as to the "anarchic inhuman reality" in consumer capitalism, as exemplified by business in New York City:

Your life is mapped out for you by the company, and it seems very regular, very well regulated. Actually you feel chaotic. You feel that you are running with the herd and the herd is on the stampede. Nobody knows where he is going, but he keeps close to his neighbor--he feels safer that way, more at ease. (*Aller Retour* 47)

This description corresponds to Miller's experience as hiring manager with Western Union, described in *Capricorn*, where tremendous job turnover kept the personnel office in a constant flurry of activity. The image of the alienated worker is more true, in large part, of the factory worker who receives less financially than white collar counterparts, but as the economy begins to produce more and more products as well as

profits, employees--blue collar or white collar--begin to feel helpless, disconnected, and alienated in the face of a system they cannot hope to understand, let alone master.

Many writers and philosophers criticized this new state of affairs, especially in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century. Marx, Engels, and Nietzsche, as we have seen, and others, Auguste Blanqui and many proponents of Socialism, critique industrial work and industrial life. In France, Zola and Émile Verhaeren, author of a book of poems entitled *Les Villes tentaculaires* [Tentacled Cities],¹⁸ both describe the life of the poor factory worker; in America, Henry Adams, alongside a generation of writers influenced by Zola, most especially Frank Norris (Bradbury 16), and to a lesser extent Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Upton Sinclair, and, much later, John Steinbeck, deplore industrialized society, perceiving the demoralizing effects of wage labor. Miller's contribution differs in that he breaks the bounds of the realistic novel in denouncing a system that is perhaps more *fantastic* than his prose.

Every day, at breakneck pace, Miller relates in *Capricorn*, he performs the same task, much like the worker on the assembly line, asking the same questions and receiving the same responses, hiring and firing messengers ad infinitum. "Why get up and repeat yesterday's song and dance?" he asks. "As fast as I hired them they dropped out" (*Capricorn* 70). What upsets Miller most "is that it's totally unnecessary I plug on, through one victim after another, the telephone ringing like mad [with requests for messengers from branch managers or orders from above]" (72). He characterizes the job as "[a] hideous farce against a backdrop of sweat and misery"

¹⁸ A difficult title to translate, but one that attempts to articulate a sense of the inter-connectedness and inter-dependence of cities.

(19), a pertinent description of factory work. "And that's how it went," he summarizes, "day after day, and there was no reason for it, except that the whole country was cockeyed and what I relate was going on everywhere, either on a smaller scale or a larger scale, but the same thing everywhere, because it was all chaos and meaningless" (75). The system, though it has spread throughout America and much of the West, certainly has not done so because it is, of its own accord, sensible, humane, and rational, but, rather, because it fetches profits, because it has managed to assert its control over large numbers of workers.

This system does offer rewards, however, among them the ability to afford the latest technological achievements--the automobile, for instance. Miller perceives the parking lots filled with automobiles--one of the fanciest of the new commodities on the market--not as a sign of success, though it is the recompense the advertisers would have workers accept; instead, these parcels of land filled with gleaming, colored steel signify submission and surrender:

The saddest sight of all is the automobiles parked outside the mills and factories. The automobile stands out in my mind as the very symbol of falsity and illusion. [...] [Those who think the American worker lucky] never ask what one must do to have this great boon. They have no idea that when the American worker steps out of his shiny tin chariot he delivers himself over body and soul to the most stultifying labor a man can perform" (*Nightmare* 33).

For a writer who encourages his readers to seek out "the life more abundant," meaningless labor takes a seat next to the commodity spectacle as yet another site of ambiguity, one unperceived by most workers. "Earning a living," Miller asserts, "has nothing to do with living" (*Remember* 40), though Americans and those in the West in general are raised believing that through work comes advantage, comes satisfaction, comes *life*, as Rimbaud also noted and rejected.

Miller does not merely criticize the system. He offers solutions, suggesting a move away from dependence on machines as one of the first steps to making of work something that people can be proud to perform: "There has to be reborn a desire to do things with the hands, to work from within out, to make the home itself a work of art, from the building which encloses it to the items which constitute it" (*Remember* 412). Assembly line work as well as assembly line products demean, for Miller. Both submerge people in an undifferentiated mass culture. He writes, "whatever they do themselves with their own hands is infinitely better than what is made for them by factory hands" (412), for factory hands are either unskilled hands or hands with one specific skill. But making something themselves will also provide people a sense of accomplishment, something they rarely receive from wage labor.

Miller acknowledges that people will likely think his ideas utopian, a charge levelled at many who hope to improve the condition of the world, and does not dodge the implication of failure often associated with the term utopian: "Every Utopian community has proved to be a failure. What of it? Does that mean that the idea of self-government, of creative government, is false? It may require thousands of experiments before the light dawns" (*Remember* 414). Failure to launch a viable alternative offers no recommendation for the status quo, he implies.

In one of the more famous passages in *Un Saisin en Enfer*, Rimbaud, similarly, envisions a new world with work that will be meaningful to people:

Quand irons-nous, par-delà les grèves et les monts, saluer la naissance
du travail nouveau, la sagesse nouvelle, la fuite des tyrans et des
démons, la fin de la superstition, adorer--les premiers!--Noël sur la terre!

[When will we, on the other side of the shores¹⁹ and mountains, salute the birth of new work and new wisdom, the flight of tyrants and demons, the end of superstition, to adore--the first ones!--Christmas on earth!] (222).

Though one can read here a sort of Edenic yearning, Ross notes that this vision of "Christmas on earth" is "nonnostalgic," hence forward-looking, and understands Rimbaud's assertion "I *will* be a worker" to mean that he will work "only at the moment when work, as we know it, has come to an end" (71).²⁰ In that moment, literary production will have value equal to that of other forms of labor. While such a position might appear self-serving for both writers, literary production can be understood to represent non-alienated labor where the worker gains some sense of achievement.

Whether either Rimbaud or Miller looks forward to a new type of work, or backward to work when it was more or less skilled labor, both reject work as currently conceived. Miller, especially, views the worker as poorly rewarded. Neither the automobile nor the myriad of other commodities available can compensate the worker for the submission and self-negation that work requires. Similar to the world intimated by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, Miller believes that people must find their own work and give themselves over to it heart and soul. Work then would become its own end, its own satisfaction, and there would be no need for

¹⁹ "Grève" can also mean to strike, as in "to go on strike." In this context it seems an unlikely translation, though Rimbaud might certainly have appreciated the double-meaning.

²⁰ Eden as forward-looking makes sense within Rimbaud's sense of time as circular.

the bribery constituted by the glut of commodities on the market. Such a society would constitute a definite progression beyond the current one.

Miller, therefore, rejects commodities, money, and wage labor as presently conceived within the currently available forms of existence. He suggests that people, rather than allowing themselves to be served (with machine products), must re-develop skills they have surrendered to a factory-machine system that degrades skills; they must re-learn the satisfaction of making something themselves. That such a change, among others, seems unlikely induces Miller to reject civilization as it is, to perceive the decline of civilization a good sign.

Consequently, as war in Europe, and then American involvement in the European war, begins to look inevitable, Miller's examination of civilization produces fewer and fewer reasons to fight. People have come to focus on the wrong things and fear the future for the wrong reasons. "Our world is a world of *things*," writes Miller, in 1940 or 1941.

It is made up of comforts and luxuries, or else the desire for them. What we dread most in facing the impending débâcle, is that we shall be obliged to give up our gew-gaws, our gadgets, all the little comforts which have made us so uncomfortable. (*Nightmare* 17)

Miller, as we have seen, rejects commodities in general and as compensation for work. He perceives the worry most Americans exhibit over the impending expansion of the European war, into what we now know as the Second World War, as an expression of a most small-minded apprehension: the fear that all the useless objects they have thus far been taught to desire and require, and which they have dutifully struggled to accumulate, will be taken from them. The American way of life has, thus, become

reduced to laboring in order to accumulate a variety of commodities; as such, it is certainly nothing worth sacrificing human lives for. It is, just maybe, better wiped-out.

Damning Praise: George Orwell's Conception of Passive Acceptance in the works of Henry Miller

At this perhaps unlikely point I wish to challenge what has become an accepted truism in Miller criticism. In his 1940 essay, "Inside the Whale," George Orwell identifies Henry Miller's works as advocating the position of passive acceptance. Though the essay is nearly sixty years old, its stature appears undiminished.²¹ Orwell's thesis, however, is founded upon a narrow and prejudicial reading of Miller's earliest published works. At the risk of playing Ahab chasing after the White Whale, I believe this pernicious notion of passive acceptance in Miller must be firmly repudiated. Orwell's target, moreover, should be recognized to have been, rather than Miller, who serves mainly as Orwell's punching bag, the political writers of the nineteen-thirties--who are critiqued in the second part of the three-part essay.²² Even so, Orwell's critique of Miller must be explored and refuted.

Thus far into this study of Miller, we have explored among other subjects Miller's arguments against the modern city, as epitomized by New York City and to a

²¹ A newly-translated and abridged version of Orwell's essay was published in the October 1991 special edition of *Europe: Revue Littéraire Mensuelle*, dedicated in part to Miller's 100th birthday. Charles Holdefer's 1993 essay, "The 'Other' Whale: The Ideology of Passive Acceptance in the Work of Henry Miller," offers an explication and update of Orwell's essay, supporting Orwell's contention, while remarking the risks of a politically-engaged text as evidenced in the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie.

²² Edward Mitchell's 1971 collection of essays on Miller contains an abridged (more accurately, *gutted*) version of Orwell's essay, which excises part 2 along with the first three paragraphs of the essay.

lesser degree Paris, his criticisms of consumer capitalism and work, as well as his rejection of writer James Joyce for being too focussed on the past and not effectively in the present. Orwell's charge of passive acceptance should seem at odds with the critique Miller levels at the modern world, for *critique* would appear to contradict any simple notion of "acceptance." In *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Gilles Deleuze asserts that critique is "the active expression of an active mode of existence" (3). Hence even on the surface, Miller's position would appear to be anything but passive or accepting.

But Orwell, without in the least probing Miller's critiques of America, France and the West, dismisses them derisively as "the usual angle of the literary man who hates industrialism" (17) and, therefore, simply ignores what might otherwise discredit his thesis. Raymond Williams, however, argues that even if writers reiterate "a known judgement" of the evils of industrialization--and Miller here joins company with Zola, D.H. Lawrence, Upton Sinclair, and many others--such repetition is necessary. "This kind of observation," Williams contends, "has to be made again and again, in every generation The reminder that the thing is still here has repeatedly to be issued" (*Culture* 202). Williams even defends so-called "professional protest," Orwell's implicit characterization of Miller's rebellion. Whatever the source of the protest, Williams declares, "the larger issue is the opposition on general human grounds to the kind of civilization that [is] being inaugurated" (36). Orwell's task, at the very least, should have been to demonstrate that Miller's alleged passive acceptance hinders or even defuses his protest, that it is a suicidal dialectic he puts forth. But Orwell chooses a different tack: he simply rejects Miller's criticism as "the usual angle" and, hence, inauthentic.

The most insidious facet of Orwell's humorless criticism, however, is that it is couched in praise, a harsh and thoroughly damning praise, to be sure, that has yet to be truly recognized as such. Orwell opens his essay praising Miller as a writer using English "as a spoken language, but spoken *without fear*, i.e. without fear of rhetoric or of the unusual or poetical word" (14). Declaring Miller's affinity with Walt Whitman, a figure Orwell's praises, Orwell then wonders "if Whitman himself were alive at the moment he would write anything in the least degree resembling *Leaves of Grass*" (16). Both Miller and Whitman, according to Orwell, are saying "I accept," but, he notes, "there is a radical difference between acceptance now and acceptance then" (16).²³ As we will see in a moment, Orwell defines unequivocally what it means "to accept" in the late nineteen-thirties, deducing from there that Miller as a modern-day Whitman is "a sort of Whitman among the corpses" (50), a vivid if macabre vision of Miller as a careless man unmoved by the suffering and devastation all around him. Though Miller can be faulted, regarding his often thoughtless treatment of women, for instance, he frequently displays empathy with people, in his works--in relation to "money" and "work," as we saw earlier in this chapter, and in his critique of modern civilization in general which he believes provides only illusory joy.

Orwell concludes that the success of Miller's works is symptomatic--"a demonstration of the *impossibility* of any major literature until the world has shaken itself into its new shape" (50). Clearly Orwell does not view Miller's work as "major

²³ Orwell's reading of American history is remarkably naive. He writes, for instance, "The democracy, equality, and comradeship that [Whitman] is always talking about are not remote ideals but something that existed in front of his eyes. [...] Everyone had inside him, like a kind of core, the knowledge that he could earn a decent living, and earn it without bootlicking" (16).

literature"²⁴ but only the best that we can expect in a time of declining standards. Orwell writes: "One has only to think of *Ulysses*, *Of Human Bondage*, most of Lawrence's early work . . . and virtually the whole of Eliot's poems up to about 1930, to wonder what is now being written that will wear so well" (29). Orwell has, in turn, rejected the work of committed writers of the nineteen-thirties, members of the "Auden-Spender group" among others, and he has done so without directly addressing them, except in the second part, the implication being they do not merit his full attention. Their literature, for Orwell, is compromised by party politics. He writes: they must "toe the line, or shut up" (39), from which follows his approval of Miller's fearlessness.

Writers, in Orwell's view, either abandon their particular world view completely, surrendering to the party or to some religious affiliation; or, they abandon the world, except as it forces itself upon them, and surrender to their own egos. Miller, consequently, escapes party politics, in his refusal to align himself with one side or the other, but at the price of making himself historically irrelevant. In his works, Orwell claims, "one gets . . . back to a viewpoint not only individualistic but completely passive" (40). Miller's fearless yet egocentric contribution, weighed against those who devoted their time to "propaganda campaigns and squalid controversies" (40), is merely the best of a bad lot: though a "footler" or an "idiot" (10), he is better than they are.

²⁴ In the opening pages of *Cancer* Miller rejects capital-L Literature rather than literature in general, literature as an art form. He rejects, as we have seen, what he views as lifeless craftsmanship (which he believes characterizes most literary production) in favor of passion and a realism that goes beyond Realism in describing lives as they are lived. Orwell's assertion should not be understood as *reflecting* Miller's critique but instead as a critique *of* Miller.

After the initial "appreciation," Orwell almost immediately launches his offensive, condemning Miller in rather simplistic terms:

To say "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, slogans, Bedaux belts, gas masks, submarines, spies, provocateurs, press censorship, secret prisons, aspirins, Hollywood films, and political murders. Not *only* those things, of course, but those things among others. And on the whole this is Henry Miller's attitude. (13)

Orwell reads the provocative prose we expect of Miller and takes him at his word; but Miller is caught in Orwell's double bind: if Miller criticizes the world, he merely plays the role of the derisive Ivory-tower-ensconced literary man; if he accepts the world, he accepts, above all, everything wrong with it.

Yet what is truly dismaying about Orwell's list--and we have already seen that some of the items on this list ("tinned food," "slogans," "press censorship," "aspirins," "Hollywood films") are subjected to Miller's critique, either directly or incidentally--is not simply that it is horrific as well as, with reference to Miller, demonstrably wrong (and Orwell tries to wriggle out of his accusation by adding "on the whole"). What is more dismaying is that several generations of critics, with access to works not available to Orwell,²⁵ have made no attempt to clarify Miller's perspective(s) or to challenge Orwell's argument in any way. Though Mitchell, in an introduction to his 1971 collection of critical essays, asserts (without citing any examples) that the immediate reaction to Orwell's essay was not entirely favorable (2), he does not indicate which aspect or aspects of Orwell's essay raised a protest (that word is

²⁵ In 1939, Orwell had access to only a fraction of the material used in my study. For instance, Orwell admittedly had not read *Tropic of Capricorn*, Miller's fourth, and for many, best work. Miller's anti-war tract "Murder the Murderer," which will be examined later in this chapter, was not written until 1941.

probably too strong), and not one of the essays in his collection defends Miller against Orwell's attack. Lawrence Durrell and William Gordon have taken issue with Orwell, defending Miller, but only in the equivalent of side-long glances. Durrell does not dispute Orwell's criticism, but insists it should be "more balanced," adding that perhaps Miller's beliefs about "the betterment of the world" differ from Orwell's (97).

Gordon's fleeting bout with Orwell's essay is even more inadequate. In the two sentences he devotes to the issue, Gordon writes that "while [Orwell] extolled Miller's revolutionary fervor, [he] could not understand Miller and ultimately condemned him for his lack of social conscience" (39); in a footnote, Gordon adds, "If Orwell had understood Miller he probably wouldn't have approved him" (39n). What Gordon means by "Miller's revolutionary fervor" is at best vague, though it might refer to Miller's prose; what he believes Orwell failed to understand is not identified; and he does not even debate whether or not Miller can be said to lack a "social conscience." Few critics, in brief, have found much in Orwell's damning praise to take issue with, in writing, except for writers like Salman Rushdie who take issue with the "praise" rather than the "damning."

Orwell's commentary, however, demonstrates--as I hope to show--that his reading of the Miller works available to him was far from thorough. Moreover, he did not know these works in a way available to interested modern critics--who have access to scores of books and other publications by Miller, a number of biographies and

critical studies of Miller and the nineteen-thirties²⁶--nor did he have a distanced view of his historical period, which might more effectively contextualize Miller.

Orwell dismisses Miller's criticisms as insincere, but without explanation regards the alleged acceptance, of everything and anything, as genuine. Orwell chooses not to quote any passages from Miller's works to support his argument, claiming exaggeratedly that he cannot do so because "unprintable words occur almost everywhere" (14), so I have selected a passage at random. Miller's description in *Tropic of Cancer* of a walk home after work with two fellow exiles seems on first glance a perfect example to support Orwell's theory:

we get to talking about the conditions of things with that enthusiasm which only those who bear no active part in life can muster. What seems strange to me sometimes . . . is that all this enthusiasm is engendered just to kill time, just to annihilate the three-quarters of an hour which it requires to walk from the office to Montparnasse. We might have the most brilliant, the most feasible ideas for the amelioration of this or that, but there is no vehicle to hitch them to. And what is more 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. Otherwise nothing matters. [...] We have become coolies, white-collar coolies, silenced by a handful of rice each day. (153)

Orwell may well have read the above passage as "passive acceptance," but such a reading could hardly be called compelling or exhaustive. Miller and his friends discuss "current affairs," but Miller attributes their interest, in seeming contradiction, to a *lack* of involvement. Farther down, he asserts that their ideas for improving

²⁶ One could point out, for instance, that Miller wrote the greater part of *Cancer* in 1931-32, *before* Hitler's rise. The novel waited over a year for publication, in 1934, by which time, as Orwell notes, "Hitler's concentration camps were already bulging." Had Miller somehow included the concentration camps, then, it would have been an act of prophecy.

conditions may be "feasible," but they have no way to make their voices heard, "no vehicle to hitch" their ideas to. Their "lack" of involvement results from their status as exiles who cannot vote or participate in the political system, but it may at the same time signify greater freedom: a larger, more encompassing perspective than those whose interests are vitally connected with one side or another and whose room for maneuvering, consequently, is much more limited. The "enthusiasm," then, of these three men might indicate a certain fearlessness: they will tread on nobody's toes, or everybody's toes, as they impartially solve the problems of the world. In the ensuing sentences, Miller's scorn for people who accept "the absence of any relationship between ideas and living" becomes clear. Rather than supporting such a division and the resulting passivity, Miller suggests that such people are little better than well-trained dogs who obey their master's orders, no matter how humiliating the task. He insinuates, further, that such passivity, where it exists, is *bought*, a form of bribery, just like the factory worker's acquiescence is purchased with access to an automobile. It is just this "bribery" that Miller, as we have seen, has struggled against. Perhaps he has succumbed to temptation, occasionally, but he has not submitted. Hardly a ringing endorsement of passivity.

Orwell writes, "Exactly the aspects of life that fill Céline [in *Voyage au bout de la nuit* / *Journey to the End of the Night*] with horror²⁷ are the ones that appeal to [Miller]. So far from protesting, he is *accepting*" (15-16). This happy acceptance that Orwell perceives in Miller--and Orwell, perhaps cynically, applauds Miller "as a man

²⁷ Orwell contends Céline "protests against the horror and meaninglessness of modern life--actually, indeed, of life" (15).

who is happy" (15)²⁸--may not be the unsophisticated spirit of that mood Orwell seems to assume. It may not even, as we saw above, be "acceptance" at all. As I read it, Miller's apparent "acceptance" and, indeed, embracing of all the ugliness of his life and life in general runs along the same lines as Nietzschean *affirmation*. Both Nietzsche and Miller "choose life," to employ a phrase that has become a cliché today in America. Instead of bewailing and bemoaning his existence, like Job after God's betrayal, Miller chooses to make a strength of what others would suffer as a weakness: This is what we have, this is what we like (a Hungarian proverb).

Perhaps, too, Miller's optimism is mistaken for "acceptance." Though no one besides Michael Fraenkel²⁹ has seriously considered it, and Fraenkel does so without naming him, Spengler's vision of a world in decline, in the death-throes, as I discussed in the introduction to this study, significantly informs Miller's thought. Spengler, recall, characterizes human civilization as a biological entity that endures all the phases experienced by a living being, from birth to death. Out of many possible examples, I present here two excerpts from *Tropic of Cancer* that spotlight Spengler's influence:

The atmosphere is saturated with disaster, frustration, futility. Scratch and scratch--until there's no skin left. However, the effect upon me is exhilarating. Instead of being discouraged, or depressed, I enjoy it. I am crying for more and more disasters, for bigger and bigger calamities, for grander failures. I want the whole world to be out of whack. I want everyone to scratch himself to death. (12)

The world is rotting away piecemeal. But it needs the *coup de grâce*, it needs to be blown to smithereens. (26)

²⁸ Miller's "happiness" contrasts with that of the more dour committed writers.

²⁹ Miller's friend and collaborator (on *The Hamlet Letters*) from the Paris days--and the "Boris" of *Cancer*.

Doubtless, these statements are provoking. Both seem to support Orwell's accusation of passive acceptance in Miller. Certainly Miller depicts the undoing of the world, the diseased scratching and "rotting away" of Western Culture, without advocating any action to stop or slow it. In fact, he encourages the downward slide. These passages need not be read solely on a literal level, as Orwell apparently reads them. They can be read figuratively, as voicing a sensibility, evoking the disintegration surrounding him--the depression years of the early nineteen-thirties, a time when the world economy was in tatters--in which to situate and temper the action of the story.

However, if we are to read the above passages more literally, we must recognize Spengler's influence. Inspired by Spengler, Miller believes that once the current cycle of progress-and-decline has ground to a halt, a new life, a new civilization, will commence. Miller, therefore, views decline optimistically. Rather than "taking pleasure at the spectacle of [people] scratching themselves to death" (66), as Holdefer supposes in his essay supporting and extending Orwell's position, Miller perceives decline everywhere but look toward the future hopefully, without, however, discounting the here and now. Embrace what can and need be saved, Miller says in effect, but let the rest go. Spengler argues that Western Culture is experiencing an inevitable and inescapable decline. While acknowledging that the hopes of some will be dashed, because they are born into an exhausted Culture, Spengler counsels acceptance, but acceptance in a Nietzschean sense as opposed to that critiqued by Orwell: "And if the hopes thus doomed should be those most dear, well, a man who is worth anything will not be dismayed" (31). For Spengler, inevitability vitiates the disappointment, so we had better face up to this world and take on all its limited possibilities.

Accordingly, when Orwell notes that Miller's vision of the world is that of a "world-process outside his control," but that he "in any case hardly wishes to control it" (40), Orwell has either not recognized or has underestimated Spengler's influence. If the decline is biological, that is to say *natural* as opposed to social, what will *wishing* do? Moreover, how would Miller, as a writer, attempt to stop the "world-process," without invoking the typical concerns "of the literary man who hates industrialism" that Orwell has already dismissed? Likely, once again, Orwell's objection revolves exclusively around the rise of Hitler and the evident necessity of combatting him; for Miller, however, Hitler represents a symptom of the world malaise rather than the disease itself.³⁰

Orwell writes, further, that Miller "believes in the impending ruin of Western Civilization much more firmly than the majority of 'revolutionary' [read: Communist] writers; only he does not feel called upon to do anything about it" (42)--an assertion valid only within Orwell's terms. Orwell imposes on Miller his (Orwell's) particular variety of activist ideology, to which Miller does not adhere. Miller takes action in the only way open to him, action which Orwell describes as "fiddling with his face toward the flames" (42), but which can be more properly and concretely described as *critique*. Though Orwell has already belittled Miller's criticisms of Western culture, Miller's prose shows him to be a descendant of the muckrakers of the latter half of the nineteenth century, committed just as they were to exposing injustice and to changing society.

³⁰ Miller's appraisal of Hitler and the Second World War will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Beyond acknowledging the decline, however, in his work Miller asserts his optimism, "crying for more and more disasters, for bigger and bigger calamities, for grander failures," the way a drag queen flaunts his femininity--joyously and aggressively. Miller believes, as does Spengler, that an end is coming, and he urges it along, certain that a better world will rise from the smoky ruins of this one. Miller, remember, conceives of destruction as vital and productive. Far from being a nihilist, then, Miller should be regarded as an optimist, though in no silly or superficial sense. Instead, his optimism persists as willfulness, as a profound faith that the future can be marvelous--Christmas on Earth!--if only people resolve that it be so and shed those aspects of modern culture (alienated wage labor, consumer capitalism, and more) that demean them, and resolve to improve their environments, whether they be cities or villages, factories or offices.

Orwell indulges in personal attacks on Miller twice. Near the beginning of the essay he claims, "It is perhaps significant that [Miller] *looks* exactly like everyone's idea of an American businessman" (15, Orwell's italics), though what significance that has for Orwell, what bearing Miller's appearance has on his writing, is nowhere described. At the close of his essay, Orwell predicts that Miller is the equivalent of a one-hit wonder (49). His essay, then, bears some of the hallmarks of a grudge match.

But Orwell's critique of Miller the man and the writer is evident throughout. He commences his essay declaring, "Of course a novelist is not obliged to write directly about contemporary history, but a novelist who simply disregards the major public events of the moment is generally either a footler or a plain idiot" (10). Approaching his conclusion, Orwell returns to Miller's alleged indifference, asking if Miller's is "a defensible attitude?" (43). Orwell responds that it is because "the

disintegration of our society and the increasing helplessness of all decent people" is so rife (47). Still, he has already asserted, "To accept civilization *as it is* practically means accepting decay. It has ceased to be a strenuous attitude and become a passive attitude--even 'decadent' if that word means anything" (18). At best, then, Orwell views Miller's "acceptance" as justified if irresponsible, artistic if unfortunate--in short, "decadent," a sign of widespread moral decay in Western society.

At the beginning of the third section of the essay, Orwell presents his most damning piece of evidence against Miller. Here Orwell narrates his 1936 meeting with Miller wherein Miller attempts to dissuade Orwell from going to Spain to fight in the civil war. Orwell's account of the meeting coincides nicely with his reading of Miller's works. Miller, expressing "no interest in the Spanish war whatever" told Orwell

that to go to Spain at that moment was the act of an idiot. He could understand anyone going there from purely selfish motives, out of curiosity for instance, but to mix oneself up in such things *from a sense of obligation* was sheer stupidity. In any case my ideas about combating Fascism, defending democracy, etc., etc., were all baloney. Our civilization was destined to be swept away (40-41)

Miller rejects Fascism but, even more, he is against civilization, a position he will make clear in his 1941 argument against fighting. Miller's protest, against civilization as it is, does not translate into an action-oriented philosophy along the same lines as Orwell prescribes: going to war in a soldier's uniform. Miller explains that he can understand base motives, because at least they are practical--their goals attainable--but he rejects Orwell's idealism, which is shiny and new yet hollowed-out like any other commodity. Miller does not believe the Spanish civil war, even if the "correct" or "good" side wins, will make society better for the Spanish, or improve the situation for

the rest of the world. Destroying Fascism, which for Miller represents only a symptom of a larger issue, will provide no solution to the crisis. Miller's position may in this instance be faulted as over-intellectualized, along the same lines as Horkheimer and Adorno's argument that "it is better not to be too clever" (209), suggesting that intellectuals overlook (or discount) important and obvious matters in searching for complexity. Still, Miller's position cannot be reduced to passivity or acceptance.

Orwell's either/or proposition is finally untenable, because it commits the individual to one side or the other without allowing for other options--*If you're not for me you're agin' me*, as John Foster Dulles once declared, allowing for no middle or middling position. Orwell even rejects religious- or mystical-based pacificism, reductively to be sure, arguing "whichever way you like to look at it . . . the moral . . . being 'Sit on your bum'" (43). Rather than sitting on his "bum", Miller is "facing the flames" of Rome while it burns. Witnessing and describing what is happening signifies more than "Sitting on your bum." Sometimes, to be a witness may be the only available option; a useless sacrifice may simply serve to bury the record. Orwell's position, focussed on fighting, is understandable, perhaps, given the immediate danger of Hitler, the proximity of Spain, and the unmistakable anguish of the Spanish civil war, as well as the frustration inspired by one who appears to understand the world predicament, but denies the "obvious" conclusion, that of risking life and limb in battle. Still, Orwell has clearly loaded the dice against Miller--rejecting Miller's criticisms of the modern world and defining, within very limited parameters, what "commitment" requires of a person.

Toward the end of his essay, Orwell admits he has not read *Tropic of Capricorn*, "because the police and Customs authorities have thus far managed to

prevent me from getting hold of it" (49). He then unwisely engages in prophetic criticism, asserting, "it would surprise me if [*Capricorn*] came anywhere near *Tropic of Cancer* or the opening chapters of *Black Spring*" (49). For some, *Capricorn* has become Miller's best work, while many others would at least place it among the best of his works. What is disappointing about Orwell's inability to lay his hands on a copy of *Capricorn*, however, is that in it Miller exposes the dehumanizing side of labor, and not just that of factory workers but also of their bosses. Had Orwell read *Capricorn*, he might have chosen to revise his understanding of Miller, might have accepted Miller's anti-modern stance as authentic, though Miller makes statements in *Capricorn* that still seem to support Orwell's contention that Miller is a passive acceptor. Miller declares, for instance, "fundamentally I have no desire to work and no desire to become a useful member of society" (*Capricorn* 102). Such statements, however, clearly retain their rebellious content in this later work, just as Rimbaud's assertion of laziness, "the antibourgeois value par excellence" (Ross 53), demonstrates sheer rebellion. As we saw in the conclusion to Chapter Two, Miller already grasps that he is just a pawn, that he is being exploited by the Cosmodemonic Telegraph Company, and that if to be "exploited" is what it means to be "useful" in this society, then he wants no part of it. This refusal to participate must be differentiated from passivity and from acceptance.

Orwell's reductive understanding of Miller as "a completely negative, unconstructive, amoral writer, . . . a passive acceptor of evil" (50) is simply untenable, and it is disappointing that for close to sixty years the notion of passive acceptance that Orwell linked with Miller has gone unchallenged. Ultimately, Orwell perceives rightly that Miller is "non-cooperative" (47), though unfortunately linking even that

with simple passivity. Civil disobedience, employed by Martin Luther King and his followers, exemplifies non-cooperation, and while such acts at times involve quite literally "sitting on your bum," to understand them only in those terms would be short-sighted indeed. Perhaps now that we know so much more about Hitler and the Holocaust Miller's position, non-cooperation, seems impossible, civil disobedience ineffective. While I would not wish to put Miller on an equal footing with Dr. King and his followers, Miller's unwillingness to do anything to stop the decay of the Western world, to join in the fight to save civilization as it is, signifies a step in the direction of civil disobedience.

To reject the mass in favor of the individual, as Miller does, however problematically, is to be a traitor to the state and to be uncooperative with the larger society. Miller rejects and opposes much in bourgeois culture, and he rejects in favor of the individual and *for* the future. His opposition stands in direct counterpoint to the passive acceptance wrongly imputed to him. He rejects "the world *as it is*" and refuses, as we will see, to support the battle to save it.

"Td Prefer Not To"

Miller's rejection of the modern world, his disgust with cities and the commodity spectacle, his refusal to acknowledge the sanctity of money or work, converge at last in his unwillingness to support the Allies in the Second World War, an act of defiance rather than of passivity. He believes the war will only be fought to maintain the status quo. Alternatively, Arthur Rimbaud, with whom Miller felt himself spiritually aligned, because of his rejection of modernity, and his rejection of

the bourgeoisie, expresses a keen desire to involve himself in fighting--for the Paris Commune.

Miller's most explicit anti-war statement, and the basis for much that will be discussed in this section and the next, *Murder the Murderer*, was first published as a chapbook in 1944 (Shifreen and Jackson 154). An expanded version was later included in *Remember to Remember*. Begun in early 1941, well before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, it takes the form of a letter to his "boon companion" Alfred Perlés, who has enlisted in the British Army, though he is Viennese by birth and under no obligation to fight. Perlés has taken issue with Miller's anti-war position, articulated in a previous letter, and accuses him of "detachment" (*Remember* 128)--an accusation that echoes Orwell's attack--inspiring an explanatory response from Miller. Miller's rejection of modernity reaches perhaps its highest pitch in this refusal to support the war on any front. While it might seem reasonable to expect him to wish to defend at least the France that had provided him the freedom to write and grow, not even this portion of Europe, ultimately, appears worth saving. Miller's broad denunciation of modernity leads him to take a position that cannot, as he believes, be classified as "pacifist" but is resolutely anti-war.

As an expatriate, Miller has already, in 1932, proclaimed his freedom and renounced all responsibilities: "I have no country, no frontiers, no taxes to pay, no army to fight for" (*Emil* 94). Eight years later, in 1940, he declares, "Europe is my homeland--not America" (*Sunday* 196), a statement I understand not as an affirmation

of "Europeanness"³¹ but, instead, as a renunciation of America; for while Miller only inconsistently champions Europe he unfailingly condemns America. More to the point, Miller considers himself to be "living ahead of the European and the American. What they are fighting for I relinquished a long time ago" he asserts ("Farewell" n.p.), indicating above all nationalism and all that he rejects in declaring himself an expatriate (ties to land, custom, history, people, along with his own past in America, and more), but particularly the strain of acquisitiveness, so characteristic of the West.

He reiterates his status as an expatriate in an April 30, 1939 letter, written in France when war seemed only weeks away: "I have no interest in politics or culture. [...] I swear allegiance to no government" ("Farewell" n.p.). For Miller, the artist rises above the squabbles of governments which only use or squash the individual. "The artist does not dedicate himself to the preservation of his country," Miller will argue later, "but to the preservation of what is human" (*Remember* 335). He rejects the synchronic in favor of the diachronic, refusing to protect what is characteristic of the life people experience in the here-and-now in favor of that which is truly human and has always been part of the human makeup—for Miller that means only the creative side of humans and does not include the destructive side, more specifically the uncreative destructive side.

Miller's position may seem pacifistic, but given his intuitive (or perhaps idiosyncratic) approach to life rather than a consistently rational or logical approach, he is far from constant in his refusal to kill—though pacifism requires, above all,

³¹ Miller writes near the end of his stay in France, "I could have starved to death here, for all the French care. No Frenchman ever offered me help when I needed it" ("Farewell" n.p.). While he may feel more at home in Europe, he is never accepted there as a Frenchman or a European.

inflexibility on just this issue. In 1938, shortly after the Munich Crisis, Miller claims, "I am not ashamed to murder a man, if it is necessary. But I am ashamed to go to war, to murder in cold blood and for a cause which is not mine"--the preservation of this consumer capitalist society (*Hamlet* 164). Such a statement surely differentiates Miller from the run-of-the-mill Quaker who regards the Biblical injunction "Thou shalt not kill" literally (at least with regard to humans). In April 1939, however, Miller writes "I don't believe that peace is achieved by fighting for it" ("Farewell" n.p.)--just as slapping a child will not teach it to renounce violence, quite the opposite--a statement that sounds pacifistic, for it appears, though not categorically, to perceive no value in fighting. Then, in 1941, Miller states: "To me [the French] attitude [toward the war] always seemed to reveal the highest form of courage: it was eminently pacifistic. They would fight out of a sense of duty and without hatred" (*Nightmare* 71). In this last statement, Miller is certainly wrong, for pacifism by definition rejects military and other similar life-threatening means of solving problems: There is nothing "pacifistic" about fighting or about championing those who fight. Miller's point seems to be that they fight because they are forced to, not from any desire to fight, not from any bloodlust. To fight without hatred,³² which further underscores the French reticence to go to war, may be a virtue, but it no longer indicates pacifism.

While asserting his general opposition to war, Miller takes another step away from pacifism by challenging those who so willingly line up to fight and who so earnestly proclaim the need to go to war. If a war is necessary, then he calls for absolute war:

³² Miller's claim is a dubious one at best, given the history of French-German rivalry.

No prisoners, no Red Cross nurses, no Salvation Army, no Y.M.C.A. Complete devotion, sacrifice and consecration to the task--nothing more, nothing less. No retreating, no surrender. [...] Don't bury the dead, let them rot and sow pestilence. Risk everything, because there is only one goal; if that goal is not reached then nothing is worth saving.
(*Remember* 157-58)

Likely, Miller remembers the First World War (he was twenty-three when it broke out in Europe), a war unlike all others--the first war, writes Eric Hobsbawm, that "involved *all* major powers" (23). It was a war which, despite the barbarity, still asserted gentlemanly overtones, thus explaining the fact that many young upperclass Englishmen, "destined as gentlemen to be officers, who set an example, marched into battle at the head of their men and were consequently mown down first" (26). Miller wishes to scrape away the gentlemanly veneer, to douse the patriotic glow, and expose the grisly reality of war, as if to say, if we are going to fight then let's do it out in the open, without shame and without remorse, with no holds barred, but above all without self-deception.³³

During his decade in France, Miller certainly had occasion to witness the human dimension of the French experience of the First World War--from the signs on the Paris Metro reserving seats for the war-wounded, to the "*'gueules cassés'* ('smashed faces') which became so vivid a part of the after-image of the war" (Hobsbawm 26)--and detected no romance in war. "War now means just as it did in the past, 'blood, sweat and tears'--oodles of it" (*Remember* 198), Miller declares. It is perhaps more

³³ And that, in general, is what happened. The war was "fought to a finish, without serious thought of compromise on either side"; the "losses are literally incalculable" not only because of the particularly brutal nature of the war, but because noncombatants (especially city dwellers) finally became targets for both sides (Hobsbawm 43). The war, however, as Miller predicted, did not bring peace; it merely shifted the fronts--Berlin, Korea, Vietnam--and gathered new combatants.

correct to label Miller, if we must, an opponent of war rather than a pacifist, finally, because he also expresses amazement that men willingly "sacrifice their lives, their homes, their families by going to war," but not one man would "sacrifice his life by *not* going to war!" (*Hamlet* 159). He seems to suggest, here, violent revolt-- assassinating the leaders (Hitler as well as Neville Chamberlain and Léon Blum, among others) who have thus far navigated a path toward provocation, or to taking vocal public stands against the preparations for war which might be seen as treason-- but he does so only obliquely.

What Miller is trying to determine, it seems to me, is *when* one fights, *when* lives can be legitimately sacrificed. In the years leading up to the Second World War, when it became more and more apparent that war was imminent, especially during the Munich Crisis of 1938, Miller begins to make statements about war, working his way toward a clear, oppositional stance to the events unfolding before him with seeming inevitability.

In defending the willingness of the French to fight, it may be that he expresses the belief that when one country is physically threatened by another then fighting becomes a reluctant duty, at any rate *acceptable*, which may help to explain why Miller tried to convince Orwell not to fight in Spain. Orwell, rather than defending himself or his country, was mixing himself in another country's affairs. A defensive war, *selfish* as it might be, can at least attain its limited goals in a way that fighting for ideals, in an age of *spectacles* and of decline, cannot.

Miller's position on war, then, seems to balance between, on the one hand, a belief that fighting will not bring about the desired end (peace, ostensibly); and, on the other hand, the sense that fighting becomes appropriate only when one is defending

oneself (as in the case of the French invaded by Hitler's armies). Defending a principle, or in Orwell's case fighting for a principle, demonstrates to Miller the utmost naïveté. Miller asserts, "[R]evolutions . . . always involve a return to the *status quo*" (*Cosmological* 160), and a look at the American and French Revolutions provides evidence enough of the truth of his statement. Revolutions are exceedingly vulnerable to betrayal and almost inevitably become merely the new tyranny. Alternatively, if Miller is against civilization, as fundamentally impinging on the freedom of the individual, then he rejects principles that unite a civilization, and will refuse to fight for them.

Rimbaud's experience with war might be seen to illustrate at least one side of Miller's position on war as I have thus far theorized it. The Franco-Prussian War broke out in September 1870, and soon after began the siege of Paris by German troops under Bismarck. Rimbaud, at the age of 16, immediately sought to enlist in the army to defend his country. He was continually turned down, however, because "he looked far younger" than he was (Starkie 70), though he did spend three weeks in Douai drilling with the National Guard, frustrated at marching with broomsticks and yearning for action (62). During the fall and winter of 1870-71, Rimbaud like many French citizens began "developing a hatred of all government, of all authority" (72), in response to the corruption of the government of Adolphe Thiers, the government that had replaced the Second Empire of Napoleon II and was badly mismanaging the war and the country (71).

In January of 1871 as the war wound to a painful halt for the French and the five-month siege of Paris came to an end, the National Guard in Paris began to make gestures toward supplanting the government which had at last capitulated (treasonably,

in the view of many) to the Prussians. In late February 1871, Rimbaud made another trip to Paris, not to look for welcoming arms in literary society, as he had done before, but "to help in his country's fight for liberty" (75), this time freedom from bourgeois Frenchmen. It is unclear whether Rimbaud participated directly in the Paris Commune,³⁴ which followed quickly on the heels of the French surrender to Prussia, but certainly he sympathized with it, for he memorialized it in several poems ("Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie," "L'Orgie parisienne où Paris se repeuple," "Chant de Guerre Parisien," "Qu'est-ce pour nous, mon coeur"); in others he espouses ideas in circulation in Paris during the Commune--his rejection of alienated wage labor, as well as his frequent support of fraternity (Gascar 69)--such that for Ross he becomes the poet of the Paris Commune.

Perhaps it was the direct attack on France and then the political causes espoused by the Communards that aroused Rimbaud's fervor; perhaps it was merely his youth: a year later he might have rejected participation in a battle or in the Commune. Though both Miller and Rimbaud reject bourgeois values, this rejection settles them on opposing courses--one refusing to fight to defend these values, the other anxious to participate in fighting, believing that in the Paris Commune these values would be repudiated and new ones would take their place (--"Christmas on Earth!"). Rimbaud trusts the Paris Commune can effect change--genuine and fundamental change--while Miller foresees no positive outcome to the war in Europe.

³⁴ Since the commune was under siege during its entire, brief existence, entering or leaving Paris was terribly perilous at best.

What are We Fighting For?

While the Paris Commune and the Second World War might not seem on first glance a propitious juxtaposition, that Rimbaud wished to support the one with his life while Miller refused support to the other invites just such a correlation, especially given Miller's sense that he and Rimbaud shared a similar background and similar ideals. Though the Commune can be described, briefly, as a war between Paris and the provinces, with Prussia looking on menacingly, and the Second World War became a conflict involving many nations and several continents, both indicate conflicts over ideologies, waged all the more brutally for that (Marchand 120; Hobsbawm 43). Hobsbawm, moreover, contends that the Second World War "can be best understood, not through the contest of states, but as an international ideological *civil war*" fought over two conflicting visions of the future, one that venerates and looks forward to continued progress, the other regarding Enlightenment thinking (especially as given shape by the liberal democracies and their purported logical extension--revolutionary Russia) as a mistake, as decadent (144, emphasis added).

Though Miller was born some twenty years after the end of the Paris Commune, and within his work on Rimbaud (*The Time of the Assassins*) there is only a brief allusion to Rimbaud's interest in it, the Paris Commune might just have been worthy of his (Miller's) support, if not actual participation, in a way that the Second World War was not. Pierre Gascar notes a certain "generosity" on the part of the members of the commune (76) and an attempt to create a community, which he sees reflected in Rimbaud's poetry (71), two themes Miller takes up repeatedly. "Community," especially, is important for Miller because it "carries with it the idea of inclusiveness. It carries with it the assumption that there can be no viable civilized

effort until the organism embodying the ideal becomes worldwide" (*Remember* 147).

In the early nineteen-forties, Miller found little to support.

The war underway in Europe in 1941, a time when Germany had conquered most of western Europe and England stood alone against Hitler (Hobsbawm 39), does not inspire Miller: "In the present conflict," he asserts, "there are no issues worth fighting about--yet" (*Remember* 147). With this "yet," Miller suggests that if the war situation becomes critical, the endangered governments (or those isolated by German conquest) may offer their citizens certain concessions that might finally amount to real and substantial change.

In hindsight, Miller's position places him in a clear minority. Even a left-wing critic such as Hobsbawm, who might be expected to write history against the grain and undermine current orthodoxies, reports that the causes of the war can be reduced to "two words": "Adolph Hitler" (36). Hobsbawm further explains that the war also resulted from "aggression by the three malcontent powers [Germany, Italy, Japan]" (37), as well as the Treaty of Versailles, which he characterizes as a "penal peace" (33) that "could not possibly be the basis of a stable peace" (34) and which served to spur the rise of Hitler. Though Hitler's accession to power can be in part blamed on the victorious nations in the First World War (England, France, and America), Hitler ultimately initiates the Second World War, for Hobsbawm.

Such a reading of the Second World War, however, simplifies it and amounts to, at least in part, what Herbert Marcuse might characterize as "affirmative" history--history that affirms the status quo. According to Howard Zinn, though the war has usually been presented as unanimously supported, a substantial proportion of the

American population thought it wrong and the goals of the war unclear. "Out of 10 million drafted for the armed forces during World War II," Zinn reports,

only 43,000 refused to fight. But this was three times the proportion of C.O.'s (conscientious objectors) in World War I. Of these 43,000, about 6,000 went to prison, which was, proportionately, four times the number of C.O.'s who went to prison during World War I. Of every six men in federal prison, one was there as a C.O. (408)

Among artists, poet Robert Lowell was one of the few who refused to fight in the Second World War and served time in prison instead. The war was less popular than usually believed, though it was still widely supported. Non-support for the war, on the other hand, was greater than in the previous World War and more sternly punished.

Miller was certainly mistaken to discount Hitler, to see him simply as a token of the decline of the West, and his suggestion that war might have been averted had the Allies simply laid their weapons down and invited Hitler in, thus defusing his imperialist desires (*Remember* 150), now sounds ludicrous if not positively willed ignorance. Miller, however, did not recognize Hitler as a unique and powerful danger. "Hitler and Mussolini are simply instruments of fate," Miller writes; "I can detect no more evil in them than in Churchill or Roosevelt, or any other of the democratic leaders" (148). Such a statement reveals more about Miller's attitude toward Churchill and Roosevelt, and the countries they represent, than about his feelings toward Hitler. Both *democratic* leaders represent, for instance, imperialist nations, and not just in *intention* but in reality. America's actions in Latin America alone--where time and again it sent troops to quell revolutionary movements or to overturn governments not sufficiently favorable to American business interests, or in the case of Panama to simply take land (for the canal)--demonstrate its concerns were not with the freedom of people but with increasing the wealth of America, more specifically that of the

industrialists (Zinn 399). Both Churchill and Roosevelt act in their own best interests. Their ideals, as they proclaim them, quite often offer a counterpoint to their actions and the histories of the countries they represent.

Miller, furthermore, was not the only one unsure of Hitler's ultimate intentions. Before the war, England and France, with American support, ignored Soviet calls for unity against Germany and sought several times to appease Hitler. The United States did not even enter the war, though France was defeated, most of western Europe was under German control, and Britain was under attack, until forced to by Hitler's declaration of war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The U.S., as it has done in the past and continues to do, targets left wing governments for its animosity (the Soviet Union in the nineteen-thirties) rather than repressive right wing governments (which quite often receive its support since they are friendlier to business interests than their left-wing counterparts), a preference with disastrous consequences--in China, Iran, and Afghanistan, for instance.

Miller's critique of the Second World War contains many valid points, because as an outsider (though he was certainly not a very distanced outsider) he was not blinded by patriotism and would not accept that the cause of the war and its goals could be simply pinned on the figure of Hitler. Instead, he sought to determine why each side was fighting, what it hoped to protect and to gain, and what were the likely outcomes of the war. For Miller, Hitler is certainly a "monster" (*Remember* 169), but if Hitler is the sole cause of the war then the war should not last long, of its own accord. If it becomes an extended affair, however, then there must be more on the line, more to the struggle than a simple good-guy versus bad-guy shoot'em-up, and the

issues must sooner or later come to the fore. In short, it is clear what America and the Allies are fighting *against*; what is less clear is what they are fighting *for*.

Some of the basic assumptions, current in 1941, are simply untenable for Miller. For instance, it is questionable, at best, whether those fighting *against* the Axis Powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) really constitute a force fighting *for* "freedom and liberty" (*Remember* 130). At the moment he is writing, in 1941, Miller believes the people in the West are demonstratively not free, and in *Murder the Murderer* he presents several examples of "unfreedom." Referring to conscription, to which he is not subject (he turns fifty at the end of 1941), he writes that people "who live under democratic rule today have as little freedom of choice, in this matter of acting or not acting, as those living under the Communist or Fascist yoke," hence the freedom they thought they enjoyed before the war was illusory (130). In fact, he continues, citing Perlés' *choice* to participate in the war, "You had to be a man without a country in order to have that privilege [willingly enlisting]" (134). One of the more basic freedoms would seem to revolve around whether or not a person wishes to imperil his or her life, and/or deciding when such risk becomes necessary. No one in the West, in 1941, possesses that right, due to obligatory military service. Miller next admonishes his friend by raising the issue of England's particular and blatant hypocrisy: "The country for which you volunteer to fight, in the name of freedom, denies the rights of freedom to a subject nation [India] of over 300,000,000 souls" (134). Referring, finally, to his own predicament as a banned writer, he notes that those who disagree with his position on the war claim he could not write (*publish*) his books under the Nazis. "But then neither am I allowed to write such books in England or America" (140). Moreover, in the U.S., in 1940, the Smith Act was passed "which took

Espionage Act prohibitions against talk or writing that would lead to refusal of duty in the armed forces and applied them to peacetime"--an act that clearly violated Free Speech rights, but that *did* lead to the imprisonment of alleged offenders (Zinn 411).

Miller concludes that though this war is being fought ostensibly for freedom, as most if not all wars are, "the English-speaking countries have never appeared to me as a haven of liberty, where freedom of speech rings" (*Remember* 140).³⁵ The only person Miller believes to be free today is "he who has money or who owns the machines we work with" (152)--the business magnates, the imperialists. The freedom of those who benefit most from the system is the real object being protected. Those exploited by the owners of the means of production in order to accumulate their millions, the workers, are now exploited as soldiers in order to protect those millions.

During the nineteen-thirties, and putting aside America's numerous imperialistic adventures (in Cuba, Haiti, Latin America, the Philippines, and more) as well as its treatment at home of African-Americans and of women, the U.S. still did not take a principled stand for freedom for others. Even as early as 1934, Roosevelt and the State Department decided against public criticism of Nazi anti-Semitic acts (Zinn 400). Throughout the decade, moreover, the Allies (including the U.S.) did more than refuse support to countries faced with German and Italian aggression, in Ethiopia, Spain, and Czechoslovakia, for instance. In the case of the Italian war on Ethiopia, "American businesses [sent] oil to Italy in huge quantities, which was essential to Italy's carrying on the war" (400). America supported Italian aggression in 1935, but in 1936 blocked aid to Spain against German-supported aggression, so that a democratically-elected

³⁵ The anti-Communist hysteria of the late nineteen-forties and the nineteen-fifties was to further corroborate Miller's position.

leftist government fell. America, it would seem, supports democracy of one limited variety--a conservative, capitalistic democracy offering rather circumscribed freedoms.

Rather than freedom, Miller reckons that the actual objective is merely "to defend the status quo" (*Hamlet* 163), which constitutes a state of unfreedom and conformity. In *Capricorn* Miller wrote, "The moment you have a 'different' thought you cease to be an American" (56). "Group think," as Orwell would later call it, was already in place in America. "The difference between being out of step with a dictator and being out of step with the democratic majority," Miller asserts, "is practically negligible. The important thing is to be in step" (*Remember* 130). Suppression of labor movements and of socialist rallies, for example, have occurred throughout American history, and the McCarthy Hearings, of the early nineteen-fifties, constitute only the most infamous attack on those who were "out of step,"³⁶ on those who were not "good Americans."

In contrast to the state of unfreedom that, in Miller's view, the Allies fight to maintain, the Paris Commune that Rimbaud endeavors to support appears to have truly been an attempt to improve day to day life for the average Parisian, the average French citizen. While Marchand claims "it would be dishonest to attempt to extract a coherent political position" from the Paris Commune (113-14), Marx, writing during and immediately after the Commune, argues that the variety of "interpretations to which the Commune has been subjected . . . show that it was a thoroughly expansive political form, while all previous forms of government had been emphatically

³⁶ Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* details numerous worker's meetings, labor rallies, Socialist rallies, and Women's rallies broken up by police, militia, and the National Guard, usually violently, usually without the least provocation (besides that inspired by their existence).

repressive" (75), most certainly from the perspective of the laboring classes in France between 1830 and 1870 (Wright 172-73). The Commune leaders sought to replace the authoritarian Second Empire of Napoleon III as well as the "Capitulard" government of Adolph Thiers,³⁷ centered in Versailles during the time of the Paris Commune, with a government that offered more freedom and denied the economic determinism that kept the laboring classes mired in poverty.

Like Marx, who saw the Commune as "essentially a working-class government" (75), Marchand characterizes the battle between the Communards and the Versaillais as above all "a class war: the greatest part of the prisoners interrogated by the parliamentary commission were workers or artisans" (112). Rimbaud's memorial for the *pétroleuses*, women who put some regions of bourgeois Paris to flame with petroleum bombs when French troops from Versailles attacked the Commune in the last week of May, makes clear their working class origin through describing their hands, "des mains fortes, / Mains sombres que l'été tanna, / Mains pâles comme des mains mortes" [strong hands, somber hands tanned by the summer, / pale hands like those of the dead] ("Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie," 132). That Rimbaud chooses to celebrate the hands of these women demonstrates his awareness that they are the hands of workers; the hands of these women, tanned if they work outdoors or like ivory if in factories, are strong--which differentiates them from their often delicate bourgeois counterparts. His description of their hands as "la place / Qu'en baisa tout Révolté fier!" [the place / where one kisses all proud revolt] (134) further acknowledges the

³⁷ Thiers had figured in Napoleon III's government.

women's participation in the Commune as no less inspired than the men's, whereas the bourgeois wife was expected to be passive, doing as her husband-and-master said.

In addition to Rimbaud who was virtually unknown at the time, the Commune enjoyed the support of members of the avant-garde (Christiansen 317)--Jules Vallès (novelist), Eugène Vermesch (poet), and Gustave Courbet (painter), for example--all of whom actually participated in the Commune government. In contrast, Orwell describes the position of British left wing avant-garde writers of the nineteen-thirties as "narrowed down to 'anti-Fascism,' i.e. to a negative" (38). The Commune, rather than forcing artists into an essentially conservative or defensive position, offered them hope for dramatic change, for a fundamentally new world, that they could help bring into existence. Later French avant-garde groups like the Surrealists would be politically committed, but party politics (both Surrealist and Stalinist-Communist) would then play a restrictive rather than an expansive role. The New Left of the nineteen-sixties, with writers like Michael Harrington, Todd Gitlin, and Richard Sennett, as well as the *Situationistes* in France, led by Guy Debord, and those who took part in May 68, become the closest contemporary approximation to the attitude manifested by the Commune. During the Commune, for instance, the Federation of Artists of Paris "proposed that Art should be run by Artists, free of commercial considerations" (Christiansen 317), which suggests a freedom from party politics as well as from the market. The expansiveness, the generosity of the Commune is clear and will become more so in a moment.

The Commune, as noted above, signified a war between Paris, the site of the 1789, 1830, and 1848 revolutions, and the more conservative provinces. In March 1871, the provinces had overruled Paris and elected a majority of Monarchists into the

Assembly (Wright 224), precipitating the Paris uprising of March 18 which led to the establishment of the Commune. According to Marchand, "the Commune was before all an urban movement and typically Parisian" (102)--it did not spread widely nor last long in the few regions it did reach, in Lyon (a major manufacturing city) for example. The peace treaty concluded between the Prussians and the French government signaled for many Parisians, after a five month siege, "the return to power of the monarchy, the aristocrats and the priests. Against that return to a tyrannical past, Paris rallied together and organized another commune" (108).

While it may be unwise to provide too coherent a depiction of the Commune's goals, for Ross, the most important issues that attracted those who either declared an affinity with the Commune, like Rimbaud, or actively participated in it, were the "concrete problems of work, leisure, housing, sexuality, and family and neighborhood relations" (33). According to Rimbaud biographer Enid Starkie, this revolt against the world as currently delineated is reflected in Rimbaud's attempt to become a *voyant*, a seer, rejecting "accepted facts, . . . the very conditions of existence" (96), attempting to see beyond this artificially limited existence, to break the forms and take another step in human development. While Rimbaud looks for spiritual development, the Commune "offers moral and physical liberation to the people of Paris" (Gascar 64).

Whereas the Second World War appears to Miller to be a battle to simply maintain the status quo, the leaders of the Paris Commune took steps to decisively change society, to improve life for its most degraded members. Due to the brief lifespan of the Paris Commune, its ultimate tenor remains only conjecture, but its decrees (not always fully acted upon, again due to the brevity of the Commune's existence) provide some guidance. It freed political prisoners, destroyed the guillotine

in abolishing capital punishment, and separated church and state (Marx 141)³⁸. For the laboring classes the Commune attempted to provide a better work environment: they suspended night work in bakeries (80); prohibited fines in the workplace, levied by an employer who was at once accuser, judge, and beneficiary (80); and acknowledged the importance of women workers by decreeing equal pay for equal work (Christiansen 314).

On a more broadly social front, they attempted to deal with the problems of alcoholism, particularly problematic among the working classes (338); to, in part, reconceive the family by abolishing "the discrimination between legitimate and illegitimate children" as well as loosening "the formalities governing marriage" (346); to set up programs to help the destitute (Marchand 114); to make education accessible to all by making it free and compulsory up to age twelve; and to "secularize education" in order to educate youths according to "'experimental, positivist and scientific' principles" (Christiansen 322-23). It is undeniable that when excitement ran high--at both the very beginning of the Commune, on March 18, and during the week of battle in May in which the Commune was overpowered by the army of the government in Versailles--over a hundred hostages (generally members of the army and the clergy) taken by the Commune were shot. During the Commune itself, however, crime actually was reported to have gone down (Marx 82; Christiansen 309-10). In contrast, Communards captured by the Versailles government *during* the time of the Paris Commune were routinely summarily executed (306). In the bloody

³⁸ Since Marx is sometimes considered strongly partisan, hence (implicitly) unreliable, it should be noted that everything Marx attributes to the Paris Commune is confirmed by Christiansen.

repression of the Commune, the Versailles troops suffered 1,100 deaths as opposed to nearly 35,000 for the Commune (Marchand 111)--many executed in Père-Lachaise Cemetery, and numerous sites across the city, and then thrown in mass graves. In sum, the Paris Commune appears to have offered the people of Paris a very different way of life than that experienced before it rose, though perhaps due to its fleeting existence and thorough repression (in itself a comment on the example it set) it has been largely forgotten as well as trivialized by such historians as Gordon Wright.

It may be that, outside the immediate stakes to be gained by fighting (the removal of Hitler from power, for instance), in microcosm and within limits, the battle between the Paris Commune and the French government, centered at Versailles, more closely mirrors the Second World War than at first glance appears possible: a civil war in France against a civil war in the West. Certainly the Paris Commune more nearly approximates liberal democracy³⁹ than did the Versailles government, composed chiefly of monarchists (Orleanists) and authoritarians (Bonapartistes). In the Second World War, lined on one side stood "the core countries of Western Liberalism--Britain France and the USA--the general hegemony of the revolutionary tradition" (Hobsbawm 121), now grown conservative, facing a Germany, united by Bismarck after the Franco-Prussian War, under the authoritarian rule of Hitler. In both cases heirs of the Enlightenment oppose authoritarian regimes hearkening to the past.

But the differences between them are also instructive. Whereas the Paris Commune frequently fell victim to propaganda, as Marx and Christiansen repeatedly

³⁹ Members of the Commune were of such variety of political backgrounds that to characterize them as "Reds," as they were in the press of their time, or as Communists, in the twentieth century sense of that term, makes little sense.

show,⁴⁰ and had little time to prove itself, England and especially America had plenty of time to demonstrate the alleged superiority of their democratic systems of government, as examples of the virtue of the Enlightenment, but failed, most spectacularly in their "penal peace." And the Commune represented, at least in part, an overt attempt to improve the lives of the common people, while the Allies fight only to maintain the status quo or to return to the situation they enjoyed before Hitler rose to power and distracted attention--if not to simply extend their sphere of influence and open new markets.

Miller's most prescient analysis then is that the war, between two opposed political forms, signals a failure on the part of the Allies, the liberal democracies. With manifest sarcasm, he charges, "Over 200,000,000 people, hypnotised by their insane leaders, refused to see that the democratic way of life is the best. Somehow, possibly because of the bad example we gave them, they remained unconvinced" (*Remember* 181). America, England, and their allies, according to Miller, cannot lay claim to the moral high ground. Their ideals are flawed or else "sadly demonstrated" if others do not find them respectable. "If there be such undeniable truth behind our principles as to make us willing to sacrifice our lives for them, then why have they not been more convincing?" (144) he asks. The fault either lies with the ideals, that they are not worthy, or the people--that they have not personified the ideals to advantage. Miller opts for both.

⁴⁰ One piece of propaganda leveled against the Commune was that foreigners or, alternatively, Marx's International Working Men's Association, were behind it (Christiansen 320). The first is completely unfounded, and the backgrounds of the Commune leaders, again, were too various to support the second.

He notes that there are those who find "certain ideas which the Fascists have made use of were not entirely without value," but that the Allies are fighting against only "the evil doctrines of Fascism" (135). "And what about our own evil doctrines--" Miller demands, "who are there who will admit the existence of wrong, or error, in our democratic way of life" (135)? Miller could have cited as examples of "error" the continuing problems with racism in America, anti-Semitism, official repression of dissident groups (those who are "out of step") within America and the West, as well as the inequities of consumer capitalism.

Miller reads the demonizing of the Germans as an additional failure on the part of the Allies:

We could never admit to ourselves that we have decided to kill the Germans off because we are incapable of convincing them that our way is the better way--no, we must first believe that they are not only wrong but evil, a menace to the world. (144)

Though in hindsight, demonization of the Germans may seem justified,⁴¹ Miller's point is not to argue the Germans were no threat but rather to emphasize the Allies' unwillingness to discuss what benefits, besides the subjugation of an admitted evil, would accrue to the survivors of the war. Hobsbawm describes the Nazi goal as amounting to a "deliberate reversal of civilization" (150), arguing that even in the Allied countries there were divisions between those who to one degree or another supported Hitler in opposition to "the descendants of eighteenth century Enlightenment" (144). In other words, the value of modernity, of liberalism (Democratic Capitalism), even more, of progress, at last took to the field as issues to

⁴¹ Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* portrays "The Final Solution" as the work of the average German rather than of a small but significant number of Nazi fanatics..

be confronted, and yet the Allies repeatedly returned to simple demonization to explain the rush to war.

Miller recognizes a similarity between combatants on all sides, however:

As Democrats, Republicans, Fascists, Communists, we are all on one level. [...] We defend with our lives the petty principles which divide us. The common principle, which is *the establishment of the empire of man on earth*, we never lift a finger to defend. (*Nightmare* 21)

Like Rimbaud, he looks toward a "Christmas on Earth!" but understands that it will not come about until all people learn to recognize what unites them and, more specifically, what divides them--governments.

"Our democracy has been the worst democracy that has ever been tried out. It has never had anything to do with freedom, has never been anything more than a name" (*Remember* 169). Though his invective may appear somewhat overstated--American democracy may not be the "worst" ever "tried out" but only the most disappointing given the hope and hype surrounding it--his argument denounces a betrayal of the dream that inspired America: "we have reduced the conception of freedom and service to mankind to a poverty-stricken notion of power and riches" (169). In America, Capitalism has replaced Democracy as the ideal. The Land of the Free, where all are welcome, has been transformed to a place epitomized by the belief that anybody can become a millionaire, can go from rags to riches and rule over a self-made empire, so that community is devalued in favor of the ideology of the self-willed, rugged individual struggling and sacrificing and gambling all--for riches, for simple pecuniary gain. The Land of the Free, consequently, is reduced to the Land of the Free Market.

The Allies cannot, alas, claim the moral highground unless they resolve to improve the lot of their own populations as well as to curtail their imperialistic adventures, something Miller believes unlikely (though still possible--remember his all-important "yet"). The Second World War will not be worth fighting if it does not improve the life of the average American, the average Briton, the average Frenchman--not to mention the African and the Indian and Filipino.

But Miller predicts that the wrong people will benefit from the impending war. Citizens of a country "almost never" clamor for a war "in modern times. It is the minority which sponsors the war, and this minority always represents the vested interests" (133). Zinn corroborates Miller, reporting that the "chief beneficiary" of the war "was a wealthy elite" who gained greater access to European markets as well as new markets (408). The young and poor, who benefit least from a war, are forced to fight, while those who aid, abet, encourage the war, sit back, risk little yet stand to gain much (the inverse of the way the stock market usually operates), especially those in industries that outfit the military (*Remember* 153-54). The soldiers, meanwhile, as they march off "to rid the world of evil" will be "hailed as heroes," though after the war the survivors "will have to pawn their medals and stand in the bread line. Unless in the meantime the forces of evil on this side of the water have been vanquished too" (143).

Miller is especially exasperated by the fact that the two wealthiest nations in the world, England and America, turn to the poor, through taxation, to support the war.⁴² "[H]ad these same poor demanded [money] of their government in peace time

⁴² Hobsbawm argues that England was not wealthy and, in maintaining its empire had finally overextended itself (153).

for food and shelter," he argues, they would have received in response "bullets" (153).⁴³ The government, in brief, acknowledges no obligation toward the people but requires their obedience. That inconsistent state of affairs must change, Miller asserts. If it will not change--and permanently--because of the war, then there is very little for most people to gain by fighting. The capitalists, the only free people, stand to make money, in the short term, in arming and outfitting the troops, while the troops--the less fortunate--stand only to lose their lives or else, at best, to return to life as they knew it before the war, providing they receive no permanent injuries.

Miller, thus, refuses to believe the Allies are praiseworthy and in fact indicts them on several counts in creating this war. Though he agrees the Germans "are poisoned with hatred," he counters that "we who oppose them are not precisely suffused with radiant love. Men do not become poisoned with hatred in a vacuum, nor when surrounded by loving, sympathetic neighbors" (*Remember* 163). Miller no doubt refers to, among other things, the Treaty of Versailles, which practically ensured the next war. As bad winners, the Allies had guaranteed that Germany viewed itself as a rogue nation, and now the Allies were paying the price--more specifically, the descendants of those who had survived the First World War were paying the price.

Miller also notes that during the First World War, America fought not simply to "end all war" but also "to 'make the world safe for democracy.' Not real democracy," he adds, "but the American brand" (179). America in World War I, like Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union later, fights in order to spread its ideology, as well as to open new markets to its products. It does not fight selflessly; its generosity

⁴³ See Howard Zinn's description of the brutal treatment, at the hands of the U.S. government, of World War I veterans.

bears the hallmarks of self-interest, of imperialism. All sides then, Miller believes, fight for the wrong reasons in 1941: Germany is determined to expand and the Allies are just as determined to prevent that expansion, though at the same time they seek, themselves, to expand. War, Miller notes, involves more than anything else "economic rivalry" (160). Beneath the ideological warfare, the smokescreen of demonization proffered by both sides, lurks the selfsame pursuit of material benefit.

The real battle, for Miller, should be "for life, to have it more abundantly" (*Cosmological* 157). Hence, the way civilization is organized at the moment only insures future problems. "A real man has no need of governments," Miller claims, "of laws, of morals or ethical codes, to say nothing of battleships, police clubs, high-powered bombers and such things" (4). Miller rejects all those forces and institutions which serve to separate one person from another, one people from another, to keep one person or people down in favor of another. Civilization is the problem, for Miller. While many governments proclaim equality, even community, the Democratic and the Communist most emphatically, none delivers.

The war also reflects, for Miller, the continuing decline of western civilization, making the structural imperfections all the more apparent. "Civilization," he warns, "is in question" (*Remember* 132). No matter how much the Allies may deplore the German government, Miller asserts, "we cannot in all honesty pretend that ours is the only true way of civilization" (132). Miller does not suggest the Nazi government should be considered a viable alternative to that of the Allies, but rather that different countries (or regions or continents or hemispheres) with different histories may require their own particular forms of government. The idea that every country should be capitalistic demonstrates Western (or even American) chauvinism, in addition to

economic opportunism, a one-size fits all ethic that may work for night shirts but is woefully inadequate for governing.

Ultimately, defense of the status quo will not suffice. Miller reminds the reader that the brutalities of the Aztecs, who made daily human sacrifices to their gods, seem particularly horrific, yet "we see nothing ignoble in the periodic sacrifice of millions of lives in the name of country, God, Democracy or Civilization. What monstrous things can these be," he asks, "in whose name these horrible sacrifices are demanded" (148)? Those in the "civilized" West are little different from the Aztec "savages," for both require sacrifices to gods, ideals. All these centuries of reputed progress, then, appear to have been for naught.

Perhaps Miller unrealistically expects a country to examine itself before making war on another country. Perhaps such an expectation is unfair, though the West had nearly seven years, between Hitler's rise to power and the outbreak of war, to reflect upon itself. On the other hand, the word "realistic" has often been used to justify the status quo and not seeking solutions to problems, whether a threatening antagonist sits on the borders or not. Max Horkheimer writes clearly and passionately, thus meriting extended quotation, of the reluctance to inaugurate change, change of a fundamental sort in society, most often deemed unrealistic *because* it goes to the very roots of that society, because it presupposes a remaking of the world such as Miller advocates:

The relatively stable system of long-practiced, effortless behavior which people of a particular period and class manifest, the manner in which they accept their situation with the help of conscious and unconscious psychic practices, the infinitely differentiated and continuously revised structure of preferences, acts of faith, evaluations, and fantasies by which people in a particular social stratum come to terms with their material circumstances and with the limitation imposed on their real satisfactions, the set of internal contrivances which despite its complexity is for the most part the daughter of necessity--all this is

preserved in many instances only because to leave the old way of life and to adopt a new one, especially if the latter demands increased rational activity, requires strength and courage; in brief it requires an immense psychic effort. This is also one reason why changes of world-wide historical importance cannot be expected to occur if people must first change themselves. (*Critical* 67)

When real change occurs, people are discomfited. "Displacement," Ross asserts, in a slightly different context, "after all, hurts" (14). People worry that they will lose the little they have, that more--or simply different--actions may be demanded of them, hence they will have to learn a whole new structure of behaviors, and so they gravitate toward comfort zones. If they lead lives of discomfort now, they would rather retain these discomforts, familiar and bearable finally, rather than risk acquiring new ones all in an attempt to improve their lives.

Such reticence to risk anything, beyond lives, on the part of the Allies and their populations settles Miller's position on the war. As we have seen him do in other circumstances, in rejecting war as it is sanctioned by societies, Miller once again turns to "the individual." He refuses to accept the manifest unfreedom of individuals (though without revealing that this unfreedom is omnipresent); he refuses to accept that people who have both literally and figuratively bought-in to the systems he rebukes are not free and that this unfreedom is no isolated phenomenon. The "individual," moreover, just might surprise Miller, as the workers surprised Socialist leaders in 1914 by halting any strikes and enlisting to fight in the war, by rejecting the freedom Miller wishes to burden him or her with. But Miller, rightly, expresses especial distaste for "forcing a man against his will and his conscience to sacrifice his life for a cause he does not believe in" (*Remember* 154), though people have arguably already done so in the marketplace.

Miller's rejection of war hinges on war as just another exemplar of the instrumental use of people--as workers, as consumers, and finally as soldiers, but he grounds his rejection of the war on his notion of the sanctity of the individual, a fairly vague notion, though he is willing to risk all for this individual:

"To me the screams of one agonizing individual rings louder and more imperious than all the exhortations of the righteous. I would rather be called a coward and a traitor than neglect the plea of that helpless individual" (162).

In opposition to all those who would provoke a crowd, who would inflame a nation and urge it to war, Miller sides with the minority, the voiceless individual amidst the clamoring crowd.

It is this crowd, as well as the short-sighted politicians who cannot manage or even choose not to eliminate war or the likelihood of its recurrence, that finally inspires Miller to wonder if there really is any hope for humanity. Immediately following the Munich Crisis of 1938, when war was only narrowly averted, Miller asks, "has man always played into the hands of Fate or is there really an opportunity to surpass himself each time a great problem arises" (*Hamlet* 159)? In other words, in this so-called age of progress what really and finally constitutes "progress," and is it possible for humans to advance in a fundamental way?

Miller does not foresee a world of indolence, but he does envision a world where people contribute according to their abilities and where they focus on living and live in peace without governments (a war, it should be remembered, is between governments rather than people, for Miller), without civilization. The distance between such a picture of the future and "progress" as conceived in Enlightenment

thinking demonstrates the distance between Miller and mainstream modernity, but unites him, once again, with the worlds of Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud.

Chapter Four / Life Never Looked So Bleak: Henry Miller on Progress

The average man . . . is more frightened of alien ideas than of cold steel or flame throwers. ("Murder the Murderer," *Remember to Remember* 206)

Every improvement in machinery throws workers out of employment, and the greater the advance, the more numerous the unemployed; each great improvement produces, therefore, upon a number of workers the effect of a commercial crisis, creates want, wretchedness, and crime. (Engels 159)

Henry Miller argues against fighting what has since become known as the Second World War, and his argument rests in large part on the relation between that war and the notion of progress. Throughout this discussion of Miller's attack on modernity, his critique has been implicit, when not explicitly, an attack on the notion of progress. Have we improved our cities? Has commodity culture fundamentally enhanced our lives? Has technological development provided us more free time in which to enjoy life?

"Progress," as we shall see in a moment, has not been universally heralded and has, in fact, been subject to numerous critiques. Miller is concerned, furthermore, not with technological progress alone, but with what he considers a more important and a more basic site of progress, human development, which entails among other things a better day-to-day life for the mass of people. Miller's concern, finally, is that conceptions of progress might be overly enthusiastic and not properly elaborated.

"Whether it be true or not," he writes,

civilization has come to stand for something in the nature of a continuous advance, something ineradicable in the human scheme of things underlying the ephemeral birth and death of cultures. Is this advance maintained by war? If not, why should one take up arms, even though the aggressor be obviously in the wrong? (*Remember* 132-33)

As we observed in the last chapter, Miller decries the rush to weapons without a rational discussion of the object to be gained by fighting. Though he seems to read the possible Nazi conquest of the West as yet another step toward the final downfall of Western culture, predicted by Spengler, he fails to address the prospect that surrendering to forces "obviously in the wrong" might lead to a dangerous regression that could actually slow the decline and that such a state of affairs might linger rather than quickly pass. However, since Miller does not--as many do in the West--perceive progress as necessarily automatic, he questions both the reasons for going to war and modern understandings of the concept of progress, linking the two.

Technological development seems an assured outcome of war. Just as the American space program hastened the development of computers, so war generally accelerates the development of new technologies, inspiring engineers to design new and better machines of destruction and providing immediate opportunities for field-testing this machinery. But while technological advances seem quite certain, how do such developments square with human progress, with the progress of civilization? Miller suggests that if civilization is helplessly sinking into barbarism, whether the Germans win or not, the war is futile. Within Miller's critique of modernity, as with Baudelaire, Rimbaud and others writing in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, lurks what is at least an ambivalence toward the concept of progress: progress as real, as unquestionably good--as implicitly and essentially beneficial to humanity--especially when linked with what amounts to its blood-relative, technology. If, as seems likely, cities have become less humane, our daily needs are more and more constructed by advertising, work has steadily become more dehumanizing, war has not been eliminated, and riches continue to offer the

ultimate sign of success yet remain in the possession of only a privileged few, the question whether the West has progressed at all, or progressed in a desirable direction, becomes one of serious importance for Miller.

Miller and Rimbaud, both, directly question whether the world is more human as a result of scientific progress. In *Une Saison en Enfer*, Rimbaud writes, "La science, la nouvelle noblesse! Le progrès. Le monde marche! Pourquoi ne tournerait-il pas? / C'est la vision des nombres" [Science, the new nobility! Progress. The world advances! Why shouldn't it turn? / It's the vision of numbers](198). Rimbaud proclaims the victory of science, of advances in human affairs directly linked to the new science, but then questions why time cannot be considered cyclical.¹ Abruptly altering his tone, he adds that the victory of "progress" reduces the world: "It's the vision of numbers"-- numbers in this instance are static, compartmentalizing, over-rationalized and myopic, reducing people to flesh and blood machines, denying the side of nature and the human psyche that resists regimentation. The "vision of numbers," in the industrial age, stands also for the linear conception of progress which reduces the notion of "progress" to something of a parade, from point A to B.

Commenting on these lines of Rimbaud's, Miller writes, "The poetry of life is expressed only in terms of the mathematical, the physical, the chemical. [...] The world has indeed become number" (*Time* 34)--hence, inhuman. Charles Dickens' 1854 novel *Hard Times* had earlier challenged progress, attacking the shortcomings of a world produced by scientific progress, along the same lines as Miller and Rimbaud will later: Students describe a horse by listing its species and its genus, its various

¹ Spengler and many others before him--Vico, for example--posit cyclical progression rather than linear progress.

teeth, bones, eating habits, and yet somehow manage to lose *horseness* in their definition. Neither Miller nor Rimbaud, nor Dickens for that matter, stands against explanation or exploration as such. Rather, they deplore the tendency, in the name of progress, to harness nature and reduce it to a formula, to that which is quantifiable (with the rest set aside as of no real importance), to that which fulfills human material needs. The basic mystery of nature, as well as the Dionysian side of human nature, unless it can be measured and codified, loses its appeal, is denied, if it cannot be yoked to utilitarian ends. Raymond Williams describes one of Dickens' themes in *Hard Times* in terms that very nearly describe Miller's critique of what is missing in science: "The instinctive, unintellectual, unorganized life is the ground, here, of genuine feeling, and of all good relationships" (*Culture* 95). Modern science, as reflected in industry and the educational system, often serves to deaden human interaction--interaction among people, interaction between people and the natural world.

This vision of numbers does not stimulate hope for the future but rather the opposite. "And what is the chief emotion which our great discoveries inspire?" Miller asks. "Dread! We have knowledge without wisdom, comfort without security, belief without faith" (*Time* 34). We have facts, but we have not gained in wisdom, for all these facts do not amount to anything like a complete picture of the world, which must admit forces that go beyond human comprehension. While commodities make our lives easier at times, they cannot ensure our future. And belief systems focused on capitalism and material benefits--people *believe* in the value of commodities, they *believe* in the importance of fashion--fail to produce faith in the future. Richard Sheppard describes the ambivalence some felt toward "progress," asserting that the

"very generation which had grown up amid the triumphant achievements of increasingly confident nineteenth century science, technology and economics, now felt that these systems were becoming dysfunctional and potentially totalitarian" (9). For many in the early twentieth century, progress appeared to be moving toward the circumscribing of individual rights, a questionable development, at best, in the progress of history, or the history of progress.

In one of his notebooks for the *Passagen Arbeit*,² which implicitly and explicitly confronts the idea of progress, Walter Benjamin suggests that once the bourgeois class gained power in the early to middle nineteenth century, progress as an ideal "may increasingly have forfeited those critical functions that originally characterized it" ("N" 68). It was, thus, transformed from a sort of measuring stick, with which people evaluated their living conditions, into an article of faith, like the Christian belief in the Resurrection, and much less open to questioning. Benjamin adds that later in the century, after Darwin's theories had won many converts, "the notion that progress was automatic" further robbed it of any critical faculty and assured its transformation into a conviction, while at the same time broadening the scope of its perceived influence "to the entire realm of human activity" (68). Progress, then, is what happens and is no more open to doubt than the sunrise. Before embarking on an exploration of the critique of "progress" put forth by Miller, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud, I want to briefly explore the concept as we have received it.

² The English translation of the German title (literally: *Passages Work*), the *Arcades Project*, has, I think, inappropriate overtones. Today we generally think of video and pinball arcades, rather than shopping arcades.

A Short History of Progress

Progress--this belief, this ideology, this bourgeois value *par excellence*³--comes to us with a history, though it is perhaps a briefer one than we might expect, given its cardinal role in our century and the one preceding. J. B. Bury, in *The Idea of Progress*, argues that the concept of progress as we know it has only existed since the sixteenth century. Before that, from the ancient Greeks up to the medieval Christians, all western cultures posited a "golden era" in the past, viewed the present as constituting a decline, and only anticipated further degeneration. That the mythical golden era of the past is unattainable, while the present and future are marked by continued deterioration, precludes a notion of "progress," of advances in human culture (broadly speaking).

It is in the sixteenth century, with Bacon, that progress begins to assume its modern characteristics. "Francis Bacon," according to Bury, "sounded the modern note; for him the end of knowledge is utility" (51). The study of nature soon commences to revolve around the attempt "to establish the reign of man over nature" (52), to master nature such that it becomes the raw material for human projects. The ability of humans to reason transformed nature from an "end" in itself, from something *out there*, to a "means," something bestowed upon humans, to do with as they please. Once the grip of an absolute "golden ageism" is loosened and knowledge is believed to be a force capable of improving the lives of humankind, once it is possible to chart developments in science and the arts, progress becomes at last imaginable.

³ Though the bourgeois class is certainly not the only one to subscribe to it, that class is one of the main beneficiaries, hence proponents, of progress.

The notion of progress, however, has taken humanity on some unexpected detours. In France, during the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, the intelligentsia began to question "the value of the achievements of science and the improvements of the arts of life, if life itself could not be ameliorated" (127), suggesting that progress then exhibited the philosophical and critical dimension that Benjamin wanted for it. Reason demanded that people take more control over their lives and that they work to improve them, which helped lead France in the direction of revolution. Widely considered an aberration by aristocracies of other nations of Europe, the French Revolution revealed the need, for other countries (or empires) as well as France, to more directly focus the energies unleashed in the name of progress.

Progress, since the advent of industrialization, has become synonymous with technological advance and with a sense of "plenty"--plenty of food, commodities, and (at some point in the future) time--and with a belief that progress will continue into the future indefinitely.⁴ However, according to Bury, there is no generally accepted scale upon which to measure progress (what constitutes progress--evolution of technology or human morals or political systems? is civilization moving in the right direction and how can we be sure?) and no insurance that any present progress will continue indefinitely (3-4), or will continue to be considered progress.

Bury concludes that "[b]elief in [progress] is an act of faith" (4). It is, he asserts,

a theory which involves a synthesis of the past and a prophecy of the future. It is based on an *interpretation* of history which regards men as

⁴ One form of this belief is the expectation of infinite economic growth and greater profits year after year.

slowly advancing . . . in a definite and desirable direction, and *infers* that this progress will continue indefinitely. (5, emphasis added)

This new faith, based upon interpretations of the past and inferences about the future, constitutes no minor development in the history of humanity but, instead, marks a radical break with the past.

The idea of progress, Bury claims, "would have struck [the Greeks] as audacious, the theory of men unduly elated and perilously at ease in the presence of unknown and uncalculable powers" (18). Such a prescient vision of the modern concept of progress is powerfully revelatory when considered in light of the recent development of nuclear energy, whose vast powers for destruction have been confirmed and have only with difficulty been harnessed for more positive ends, but whose safety as a power source remains questionable at best due to the volatility of the technology that generates the energy as well as the wastes it produces, which remain toxic for millennia. "Pourquoi un monde moderne," asks Rimbaud, seemingly anticipating such developments, "si de pareils poisons s'inventent!" [Why a modern world, if such poisons are invented!] (220). certainly people have feared and continue to fear the side effects of electricity and the toxic elements of nuclear power, but by and large people trust that such power sources has been or will soon be tamed. In the face of the unknown, humans do indeed appear to evince blind, even foolish, complacency, something foreign to the Greek whose world was filled with inexplicable happenings.⁵

⁵ The modern world, too, is full of inexplicable phenomena. They simply are not recognized as such. Few people understand the functioning of modern technology and could, if deposited on a desert island with all the necessary equipment, construct a toaster, let alone a car or a computer.

Spengler, whose *The Decline of the West* can be read as a contribution to the debate on progress, argues that the concept of "progress," among other conceptions people have about themselves, "is an exclusively Western hypothesis, living and valid for a season" (165). It has evolved, as a concept, over the course of a few centuries, but as a means of understanding the world it will eventually lose its powers of description. With each country, the concept has a particular history--focussing on economics or science or philosophy--but it culminates in the Enlightenment, in the belief in human rationality, the conviction that reason alone can and will solve the problems of humanity. As such, progress manifested itself in "rapid changes . . . which provided the background of historical optimism" later associated with progress (Iggers 46). Progress, and that optimism which often accompanies it, helps define the modern era but is also, as Spengler noted, particular to it as well. Benjamin, in Notebook "N," argues that in rejecting progress one must also reject decline: "Overcoming the concept of 'progress' and the concept of 'period of decline' are two sides of one and the same thing" (48). Spengler's theories of decline, then, are as much a product of the modern era as is "progress."

Progress, which implies constant change, has also produced conflicts. Marshall Berman notes that one of the recurring fears of "the modern ruling class" remains something people "have always yearned for: prolonged solid stability" (95). In a capitalist world, though, "stability can only mean entropy, slow death" (95). The capitalist economy survives on change, requires it for its continued existence. Although people want, and perhaps expect progress, they begin to desire, alongside it, permanence. The optimism associated with progress exists side by side with fear of

the unknown. It is this world of anticipation and dread that Baudelaire describes when he writes of the modern world as a simultaneously eternal and ephemeral world.

Ultimately, the question arises: Is change, within a world that remains largely the same, finally to be considered "progress"? W. J. Cash describes "progress" in the American South as follows: "And so it went along the line in these years. On all sides there was change, but everywhere it was taking place within the lines laid down in the past" (233). Progress, in other words, requires no great ruptures, merely development along "the lines laid down in the past." Earlier, as we just saw, progress involved revolution, an abrupt change of direction, in France, and Benjamin seems to imply such an element when he writes that an apologetic history of the existing order "misses those jags and crags that offer a handhold to someone who wishes to move beyond them" ("N" 65), the "jags and crags" being "revolutionary moments in the course of history" (64) which seem to offer dramatic change. Such change better describes Henry Miller's implicit call, in "Murder the Murderer," as we saw in the last chapter, for a rupture with the past, a decisive change of direction.

Bury specifies three characteristics associated with the idea of progress, "the growth of modern science, . . . the growth of rationalism, and . . . the struggle for political and religious liberty" (348). Historian Georg G. Iggers offers a somewhat different notion of what characterizes progress: "the incessant growth of scientific knowledge and technological control, the transformation of society from an order of privilege to an order of meritocracy, and the extension of these modern forms of civilization" (58). Iggers' first component essentially combines Bury's first two and straightforwardly acknowledges the idea of "control" within the concept of "progress." Iggers and Bury similarly incorporate the idea of liberty into progress, though they use

different terms which suggest a somewhat different conception of liberty. Where they most clearly differ is in Igger's additional notion of the "extension" of progress to other lands, what might be more correctly termed imperialism, economic as well as cultural imperialism, further politicizing the notion of progress, perhaps returning to it a critical element Benjamin saw lacking. Neither Bury nor Iggers, however, incorporates the idea of "rupture" into the concept of progress, and it is there, perhaps, that Miller's notion of progress differs most definitively.

It's Getting So Much Better All the Time

The "extension" of progress might be understood as an important vindication of progress and its concomitants, inasmuch as it appears to support the popular perception that progress has improved the whole of the lives of the people (and not just the material conditions). This extension, however, provokes distress in Miller, as we saw in Chapter Two. In Miller's view, the advertisements for progress are fundamentally misleading to those in the capitalist countries but more especially to inhabitants of other countries in different stages of (capitalist or pre-capitalist) development. The latter perceive the so-called benefits of progress, the shelves in American stores filled with new products, but overlook the drawbacks: "they don't see the bitterness in the heart, the skepticism, the emptiness . . . which is eating up the American worker," Miller declares (*Nightmare* 33), describing worker alienation. They do not see, in other words, the inhuman system the workers must submit to in order to reap the benefits of "progress."

Rimbaud, writing *à propos* of imperialism, depicts progress as a brutal force demanding immediate and unconditional surrender in the newly-subjected populations:

"Les blancs débarquent. Le canon! Il faut se soumettre au baptême, s'habiller, travailler" [The whites debark. Cannon!/Canon! We must submit to baptism, dress, work] (201). Alluding to the Spanish meeting with the Aztecs in Tenochtitlan or the later colonizers of North America encountering the natives living along the east coast or the European conquest of large parts of Africa, Rimbaud perceives progress as a technological and spiritual force removing people from their first innocence and, through compulsion, modernizing them--as if Westerners have played the role of the snake and thrust the apple from the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" into the mouths of these "savages." Here, "modernizing" in the technological sense, or to employ the current term, *development*,⁶ has grave consequences, including deadening, mindless labor as well as warfare, and in the spiritual sense, social restrictions and new taboos, new shames, that would seem to belie the positive notion of progress, whether linked to the improvement of human comfort or to the settling of a "new" continent and an improvement of human potentialities. Translating the French word "canon" to mean a collection of texts, such as the Bible, Rimbaud's vision of religion as a regressive and oppressive force emerges, for the smug bourgeois has only a limited notion of "progress," that which benefits the bourgeois class and that which reflects the bourgeois class as it would like to perceive itself.

One of the conceptual changes that occurred between the age of Enlightenment and the time when Henry Miller begins to write is that most philosophers no longer conceived humans as innately good, as perfectible. The numerous and bloody wars fought throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and most especially the early twentieth

⁶ Such a term serves to characterize the actions as good, beneficent, rather than to describe them.

centuries, cast sharp doubts on any optimistic view of humanity. A new conception, more cynical, largely replaced the earlier one, taking into account "the destructive and aggressive aspects" of human beings (Iggers 58). And if humans were "destructive and aggressive" then the fruits of their labors, the fruits of progress, might also be.

In an era before imperialism switched into high gear, Charles Baudelaire, in *Mon Coeur mis à nu*, notes for his autobiography, despairs of the news reported daily:

Il est impossible de parcourir un gazette quelconque, de n'importe quel jour ou quel mois ou quelle année, sans y trouver à chaque ligne les signes de la perversité humaine la plus épouvantable, en même temps que *les vanteries* les plus suprenantes de probité, de bonté, de charité, et les affirmations le plus effrontés relatives au progrès et à la civilisation. [It is impossible to peruse any gazette, from no matter what day or what month or what year, without finding there on each line the signs of the most fearsome human perversity, at the same time as the most surprising boasts of integrity, of goodwill, of charity, and the most impudent affirmations relative to progress and civilization.] (*Oeuvres* 424).

Baudelaire expresses amazement that newspapers, whose daily subject matter--crime and all manner of human depravity--would seem to contradict the idea, boast of progress in the face of their own contents. The fact that they continue to make such claims for progress would seem to confirm the public's blind belief in it, perhaps even their *need* to believe in progress, given that they must sacrifice their present life, in working, for future enjoyment.

The result of such a blind faith is mental regression. Miller characterizes Americans, bragging of their success, of their delight in the fruits of progress, as "a pack of children. Senile idiots. What we call life is a five-and-ten cent store romance. [...] That cheap optimism which turns the stomach of any ordinary European" (*Cancer* 307). Miller refers, here, to the rags-to-riches romances of Horatio Alger, or Hollywood success stories, where any worthy person can supposedly become

rich, and where the movement from poverty to affluence is viewed, naively, as (inevitable) progress. Most Americans, in Miller's view, infected by the optimism that goes hand-in-hand with American conceptions of progress, have only a narrow vision of their world--childish, blind, romantic--failing to see, or else forgetful of, the destructiveness in what they do: "We're like a herd of wild horses with blinders over our eyes. On the rampage. [...] We're pulling the whole world down about our ears. We don't know why. It's our destiny" (307-08). Progress, rather than something controlled by people, is "unleashed" (*Wisdom* 34). Like the contents of Pandora's Box, progress personifies a chaotic and independent force (like the economic system discussed in the last chapter), though it may be that progress should more correctly be compared to a river whose energy could be channelled and used productively to improve the lot of humanity rather than to simply line the coffers of the those who already benefit from progress.

Similar to the Pandora's Box vision of progress, Miller views progress as a calamity. In *Black Spring*, he enumerates what he calls, "The plague of modern progress":

colonization, trade, free Bibles, war, disease, artificial limbs, factories, slaves, insanity, neuroses, psychoses, cancer, syphilis, tuberculosis, anemia, strikes, lockouts, starvation, nullity, vacuity, restlessness, striving, despair, ennui, suicide, bankruptcy, arterio-sclerosis, megalomania, schizophrenia, hernia, cocaine, prussic acid, stink bombs, tear gas, mad dogs, auto-suggestion, auto-intoxication, psychotherapy, hydrotherapy, electric messages, vacuum cleaners, pemmican, grape nuts, hemorrhoids, gangrene. No desert isles. No Paradise. Not even a *relative* happiness. Men running away from themselves so frantically that they look for salvation under the ice flows or in tropical swamps, or else they climb the Himalayas or asphyxiate themselves in the stratosphere . . . (45-6, ellipses in original)

Such a listing contains a number of factors that cannot necessarily be ascribed to modernity or progress--disease, starvation, mad dogs--though their persistence becomes less understandable in an era where progress should, in theory, have eliminated them. This list also includes obvious problematical outcomes of progress, some of which have already been explored--factories, war, vacuity, imperialism--as well as the general malaise of modernity, the uneasiness and dissatisfaction that some people feel.

Where the list above becomes most interesting, however, is in its reading, against the grain, of some apparently positive outcomes of progress--artificial limbs and psychotherapy for instance. It might be that Miller does not disparage the development of artificial limbs so much as the (continued) need for them: new and improved devices for blowing up people, developed by the military, motivate the medical industry to technological feats with artificial limbs. Recent inventions, such as the automobile, also induce a host of new injuries as well as a greater number of what once were relatively rare injuries.⁷ Psychotherapy too, rather than simply a modern cure, may signify recognition of the greater difficulty surviving in the modern world presents, as well as a way of labelling people and making the world easier to explain, on the surface.

Feats of courage and strength, included in the above listing, such as crossing the North Pole on sled or scaling certain mountain ranges, appear to be mere sensationalism to Miller, rather than assertions of an extension, or progression, of human capabilities. While Miller can be understood to be complaining about the non-utilitarian ends of such feats, it is rather the unthinking, self-congratulatory tone of

⁷ For more on this subject, see the opening pages of the chapter entitled "Speed" in Stephen Kern's *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918*.

such news (as typified by newsreels shown before films in the nineteen-twenties and thirties and forties, for instance), which provokes his criticism. Just as Miller earlier designated mainstream cinema one of the opiates of the masses, news about human accomplishments can be understood as another such opiate, for such feats, *affirmative* in the Marcusian sense, project the illusion of progress and control of nature and lull the viewer or reader into contentment and a false sense of the mastery of nature, of improved living conditions hence an improved life.

Miller, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Progress

Miller's conception of Progress, in contrast to his position on killing, can be fairly easily determined: Progress has been a disaster. "The world is pooped-out," Miller writes in *Cancer*, "there isn't a dry fart left" (249); its an empty belly too weary to groan. In *Black Spring*, he has called progress a "plague," as we have seen, a particularly virulent strain, based on the results as he enumerates them. If Western civilization is on the decline, as he, Spengler and others believe, then progress has halted, or is grinding to a halt, in which case "the march of progress was a dead march" (*Time* 156) because it did not lead to a significantly improved world; or at least it is less to be boasted of than heretofore, given the sacrifices demanded.

Paralleling his later sarcastic call for all-out war in "Murder the Murderer," in *Cancer* Miller calls for all-out progress:

Forward! Forward without pity, without compassion, without love, without forgiveness. Ask no quarter and give none! More battleships, more poison gas, more high explosives! More gonococci! More streptococci! More bombing machines! More and more of it--until the whole fucking works is blown to smithereens, and the earth with it! (267)

Miller's description of progress links it with warfare, suggesting yet again that the greatest beneficiary of progress is the military, who have more weapons at their disposal, as well as the wealthy, who manage to outfit the military at a substantial profit to themselves. Progress leads to disaster (as well as a plague again); it is its own mirror image. "They read progress and evolution," writes Miller, "in the bloody wake of Moloch" (*Remember* 336).

The dehumanization of people in work and recreation and war, the brutality required to break them rather than the machines, is this "bloody wake," which usually appears as richly displayed commodities unconnected to the producers. Worse, people cannot make sense of the facts they see before them; two plus two *is five* (to quote the title of a collection of poems by e. e. cummings).⁸ New and improved killing machines, or new and improved methods of manipulating people (electronic advertisements, for instance), or new and improved machines that require less of the operator who now only pushes a button every thirteen seconds for hours at a time, do not constitute progress, for Miller, but rather tragedy. People are not raised up by progress, but beaten down, reduced.

Baudelaire's rejection of the "new," which "makes no contribution at all to progress" ("Central Park," 53), as Benjamin notes, incorporates a similar suspicion and is expressed venomously as well. Benjamin contends that Baudelaire attacks the concept of progress "with his hate, as if it were heresy, false doctrine, rather than a simple error" (53). As suggested in his critique of newspapers above, Baudelaire conceives of progress as predominantly a human issue, as it relates to human

⁸ cummings' title suggests, hopefully, a smashing of the domination of "numbers" and a blinding rationality.

behaviors. The popular notion of progress, however, turns away from the mirror and looks for hope elsewhere. "La croyance au progrès est une doctrine de paresseux [....] Il ne peut y avoir de progrès (vrai, c'est-à-dire moral) que dans l'individu et par l'individu lui-même" [The belief in progress is a doctrine of the lazy--There can only be progress (true progress, that is to say *moral*) in the individual and by the individual] (*Oeuvres* 408). Products can only constitute progress to the degree that they improve the people themselves, or help people to improve themselves, and not merely their material conditions.

Baudelaire characterizes the individual as "ivre de son génie" [intoxicated with his/her genius] ("Le Voyage," *FM*, 158), hence incapable of determining what is truly of value. New products do not mark progress for Baudelaire; progress or its opposite--as suggested in Baudelaire's wrath against newspapers proclaiming "progress" alongside reports of murders, robberies, and other crimes--can be measured only in the behavior humans exhibit toward each other. As such, we might look at the prose poem about the glazier who sells colored glass and the treatment he receives at the hands of the narrator and see that consumer capitalism has engendered neither prosperity nor contentment, but rather frustration and bitterness, which is often unleashed upon the intermediaries of progress rather than the primary beneficiaries.

French artists in the second half of the nineteenth century rejected notions of "progress," in turning art in upon itself and denying that the market's role as ultimate judge, denying the work of art's necessary reference to the outer world, while at the same time striving for a realism that took them outside proper academic circles. Innovators of the movement, *l'Art pour l'Art*, included writers Gustave Flaubert and the Parnassians, and painters Gustave Courbet and Édouard Manet. Benjamin asserts that

what arises from *l'Art pour l'Art* is "the conception of the total work of art, which attempts to isolate art against the developments of technology" (CB 172). Manet, discussing and defending his painting *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* [*Picnic on the Grass*], refuses to link features of the painting to mythology or some "higher" intention, as academic painting would have. The stiffness of the figures in the painting prevent it, however, from being read as strictly a realistic painting. Instead, Manet encloses the painting within itself as an aesthetic whole, where the parts explain and justify each other. The painting, the novel, and the poem then follow their own laws which "are distinct from those of familiar reality, and [the artist's] first loyalty is to the canvas, not to the outside world" (Janson & Janson 379). Such a position rejects the marketplace because of its *vulgarity*, because it seeks only "copies of nature" as Baudelaire wrote rather than works that shock *and* challenge, and the corresponding drop in the quality of the works available there.

Legitimate scorn for the marketplace, however, which has reduced craftsmen to button-pushers and sacrificed quality for quantity, can only with difficulty be separated from elitism which simply detests the masses as beings without taste and education. Moreover, as artists find themselves on the defensive, attempting to satisfy an uncomprehending public, they often take harsher, more conservative, anti-democratic, anti-populist stands. Initially, however, it is possible that, along with academic art, many artists merely rejected the capitalist system, the marketplace, as the arbiter of value when it plainly devalued products through destroying craft, as an appropriate venue for art, and therefore suggests a rejection of "progress" rather than support for a strict and obtrusive elitism.

Just as Miller calls for a critique of progress, a call that has yet to be heeded except by subcultures like the Beats of the fifties, the New Left and the Hippies of the 'sixties, Baudelaire considers the concept of progress as a means of ignoring the present, since it "is predicated on a historical continuum"; current events, thus, have less weight and are merely "rooted in the past" (Blanchard 111). Rather than examining the present, and making demands on the here-and-now, many look forward to an improvement--*later*. Meanwhile, the majority of people live in misery, hence Benjamin's conception of progress, drawn from his study of nineteenth-century France, that it "is to be grounded in the idea of the catastrophe. That things 'just go on' *is* the catastrophe. [Progress]," he reminds us, "is not that which is approaching but that which is" ("Central Park" 50). The ideology of progress obliges, or at minimum encourages, people to ignore day-to-day life and to be distracted by planning for some vague future, since the life of the moment can be examined and judged. Progress, therefore, in the hands of the wealthy, replaces Christianity in the hands of the priests, as a slave morality, in Nietzsche's phrase, that keeps most people submissive and expectant. Belief in progress tends to subdue the rebellious elements in those who benefit least from the current system by promising future improvements--more products as a sort of heaven, a better environment to live in and more free time to enjoy it, developments which may or may not take place within the next several generations, since they have failed to occur in the last fifty years or more.

Like Miller, Rimbaud, as we have seen, clearly perceives the brutality inherent in progress. Imperialism, one of the underwriters of modern progress since it provides so much of the raw materials and impetus for "development" and change that fuels the system, embodies little or none of the paternalism popularly associated with it.

Kristen Ross distinguishes Rimbaud's anti-progress attitude from the typical anti-progress attitude of the nineteenth century, which she characterizes as "the clamor of bourgeois intellectuals who feared progress because they thought it meant equality" (28). At least one strain of the anti-progress protest is a protest against political liberalism, in the form of democracy and socialism. Rimbaud, as a champion of the Paris Commune and of the working class, rejects progress as he realizes that, contrary to then-current perceptions, "it has nothing to do with equality" (28) and everything to do with solidifying the current stratification of society which sustains continuing oppression. The notion of "progress" merely strengthens the position of its main beneficiaries, the bourgeois class. Ross also opposes Rimbaud's prose, "a non-expository, nondidactic prose," to a utilitarian prose in the service of "the great pedagogical movement of the century of progress" intended to effect "step by step enlightenment of the masses" (27)--in order to turn them into good workers. Understanding that education is incorporation, an instilling of the values of a certain culture, Rimbaud's prose can be understood as a sign that he supports "the side of emancipation rather than pedagogy" (27-8).

Miller, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud perceive the brutality inherent in progress and realize, as well, that it functions as a distraction, as an incursion, that the modern world is fundamentally shaped by the concept of progress--only progress as popularly conceived differs substantially from progress as generally experienced. Human rationality, in the service of progress, especially technological progress, is dehumanizing, ignoring the individual and working against a more comprehensive vision of the world through simplification and confusion.

Reason to the Nth Degree

As briefly discussed above, Charles Dickens' novel *Hard Times* depicts children forced to memorize and recapitulate facts. Dickens satirizes this type of schooling because he realizes that what is lost in the obsession with accumulating more and more facts is a broader understanding of the object under examination. The ability to list all the parts of a combustion engine does not ensure an understanding of how it functions nor the potential uses for such a machine. Miller expresses a similar distaste for such habits of mind: "This is a mania--*explaining* things. It goes with a certain type of mind which I abhor. And always leaves me with the feeling that nothing is explained, that we are simply eating into a hole" (*Hamlet* 114). Miller seems to be arguing that some things require a logical leap that moves beyond a simple gathering of facts; another possibility, however, is that Miller laments a focus on details when it is the larger, more encompassing perspective that needs clarification. Miller is suggesting, once again, that modern people obsess on the little things to the detriment of a more comprehensive vision of their world.

Max Horkheimer describes such a habit of mind, wherein "[e]verything and everybody is classified and labelled" (*Eclipse* 23), as an approach to making sense of the world which actually reduces it. While science requires methods of organization to impose on chaotic nature, these schemata have only limited utility and should not be mistaken for what they describe. Horkheimer warns against an uncritical use of them, especially in the field of philosophy, writing, "the logic of identity is a symptom of the quest for certainty, the all-too-human impulse to trim intellectual needs down to pocket size" (167). It is this "trimming" which Miller alludes to when he writes of explanation as "eating into a hole"--explanations carried out so far, in hope of reaching

some final understanding, that the concepts lose all shape and connection with their origin and become, in effect, false.

Especially when applied to people, such tendencies can become dysfunctional. "The pigeon-hole into which a man is shoved," writes Horkheimer, "circumscribes his fate" (*Eclipse* 23). Rather than allowing workers to develop a variety of skills, employers prefer to nurture and exploit one narrowly specialized skill, in each person. A worker, then, is labelled a machinist, or what-have-you, and fitted into some scheme under that single designation. As we saw in the previous chapter, such labelling induces a certain de-skilling of laborers, such that one particular skill develops while others atrophy. The effect of this upon the worker, as Marx has described it, is to inspire alienation, for the worker is no longer truly engaged in work. Moreover, he or she is now much easier to replace. The kind of reasoning Horkheimer denounces produces goods faster, with lower expenses, but at the price of the worker's loyalty, career development, humanity.

Such an appropriation of reason can be directly related to progress, to Francis Bacon's notion that "the end of knowledge is utility," for reason, along with most everything else, becomes subjugated to usefulness: It is instrumentalized, its value based solely upon the uses to which it can be put. Reason, finally, is "completely harnessed to the social process" and assessed with regard to its effectiveness in "its role in the domination of men and nature" (Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 21). Truly, as Rimbaud wrote, "the vision of numbers."

What is missing in this focus on reason, naturally, is humanity, and, more to the point for Henry Miller, something that humans, like nature, are quite capable of but not always willing or able to express. Miller quotes French writer Henri de

Montherlant and then harangues those who today we might call bureaucrats or number-crunchers:

"I'm not talking logic. I'm talking generosity." [...] You think to supply guns and ammunition to the winning side is generosity. You think sending Red Cross nurses to the front or the Salvation Army is generosity. [...]; you think if you give a man his old job back it's generosity. You don't even know what the fucking word means, you bastards! To be generous is to say Yes before the man even opens his mouth. You can even say Yes and No at the same time, provided you do more than is expected of you. (*Capricorn* 294-95)

Miller revolts against reason when those exercising it can ignore what we call today "the human element," the human cost or impact, and even suggests that reason has only a limited role in human relations if it can be used to argue *against* generosity. As with lending, Miller's call for generosity can be read as self-serving, but such a narrow reading collapses quickly, for Miller seeks to influence actions well beyond the mere exchange of money. Progress and reason, for Miller, as well as Baudelaire and Rimbaud, must be linked to humans, to human development and to relations among humans.

In order to better understand Miller's critique of reason, it might be helpful to look at Horkheimer's analysis of reason in *Eclipse of Reason*. Horkheimer divides reason into *subjective* and *objective* reason. Subjective reason can be understood, basically, as reason seen through the Baconian lens, reason as relative to what is useful, productive, remunerative. Objective reason, alternatively, is founded upon some universal or broadly cultural sense of right and wrong--usually on some religious sense of the world. Horkheimer claims that in the era of high capitalism subjective is now more dominant than objective. He does not, however, relegate objective reason to the dunghill of the past.

Miller rejects subjective reason, for it results in generosity that is offered only because it is useful, convenient, productive. Generosity, in that case, is largely self-serving. In contrast, the poor giving alms to the poor, as Engels describes it, provides an example of people giving charity because they empathize with the supplicant and because this person is part of the community and the role of each member of a community is to help those in need.

What Miller advocates instead, for example in his attitude toward money, is a move away from subjective reason, perhaps even from reason in general, into a full-fledged, heart-felt generosity, like "the fool who . . . gives without question" (*Sexus* 62), wherein people truly live the Christian ideal of giving. Subjective reason balks at such logic, and occasionally Miller relates encounters with Christians espousing a mixture of subjective and objective reason, refusing to lend money with the words that God will provide, never questioning whether God had sought to provide *through them*. Refusing to lend Miller money towards his rent, one such friend says, "God will shelter you with His blessed wings. He watches over the homeless just as much as He does over others" (*Plexus* 202-03). Such Christianity appears heartless.

Furthermore, reason dominated by the concept of utility has helped to destroy the beauty of America and cities in the West in general, as we saw in Chapter One. "Everything that was of beauty, significance or promise has been destroyed and buried in the avalanche of false progress," Miller writes during his tour of America in 1940 (*Nightmare* 36). Rather than renovate or restore, those who take responsibility for modernizing cities usually prefer to raze old buildings and replace them with new buildings, structures not designed to last but to be once again replaced. The result is that cities in America, except where they are abandoned to the poor, are often largely

composed of modern buildings designed with immediate utilitarian concerns, rather than a sense that a building contributes to the skyline, to the history and beauty of a city, to the life of the citizens. In many European cities, buildings--especially those built before the First World War--have the year they were completed and the name of the architect engraved on them, suggesting both the historical place of the building as well as the architect's pride in the design. Such information has no place in a city with little or no architectural history and whose buildings further few aesthetic values.

Development, thus, where it has occurred has often not been a positive experience for cities or city-dwellers. As James Kunstler notes, progress has ruined the cities and towns: "Ever-busy, ever-building, ever-in-motion, ever-throwing-out the old for the new, we have hardly paused to think about what we are so busy building, and what we have thrown away" (10). Like Miller, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Benjamin, among many others, Kunstler laments the apparently blind force of progress, the bull in the china shop, the vision of numbers, the idea that bigger is better simply because it is *bigger*, or more is better because it is *more*. Baudelaire, when confronted with a Paris transformed by Haussmann, which seemed to embody the "promise of change-as-progress" (Buck-Morss 178), pens "Le Cygne" [The Swan], a despairing poem that does not so much lament the lost past as the fact that the present is no better, for all the change: "Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancolie / N'a bougé!" [Paris changes! but nothing in my melancholy / has altered!] ("Le Cygne," *FM*, 96). The sense of loss has not been ameliorated by marveling over the new. Everything, beauty included, is subordinated to utility, to money-making, rather than providing an attractive environment in which people can live peacefully. "Progress," broadly conceived, is yet again deferred.

Miller, in his criticism of the lack of human generosity as well as in his criticism of cities, suggests the existence of a conflict between instrumental reason and aesthetic values. Horkheimer and Adorno seem to agree, only they view the struggle as largely over. "The earth, now rational, no longer feels the need of an aesthetic reflection" (251), they assert. They are not quite correct, however, for people do need "aesthetic reflection," for instance the relaxation afforded by the cinema, when they leave their machines for the day. Aesthetic reflection has value, is even encouraged, when it serves a useful end--nurturing and rejuvenating exhausted workers so they can toil day after day--but it should not inspire viewers to reflect upon their existence, should not suggest that life could be otherwise, for then its utilitarian aims would be thwarted by strikes or slowdowns. Hence, aesthetic reflection has been limited and subordinated to a functional end, hollowed out, in the Benjaminian sense. Consequently, reason, advanced with little or no concern for humans, has served to curb human experience rather than to extend it.

Raging Against the Machine

Life is certainly not more filled with experience when most everything that occurs must consistently be related back to some utilitarian end. For Miller, "the life of the modern man is pale and empty. [...] He has become the victim of his own inner emptiness; his torments are the torments of sterility" (*Time* 126-27). The machine age inaugurates the age of humans as automatons, going through the daily gestures of life, work, and love, without any real interest, without energy, lulled into the half-sleep within which they function. Moreover, the department store, which Sennett describes as the "complement to the factory" (*Public* 143), helps further transform the public

sphere into "an experience of publicness more intense and less sociable" (141). Rather than interacting with merchants, in bargaining over prices, products stirring up customers' desires are now marked with their prices, and the customer's options are either to purchase the product at that price or to move on to another store. The silence typifying the merchant-customer relationship spreads to envelop relationships between customers as well.

Writing of Rimbaud, Miller notes that for him, "the earth was not a dead place . . . but a live, throbbing mysterious planet, where men, if they but knew it may dwell as kings" (*Time* 156). It is not fate that has made the world the way it is, but people who look for progress, in the outside world only, rather than comparing their lives, as they are, with the notion of progress. Because of choices people have made, the planet has become "an eyesore" (156). Horkheimer notes the human cost of progress should probably have been visible as far back as the time of Bacon. "Domination of nature," he writes, "involves domination of man" (*Eclipse* 93). In order for people to subdue nature, to bend it to their uses, they "must subjugate nature" in themselves (93), must repress desires and needs, whatever is not amenable to the utilitarian aims of control and domination--hence, the sterility denounced by Miller. Sennett argues in *The Fall of Public Man* that one site where such subjugation manifests itself is the public sphere where people regard one another but do not interact, for fear of giving themselves away, of betraying emotions and inclinations that might be misinterpreted, or for fear of being different.

At the same time, as people struggle to dominate themselves and nature, they rarely stop to question the purpose of it all, beyond making money, either for themselves or others. "What have we [America] to offer the world," Miller asks,

beside the super-abundant loot which we recklessly plunder from the earth under the delusion that this insane activity represents progress and enlightenment? The land of opportunity has become the land of senseless sweat and plunder. (*Nightmare* 20)

Such activity, for Miller, dedicated to thankless toil for most and to amassing wealth for a few, is not an end in itself, and whatever purposes it serves, whatever roles it appears to play in the life of human beings, it is work and it is destruction. In the name of progress, labor continues and is constantly refined, but without essentially changing its character, usually only making it more demanding. A select few gain greater wealth and can purchase more and more products, or businesses, but the lives of the many remain largely unchanged if not actually worsened.

Horkheimer argues, "the blind development of the technology strengthens social oppression" (*Eclipse* 134). The artisanal quality once associated with much labor is outmoded when labor is reduced to maintenance of machines or to simple, repetitive motions. Workers come to realize they are easily replaceable--and had better submit if they wish to keep their income. More broadly, Miller asserts, echoing Engels' statement at the beginning of this chapter, "We never think beforehand of the consequences which a new invention entails" (*Remember* xxix); though he refers to the atom bomb, his assessment can be related to other developments. Moreover, Paul LaFargue, writing in 1880, argued that such blindness went all the way back to the Greeks of Cicero's time, where it was thought that the invention of a water-powered mill would free slaves and workers to enjoy leisure. Instead, he writes, it impoverished them (31). W. J. Cash provides a more recent illustration of the problem, observing in 1939 that the invention of a cotton picking machine "promises to eliminate most or all of the sharecroppers and a great many of the tenants within a

short period, since it overcomes the last and principal barrier to the mechanization of Southern cotton farming" (411). Picking cotton may be back-breaking labor, but for some it is the only work they have. The new machine displaces not only the sharecroppers, but also tenants unable to afford the purchase of such machines. Displaced sharecroppers and tenants are then forced into cities where there may be few jobs for unskilled laborers and those to be had will be poorly compensated, thus further alienating a group of workers already discontented. Cash adds that there will be other victims, for with more and more cotton on the market and the price plummeting, the new machine will only contribute to the glut and the downward spiral of cotton prices. An invention such as a cotton picking machine, thus, threatened the livelihood of even those who, theoretically, would benefit the most--the large landowners. As a harbinger of progress, the cotton picking machine bore with it, alongside the technological wizardry it represented, socially- and economically-destructive elements.

Another alienating effect of the newer machines employed in factories, as described by Benjamin, is that working them no longer constituted "experience"; since each movement was identical to the previous one, the worker cannot improve (*CB* 133). It is, writes Benjamin, "work . . . devoid of substance" (135). Machines, whether they be cars, sewing machines, or telephones, demand more and more of their operators, requiring faster and faster reactions, both physical and mental, while at the same time demanding less and less of them--as beings with a particular set of skills to be utilized. In Miller's view, "acceleration . . . is the keynote to this new epoch" (*Remember* xxix), and in order to sustain the momentum people must more narrowly

focus their attention, again regulating and adjusting themselves in their attempt to dominate themselves, to repress anything that might distract.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Spengler and Miller agree that people are only valued in relation to the machines they operate. They must "serve them if [they] are to survive," writes Horkheimer (*Eclipse* 97). Miller, likewise, views people as conquered by "our great inventions" (*Remember* xxix). Machines determine what procedures a worker performs as well as at what pace they must be executed. "We pretend that we created them for our own use, but we are no longer the masters, we are the victims" (xxix). William Morris, writing in the second half of the nineteenth century, recognizes a similar feature of the machine age. He asserts,

if the necessary reasonable work be of a mechanical kind, I must be helped to do it by a machine, not to cheapen my labor, but so that as little time as possible may be spent upon it, and that I may be able to think of other things while I am tending the machine. (152)

Morris describes technology serving human beings, not the other way around, so that the person "tending the machine" can be released from wretched servitude and allowed at least greater mental freedom, so that worker community may be develop on the job. But for owners and managers, machines and humans have different and unequal status. While a worker is usually easily replaceable, due to the minute division of labor, a machine represents an investment: if it goes off-line, if it is improperly operated or shoddily maintained, the owner stands to lose money in profits, through lower productivity as well as repair bills. New machines often lead to greater unemployment, at least in the short run. Those who still have jobs must adapt to the requirements of the machine--or relinquish the position.

And even as more work is demanded of factory laborers, they do not inevitably receive pay increases, are often expected to be thankful they even have jobs. Such an outlook explains, in part, Miller and Horkheimer's shared notion that progress, technological developments hailed without any foresight into the results for humans, "threatens at every stage to transform progress into its opposite, complete barbarism" (*Eclipse* 134). Further, rather than incorporating the human element into planning, what Iggers calls "the cult of efficiency" threatens "the elimination of the personal factor" through strengthening "rational social and political control" and the "establishment of impersonal regulation by means of bureaucracy" (60). The individual ceases to have value as a human being, instead becomes interchangeable, a cheap commodity whose life outside the factory demands little or no consideration from the management who, responsible to those above, seldom treat workers as anything other than instruments of the factory.

Workers thus reduced are less likely to take any rebellious steps or to do anything that will cause the bosses and owners any problems, for the powers aligned against the individual seem so all-powerful that the individual merely chooses "to launch himself onto the path prescribed for him" (Horkheimer, *Critique* 4). Pierre Gascar notes that already in the nineteenth century such a system was in place, and aroused the dissatisfaction of French workers, whose "sense of isolation and oppression" was due "in large part from the new form of life industrialization imposed on them" (64)--and which kept them narrowly confined. Progress, then, must be conceived as victimhood, as Miller asserted; or, to put it more dialectically, with "progress" there come victors and victims, remarkable advances and staggering defeats.

The surrender of both the outer and the inner life, by the worker, coincides with the decline of aesthetic enjoyment for its own sake. As we saw in Chapter Three, a person not working is lazy--or is perceived that way by the bosses as well as those in the communities who regard *dawdling* as an evil. "Relaxation," writes Horkheimer, "comes to be regarded as a kind of vice so far as it is not necessary to assure fitness for further activity" (*Eclipse* 152). The issue is that people should be gainfully employed, producing for the owners, not relaxing or dreaming, neither producing something quantifiable nor purchasing products such that they contribute to the economy. Kunstler observes that "if the worker was a new kind of slave, then the industrial method of production itself was the new master" (71), such that economic necessity, as we have already seen, takes its place as the new boss. That being the case, however, Kunstler contends that the daily reality of the workers, "[t]he naked brutality of industry was the most difficult thing to reconcile with any theory of the utopian future" (71). "Progress" for the average laborer was not toward an amelioration of life but entailed an actual worsening of conditions. While there were some who benefited from technological advances, workers by and large did not. Technological advances either further enslaved them, deprived them of their jobs--or passed them by, inspiring resentment: perhaps they were lucky enough to own an automobile; if so they could not afford the new ones though they did notice them, which served only "to inflame [their] envy" (Cash 268). Fashion, that dream-world, becomes submerged in another dream-world, progress, and prompts desires that--quite often--can only be thwarted.

The life of the worker is, in large part, one of disappointment, even misery. Their surroundings, the tenements as well as the factories themselves, inspire only

further distress. Even modern architecture, in the form of a factory designed by one of the master architects of the age, Frank Lloyd Wright, does little to relieve the situation for the worker. Miller, who visited a factory Wright designed, contends that while such architecture might adhere strictly to modernist aesthetic principles, it fails to correspond to human aesthetics and only abets the misery of the worker:

This place is flawless--deathlike. Man has no chance to create once inside this mausoleum. Just work endlessly. Man doesn't want to work efficiently. He wants to work inefficiently. This is perfect for automats. Not for men and women. Here you work fully exposed--every movement can be detected. It's a theatrical performance and the wages are death. (*Nightmare Notebook* n.p.)

The antiseptic architecture, designed for an aesthetically anemic culture, merely provides an apt backdrop to the inhuman activity that takes place inside it in front of machines. At the same time, it provides owners and managers the means for greater control of workers, thus aligning architecture with the side of oppression.

Rather than augmenting life, providing a counterpoint to the monotonous work going on inside it, modern architecture generally reflects the inhumanity of life as it is currently lived, finally reinforces what is already a day-to-day reality. "It is sad to think," writes Miller,

that a country which has the greatest advantages has so little to show for it. It is sad to think that scarcely anyone likes the job he is doing, that scarcely anyone believes in the work he is doing, that almost no one . . . sees any hope in the future. It is even more sad to observe that no real effort is made to do anything about anything. (*Remember* xviii)

For Miller, as for Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud, it is the individual and life which matters, but individuals rarely unite to take matters into their own hands and try to change things. The assumption of bourgeois values by the working class, one form of consumer capitalism's attack on individualism, helps to further destroy their sense of

community, and without organization they often lose sight of those circumstances that unite them--and differentiate them from those for whom they work.

Miller's warning, within the context of "work," is worth repeating within the context of "progress": "Earning a living has nothing to do with living" (40). The idea that either working is living or that having a job will allow a person to benefit from "progress," to purchase all the new commodities on the market, is misguided. The sense of community, as well as the family itself, can be seen to suffer from such a confused notion of what constitutes life; either work or the accumulation of "things," or both, becomes the focus of people's lives, but neither can be absolutely described as constituting the blessings of progress.

The acceleration that characterizes modernity, for Miller, reflects the influence of machines. This acceleration is part and parcel of the machine age. But these machines, occasionally serving people but more often served by them, force people to surrender to them (Horkheimer and Adorno 222). Progress, here, means capitulation, *incorporation*--in Miller's term, victimization.

Rescuing the Individual

Incorporation is antithetical to freedom, because it happens without people really being wholly aware of it, and because it tends to produce people with much the same outlook and too many of the same desires. While such molding might serve the capitalist system, ensuring smooth functioning of factories and other sites of production--department stores--it does not serve the individual. "Freedom," writes Miller, "is bound up with differentiation" (*Time* 49)--different goals in life, different hopes for the future, and different tastes in clothes, hairstyles, and movies. The only

way for the individual to survive, in this world dominated by machines and mass culture, is to wage an all-out struggle to maintain "one's unique identity in a world tending to make everyone and everything alike" (49). Much of this uniqueness, certainly, is already lost in people who form part of a society, but vestiges of uniqueness may remain and these vestiges, even more under attack in our time, are what Miller refers to.

Friedrich Nietzsche, writing in a late nineteenth-century Germany struggling behind the rest of the West to modernize itself, remarks, "Our time, however much it talks of economy, is a squanderer: it squanders what is most precious, the spirit" (*Portable, The Dawn*, 83). His complaint, remarkably similar to Miller's, laments reducing the skills of a worker to one repetitive motion, and thus using only a small measure of a worker's capabilities, and laments as well a focus on externals, on improving life through technology, producing commodities, expanding cities, or writing new laws, rather than exploring the ways people live and providing more opportunities for people to expand themselves in that way.

Baudelaire, in *Mon Coeur mis à nu*, recognizes what Nietzsche will later point out when he refers to "[l]es abolisseurs d'âme (*materialistes*)" [the abolishers of the spirit (*materialists*)] (*Oeuvres* 410), those who dedicated themselves to accumulating things for the sake of having things, those who feed off a culture rather than contribute to it. In this way, the critique returns to that of the bourgeois household, emulated by working class households, seeking only to conform, which, as Horkheimer asserts, "[i]n our era of large economic combines and mass culture . . . [is] raised to the rank of an ideal *per se*" (*Eclipse* 139). Conformity, especially a blind conformity, results in a diminution of experience.

"The wonder and the mystery of life--which is throttled in us as we become responsible members of society!" (*Capricorn* 144), Miller declaims. The world of the child seems so small and limited, he writes, but contains "boundless potentialities" (145). "I have gained nothing by the enlargement of my world," he adds; "on the contrary, I have lost" (145). It is a wider world that he journeys into, but a world shorn of mystery, delight, chance, and reduced to drudgery. Physically larger, it has become a house without rooms, furniture, paintings, with little or nothing to attract the eye, feed the imagination, providing only a minimum of what humans need to live.

In *The Dawn*, Nietzsche, as do Miller and Horkheimer, asserts that the trade-off workers believe they are making, in submitting to the machine, plainly constitutes surrender:

Phew! to believe that higher pay could abolish the *essence* of their misery--I mean their impersonal serfdom! Phew! to be talked into thinking that an increase in this impersonality, within the machinelike workings of a new society, could transform the shame of slavery into a virtue! Phew! to have a price for which one remains a person no longer but becomes a gear! (90)

Asserting that progress has moved in exactly the opposite direction from that counseled by William Morris, above, this progress reflects progressive enslavement, progressive dehumanization, rather than progress toward self-realization and greater freedom.

But this dehumanized society is the world as Miller, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud, came to know it, a world growing into itself. It is this civilization now, that defines what human beings are, what they can become, what they should be and must be. So when Miller proclaims, "If I am inhuman it is because . . . to be human seems like a poor, sorry, miserable affair" (*Cancer* 259), it is because human beings remain largely

the prisoners of custom, of duty, of so-called necessity, rarely advancing and expanding themselves outside the paths laid-out for them, rarely taking risks except perhaps on Wall Street, and, instead, repressing themselves. Machines, though consistently refined, only rarely alleviate the stress and suffering of the human being. That people accept this state of affairs persuades Miller his only option is to become "inhuman," which means to attempt to live out the possibilities most humans in the West deny themselves, to be almost criminally negligent in evading the responsibilities one is supposed to assume.

Nevertheless, the greatest number of people simply continue along the paths mapped out for them, doing just as they are told. Like the good worker, they must be reasonable, though "to be reasonable," as Max Horkheimer warns, usually "means not to be obstinate," which would be to show a flicker of life; to be reasonable means to be in "conformity with reality as it is" (*Eclipse* 10). This reality, "as it is," defined by the state and/or those who benefit from wage labor, is the "economic necessity" that owners benefit from and which makes work a necessity. "When will we forget about the state," Miller asks, "and think of humanity, of ourselves . . . ?" (*Remember* xxi). Such an attitude is unreasonable, selfish, perhaps even treasonous, and almost certainly "inhuman." In Miller's view, however, while the state demands much of people, their individuality which must be sacrificed in their submission to "economic necessity," the state offers little in return. "Everything proceeds from the living individual" (*Remember* xxi), Miller writes, asserting once more his long-standing concern for the individual. The state exists as "the specter of tyranny" (xxi), where only the strong, perhaps, survive--or, more specifically, benefit. But the survival of the strong is not enough: "There can be no common good unless the individual is recognized first and

foremost--and until the last, the weakest, of men is included" (xxi). This last assertion echoes Eugene V. Debs' claim, which Miller quotes in "Murder the Murderer," that only when there is no one in prison will he be free. Such an echo aligns Miller with those who champion "the little guy" or the "forgotten worker."

As a banned writer, Miller was well-aware of how little freedom he and others had, and of how illusory such freedom generally was. "What do we actually see and hear today?" he asks. "What the censors [i.e. those in power] permit us to see and hear, nothing more" (*Nightmare* 44). Despite improved printing technologies and new electronic media (film and radio), the appearance of a wider and freer dissemination of information remained deceptive.⁹ Such censorship, an example of which regarding movies we examined in Chapter Two, is never apolitical. Along with electricity has come a greater number of cultural artifacts--movies and books, magazines and newspapers, radio and television--and along with that more repression, more regulations about what can be promulgated and what cannot.

"The age of electricity is as far behind us as the Stone Age," Miller writes (*Time* 35), referring to archeological means of describing an epoch based on its level of technological development. The acceleration so characteristic of this age, made possible with electric and gasoline engines, has served to more quickly distance people of the modern era from those of the past, such that the lives of grandparents or great-grandparents are almost unimaginable. Life without a refrigerator?--Impossible. No cinema?--What did you do at night? Electric technology, so pervasive in Miller's

⁹ This is to sidestep the question of the implications of "information," which Walter Benjamin considers in "The Storyteller" and "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," both in *Illuminations*. Newspapers, for instance, present information as a series of unrelated items, provoking a sense of the futility of action on the part of the reader.

world and ours, is insufficient to describe the modern era. It is the uses to which technology is put, finally, that become definitive--hunting, cooking, or city-building.

For Miller, the state utilizes modern technologies to maintain control. "This is the Age of Power, power pure and simple" (35), he writes in 1949--several years after the Americans had dropped an atom bomb and a hydrogen bomb on Japan, the Soviet Union had taken over much of Eastern Europe, the Chinese were fighting a civil war, the Koreans gearing up for one, and *while* the McCarthy era was in full stride in the land of the free, attacking free speech, the fifth amendment, and other basic rights. On a more local level, everything, from the reign of machines to the ubiquitous radio and newspaper, functions to maintain the status quo, if not to actually increase the power of those governing. Miller's declaration of the primacy of the role of power anticipates a similar theme later taken up by French post-structuralist Michel Foucault, the philosopher "credited with welcoming the concept of power into the contemporary philosophical landscape" (Kelley 1), most importantly in his 1975 (in French) *Discipline and Punish*. In regarding censorship and mass media as ubiquitous, Miller senses what Foucault describes, the networks of power, the dynamism of these networks, their expansive reach.

To assert one's individuality in the face of such forces, to identify with certain values not popularly accepted and to live according to them, may seem to mark one a madman, write Horkheimer and Adorno. They hold that in an age of mass media, when incorporation threatens from all sides, to remain an individual requires "superhuman" strength (240). People who do not live according to society's rules, who envision the world differently, are labelled neurotic not only by those who stand to lose the most but by those who are themselves "incorporated," for they too have been

taught to consider such behavior abnormal. This strength, that Horkheimer and Adorno write of, is to keep the "neurotic" in that state in order "not to become healthy [i.e. sick] too" (240). Benjamin, anticipating them, had earlier written, "The hero is the true subject of modernism. In other words, it takes a heroic constitution to live modernism" (CB 74), and attributed such a sentiment to Baudelaire, Balzac and others. Benjamin describes suicide, after noting the recurrence of themes of suicide in nineteenth century literature, as "an act which seals a heroic will that makes no concessions to a mentality inimical toward this will. This suicide is not a resignation but a heroic passion" (75). However difficult it may be to accept this last part, in an age that struggles to assure itself life is "worth it" by vilifying suicide, Benjamin's point is comprehensible: The struggle to live, a battle with little possibility of victory, is exhausting, and suicide provides an escape from abject defeat.

Consumer Capitalism and Human Evolution

For Miller, it is not only the individual, who is sick, but modern society as a whole, as it *is*, as it is supposed to be, according to popular modern self-conceptions, disseminated in advertising and movies and magazines and newspapers, where technology serves fashion to insure future purchases, where accumulation for the sake of accumulation is valorized. Modern consumer capitalism simply creates new needs, in order to sell products, and consumers quite often simply follow along.

Peter Gay, in his biography of Sigmund Freud, reports Freud's assertion, in his *Introductory Lectures*, that the world has undergone three revolutions: "Copernicus had displaced humanity from the center of the world; Darwin had compelled it to recognize its kinship with animals; he, Freud, had shown that reason is not master in

its own house" (Gay 580). Another revolution Freud might have acknowledged, one described by Marx in *The German Ideology*, is the recognition that "the satisfaction of the first need (the action of satisfying, and the instrument of satisfaction which has been acquired) leads to new needs" (GI 49). As discussed in Chapter Two, the artificial creation of desire altered, in a fundamental way, the lives of humans. Products they had never known and never sensed a lack of soon became necessities and led to further purchases, to further "alienated consumption." With the rise of department stores and modern advertising, the need for greater and greater consumption in order for the capitalist system to experience continual growth, the need to create desire fueled creativity, induced a greater preoccupation with "progress." The near past soon began to look like the Dark Ages.

As such, the modern world exists as a place "suited to the monomaniacs obsessed with the idea of progress--but," adds Miller, "a false progress, a progress which stinks" (*Nightmare* 24). The modern world is, above all, characterized by a surface "progress," an illusory progress, a delusion fostered by an abundance of commodities, a progress that leaves many of the poorest people still living by earlier standards. Moreover, quality begins to suffer as quantity becomes the focus of industry. "It is a world cluttered with useless objects," Miller asserts, "which men and women, in order to be exploited and degraded, are taught to regard as useful" (*Nightmare* 24), or, more precisely, as *absolutely necessary*. Thus, they willingly submit to the work regime. The capitalist world is typified by education-as-incorporation, though not school-education alone, but education through mass media, especially advertising, an education that thrives on, even as it reinforces, the notion

that technological development is the keynote of the era and constitutes, in and of itself, an undeniable good.

But technological development did not (and still does not) inevitably lead to purchases. A novelty might not be affordable or immediately desirable, if it does not obviously relate to material needs. Nevertheless, Columbia economist Edward R. Seligman argues that technological developments will retain an evolutionary role, that they will change the way people live and conceive their day to day world. Confirming Marx's declaration above, Seligman asserts, "Progress may be the process of converting superfluities into conveniences, and conveniences into necessities. The diversification of consumption lies at the root of human development" (qtd in Leach 295). In short, human evolution is connected to "progress," involves overt manipulation, altering people's lives through convincing them they need some new product (*controlled* diversification), and then helping them grow dependent upon that product (if not because it represents a technological breakthrough, then through advertising, for instance, which reinforces its social value), thus insuring future generations of purchasers as well. The refrigerator, for instance, now frees people so that they need shop only once or twice a week, rather than daily. A person who does not own a refrigerator (a television might be a more appropriate example for today) is not really living in the modern world and is, thus, a suspicious type. Why don't you buy a refrigerator? we want to ask. At the same time, shopping once thrust a person daily into a communal existence such that he or she came into frequent contact with neighbors and merchants. The refrigerator, however, allows people to withdraw from such communal relationships, subtly encourages it even: Now, you only have to shop once a week. Progress, in this instance, is measured not simply in increased

convenience but also in the further atomization of communities and the increased isolation of individuals. And while the refrigerator can be said to have freed women from the house, to some extent, in many cases it simply freed them to submit to someone or something else.

The profusion of products on the market, however, conceals the fact that in many cases there is only a negligible difference between one product and another, more specifically one brand and another, hence no genuine choice. But the shades of difference "between equally-priced popular articles," a difference often "corroborated by 'scientific tests,' is dinned into the consumer's mind . . . as if it represented a revelation altering the entire course of the world rather than an illusory fraction that makes no real difference . . ." (*Eclipse* 99).¹⁰ Though such a statement is less true for connoisseurs or aficionados of a certain product, it remains true in general and explains in part the oft-repeated refrain we hear when running to the store for someone else, "Get whatever's cheapest." Benjamin, moreover, charges that consumers who worked with craftsmen became knowledgeable about the product they were purchasing, often learning from the craftsman when negotiating its construction and price; as buyers in department stores, however, they are "not usually knowledgeable" (*CB* 104) beyond whatever limited experience they bring with them.

But these mass produced articles, altering the lives of purchasers, unite people in their desire for these products. "Mechanization," which bound workers hand and

¹⁰ The "Coke and Pepsi Taste Tests" of the 1980s can be viewed, for instance, as an argument not only that one soft drink was better than the other (the ostensible argument), but also that there *was* a difference. It would make little sense to do "taste tests" that compared gin and whisky, hence the implication in the "Coke and Pepsi Taste Tests" is that the soft drinks are similar in taste and composition.

foot to machines, also "made possible the mass production of culture in the form of consumable objects" (Trachtenberg, *Incorporation*, 150). Once an article is mass produced, its value as a cultural artifact is that everyone has it and is, thus, united by common ownership. On the other hand, as an artifact it can be trivialized, to the point where ownership of a particular item becomes requisite among a certain population and yet meaningless, like a Steinway piano in a house where no one can play.

In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin writes of the "aura" of objects that are singular, that are original. Once the item is mass produced, the aura is separated from the object; the aura is no longer meaningful because the art work has been separated from its context (*Illuminations* 223). It lives, *if* it lives, on what might be called residual meaning: whatever meaning or understanding a viewer brings to something is the meaning it comes to possess. Benjamin also observes that mass-produced articles become "imitations" (CB 105), such that a piano in every house underscores the "mass" facet of its production. A mass produced item whose worth is solely fashionable and only for a season is thus essentially a meaningless accoutrement--the residual meaning vanishes with time and it comes to represent not the skill of one worker or a few workers but of machines. Another result of mass production is that fashion becomes much more important for retailers, for new seasons and new fashions must inspire new purchases (Leach 93). Clothes cannot be made to wear-out within a season, because purchasers generally still search for and recognize quality, on some level, even if they will gladly retire such articles once the winds of fashion have rendered them obsolete, whether they are good as new or not. Therefore, as Benjamin noted, describing the Parisian fashion world of Baudelaire's era, "Fashion prescribed the ritual by which the fetish Commodity wished

to be worshipped" (CB 166), which alerts the purchaser to how something is worn, appropriate occasions for wearing it, and proper longevity of the article.

Like fashion, technological development of household appliances as well as other household items (radios, phonographs) also serves to insure future sales. Minor improvements, hyped to appear dramatic and necessary, inspire people to discard perfectly functioning machinery to replace it with the latest "improved" version. It is in this way, according to Horkheimer, that science becomes subservient to economic forces--big business and the government. Money invested in universities as well as private foundations involved in scientific research focusses less on *inquisitiveness*, on what interests a particular scientist, than on the possibility of lucrative results (Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 72). Horkheimer argues funding often produces results, "for instance in the production of the best baby foods, super-explosions, and propaganda methods; but one could hardly claim that it contributes to the progress of real thought" (72). Once again we see knowledge linked to utilitarian ends, hence to improvements and small breakthroughs, rather than revolutionary change. As we have seen in other areas, city-planning for instance, a focus on profits invariably results in a limitation of aims. The scientist, like the worker, must dominate or repress desires, theories, aspirations in order to receive funding to achieve quite limited but quite achievable goals. Considerations outside those related to profits attract little attention, and so there is little real examination of a new product's, or a new system's, often tangential connection to progress. Advertisements will assert such a connection, through extravagant claims perhaps, but these claims are likely transparent to a critical purchaser.

There is such belief in progress, however, such a sense of the importance of each technological development, that as another faith, it shares some of the same weaknesses that critics of certain Christian groups/sects outline. One can criticize the lack of tolerance for differing viewpoints, within certain Christian groups, as a sign of weak faith, to argue that these groups attempt to exclude views that differ from theirs' out of fear rather than strength, and so they surround themselves with people who share the same beliefs and endeavor to convince unbelievers whose mere existence implicitly challenges their truths; similarly, those who believe in progress feel the need to proclaim the benefits of progress, to constantly remind themselves and others of how progress has improved their lives. Henry Miller writes of being assaulted by the fruits of progress: "It's almost impossible to escape the radio, the telephone, the fat newspapers, the glass of ice water," he asserts (*Cosmological* 343). Each new technology and each technological refinement must be hailed as a wonder, as a necessity, as something that it is almost inconceivable people once lived without. The belief that life is better with the new technologies signifies a faith in progress, and one who disagrees with the notion that life is better is a fool or a heretic.

Miller is that heretic, for he claims that these improvements simply feed "the delusion that we are making things easier for ourselves. Easier and better. Or else bigger and better" (*Remember* xxix). This delusion has a tranquilizing affect. It discourages questioning or evaluating modern conditions: Who are the real beneficiaries of progress? what constitutes progress for most people? what are the immediate and what are the long-term consequences of each invention? Such questions go unanswered, usually unasked except by the few. Human communities become atomized and human beings live in isolation, from each other and from

themselves. In this sense, we can see progress has replaced religion as the opiate of the masses, the masses here signifying more than the working classes, more than Marx's *lumpenproletariat*, but all who are fully *incorporated* in Western culture.

The Ultimate Failure of Progress

Like the Baptists arguing against evolution in the Scopes trial, the devotees of progress argue from a position under direct and indirect attack, proclaiming life to be better in the face of strong and damning evidence that it is no better at all, that if anything it has worsened. For while America, "the most productive nation in the world," manages to produce consumer goods by the shipload and its cities experience constant growth, it is still, Miller laments, "unable to properly feed, clothe and shelter over a third of its population" (*Nightmare* 30). Like Miller, Horkheimer and Adorno allege that the unequal distribution of the benefits of progress is not accidental but systemic, for the "idea of 'fully exploiting' available technical resources and the facilities of aesthetic mass consumption is part of the economic system which refused to exploit resources to abolish hunger" (139). The priorities of the system, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, are narrowly focused on products which will inspire purchases from the middle class. Housing, clothing, and feeding the poor is generally not financially remunerative and is therefore disdained.

During his tour of America in the years 1940 and 1941, Miller observes "suffering and misery everywhere throughout this broad land" (*Nightmare* 27). He had seen poverty in Paris and had even experienced it (or something close to it) himself and written about it in *Cancer*, but to see such pervasive poverty in America, the hallmark of progress in the twentieth century, seemed unfathomable and even

monstrous. Miller writes, "[T]here are kinds and degrees of suffering; the worst, in my opinion, is the sort one encounters in the very heart of progress" (27). It is the "worst" because it does not have to be and, by all rights, should not be. A system, however, geared towards making money, to providing returns to investors rather than improving the life of the average citizen, ignores those who do not or cannot contribute as much as others. People are valued less and less, in such a system, except as potential customers.

The failure of progress, for Miller, results from the goals that inspire it, and what has inspired progress at least since Industrialism is just that desire to make more money--not to make the world a better place in which to live. Machines are improved, not to make work easier, though they may occasionally do that, but to speed up production. Horkheimer exposes some of the problematical priorities of Western society. It is, he argues,

a society that in the face of starvation in great areas of the world, allows a large part of its machinery to stand idle, that shelves many important inventions, and that devotes innumerable working hours to moronic advertising and to the production of instruments of destruction --a society where luxuries are inherent has made usefulness its gospel. (Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, 143)

Usefulness, in consumer capitalism, has become a codeword for *lucrative*. What constitutes progress is improved products that make the old versions appear obsolete and thus in need of replacement, new slogans that attract the public's attention and alert people to new necessities; what constitutes progress is making money, spending money (*investing it*) to make money--to put more money in circulation so that more comes back. Workers often demand higher salaries so they can purchase more of the commodities they see in advertisements and store windows and which they themselves

produce. Money spent in advertising, which is never one-hundred percent successful, is even at times only a shot in the dark, occasions little regret, though it might more wisely be spent in renovating poorer neighborhoods, buying new books for public schools, and/or underwriting soup kitchens and homeless shelters. Such, as we have seen, is Miller's protest.

During the time Baudelaire was composing the prose poems that make up *Spleen de Paris*, Baron von Haussmann was modernizing Paris by slicing boulevards through old Paris, hoping to improve pedestrian and vehicular traffic circulation in the city. The Parisians who witnessed these changes, even those who helped--*physically*--to make these changes, likely did not recognize the changes as "progress." Marshall Berman describes some of the side effects of these changes:

The new construction wrecked hundreds of buildings, displaced uncounted thousands of people, destroyed whole neighborhoods that had lived for centuries. But it opened up the whole of the city, for the first time in its history, to all its inhabitants. Now, at last, it was possible to move not only within neighborhoods, but through them. Now, after centuries of life as a cluster of isolated cells, Paris was becoming a unified physical and human space. (151)

Berman suggests in a footnote that those "displaced" (an innocuous word which softens the violence of "eviction") left without a fight because the housing was old, unsanitary, and overcrowded (151n). Perhaps. But this "progress" also evicted the poor from the city center and pushed them outside the city. Losing whatever sorry housing they had, and thereby breaking up their communities, probably did not seem an improvement to poor workers forced to resettle in tenements located elsewhere, often on the perimeters of the city. Progress, doubtless, is only considered "progress" once the memory of the pain of the victims is forgotten or dies out of popular consciousness.

Often the goals of progress are professed to be concerned not only with providing better housing, but, as proclaimed through advertising, with providing workers more free time, as Sebastian de Grazia notes repeatedly in *Of Time, Work, and Leisure*. To that end, labor-saving devices are produced by the millions. That these products fail to save time or that working longer hours to secure them eats into the free time is often not registered. They may make additional demands on free time as well. De Grazia points out that the lawnmower, for instance, was once viewed as a labor saving device: "How often," he asks, "was the grass cut before the lawnmower (now motorized) was invented?" (330). The lawn in your average suburb must now be neatly trimmed; if it is not, neighbors complain, property values on houses abutting the guilty lawn fall. So, rather than saving time, the lawnmower now consumes free time, for few consider time spent in cutting the grass "free time." Many labor-saving devices, some of which we have mentioned, are fraught with sacrifices that often go unremarked or lead to developments unimagined. As we saw earlier, for Miller the automobile parked outside the factory is a truly depressing sight because it represents one of the most explicit symbols of the worker's surrender to the system. The worker must labor in order to afford the car as well as other supposed necessities--some, like a house, are vital (though an apartment or duplex might suffice but be socially questionable in much of America) while others are less so.

What Miller never seems to recognize, at least explicitly, is why the system works so well. It would seem that convenience and comfort, as both surface manifestations and systemic supports, may be the highest expression of progress in the modern era, after *power*. The worker is taught through advertising to value "convenience" and "comfort" and to avoid, as much as possible, inconvenience and

discomfort; in laboring the worker earns the right to purchase commodities that symbolize progress, avoidance of discomfort and further labor. Commodities promise to make life easier, though whether they actually do so is at best doubtful. Rebellion, however, takes effort; rejecting popular notions of what constitutes the good life, working and enjoying free time (courtesy of the latest commodities), requires imagination and puts a person in a vulnerable position with regard to much of the rest of society. When Miller rejects the "fat newspaper" and the ice in his drink, he may seem merely a crank, but these items are symbols, for Miller as for most Americans, though for Miller they are symbols not of the good American life but of the superficiality of so much that goes by the name of progress.

Down on Progress: Chaos, the Dandy and the Bohemian

In the land of progress where instrumental reason is a god that reigns supreme, Miller envisions himself a divisive and destructive force, a stick of dynamite in the backside of civilization. In the very heart of progress, at the very core of the business world, Miller perceives "chaos" (*Capricorn* 68)--from which he takes hope. Rather than a state of *being*, in Nietzschean terms, the world is still in a state of *becoming*, in however limited a fashion, which means that change is still possible. In his position as hiring manager, he comes to embody this force, chaos, that he also perceives elsewhere in the business world.

The world Miller describes, especially that in *Capricorn*, is the mirror image of a hurricane where, in the "eye," there are no winds and the storm seems to have subsided, to have moved on. Similarly, the chaos that runs like a current beneath the well-regulated surface of the business-world is not readily apparent even to those who

facilitate it. Some, like William Morris, describe the business world in less benign terms. "War, or competition, which ever you please to call it," writes Morris, "means at the best pursuing your own advantage at the cost of someone else's loss, and in the process of it you must not be sparing of destruction even of your own possessions or you will certainly come the worse in the struggle" (136-37). What Miller calls chaos--his job as hiring manager for Cosmodemonic Telegraph Company which he describes as senseless hiring and firing at high velocity--and what Morris terms "war or competition" appears to most people to be business as usual. Miller and Morris's descriptions, chaos or war, suggest that the system has few rules beyond survival of the fittest or winner take all, such that profits from competition, benefits from progress, need not be shared, and the larger repercussions of such actions need not be examined. The social costs of progress, of capitalist competition, so much decried by Miller and the Institute for Social Research, in Frankfurt, actually go beyond the scope of legitimate business concerns, and thus the system really is less methodical than it appears.

Miller's response, as he describes it, was to enter "the very heart of chaos" and there "I danced or drank myself silly, or I made love, or I befriended someone, or I planned a new life, but it was all chaos, all stone, and all hopeless or bewildering" (68-9). Though he had no hope of truly changing things, though he could see the utter destructiveness and inhumanity of what went on around him (the "stone" is perhaps emblematic of the inhumanity and the wreckage), Miller embraces the chaos that lay at "the very heart" of the system and even added to it. Chaos serves as an aid in the struggle against uniformity and labelling, against the sensibility, the regularity, however limited, that fueled the system.

Miller describes himself in the midst of it all, "like a man in a lighthouse":

below me the wild waves, the rocks, the reefs, the debris of shipwrecked fleets. I could give the danger signal but I was powerless to avert catastrophe. I breathed danger and catastrophe. At times the sensation of it was so strong that it belched like fire from my nostrils. I longed to be free of it all and yet I was irresistibly attracted. I was violent and phlegmatic at the same time. I was like the lighthouse itself--secure in the midst of the most turbulent sea. Beneath me was the solid rock, the same shelf of rock on which the towering skyscrapers were reared. My foundations went deep into the earth and the armature of my body was made of steel riveted with hot bolts. Above all I was an eye, a huge searchlight which scoured far and wide, which revolved ceaselessly, pitilessly. [...] all my powers were used up in the effort to see, to take in the drama of the world. (*Capricorn* 75-6).

Like the Yin-Yan symbol, like the stillness in the eye of the hurricane, big business and progress contain in themselves their opposite; both are ruthlessly destructive, squandering energy and spirit, while appearing exceedingly resourceful because of all the new products and developments. Miller imagines himself in the midst of the storm and yet above the madness, the storm-tossed seas, able to witness it all, and from there he tries to whip it up even more, in his struggle to bring the whole structure crumbling down. Then, from this chaos, this unchannelled energy, a new world can be forged.

Arthur Rimbaud, too, asserts that he will struggle violently against the system that wishes to enslave him. "Le travail paraît trop léger à mon orgueil: ma trahison au monde serait un supplice trop court. Au dernier moment, j'attaquerais à droit, à gauche . . ." [Work seems too light for my spirit: my treason to the world would be a very short punishment. At the last moment, I would lash out to the right, to the left] (Rimbaud 221). Rimbaud rejects work but is not content to stop at what is essentially a negative point. Rather, he promises an attack against the very system that wishes to enslave him, a lightning strike (which echoes one possible translation of the poem's

title, "L'Éclair"), and that he will fight wildly, on all sides. What he will fight, as did Baudelaire and as will Miller, is "progress."

Such violent activity appears a poor introduction to a depiction of Miller or Rimbaud as dandies or bohemians. Dandies affected a certain "distance" and, moreover, preferred apparent worthlessness (as a producer) to usefulness. But like Baudelaire and Rimbaud, Miller's self portrait contains characteristics of both the bohemian and the dandy, though these two types are in some ways "opposite," as Jerrold Seigel argues (98). The dandy usually appears refined and elegant, while the bohemian is typically threadbare and poverty-stricken, or affects to be so. It is this need for, or embrace of, affectation that serves to link the two at the hip, as it were. Furthermore, the two types are united by a certain boastfulness, which may be considered one of the more distinguishing forms of affectation. For example, they parade their elegance or their poverty. Though bohemians, when employed, were often placed in somewhat menial positions (not as laborers but rather in positions that required at least a modicum of education) and were improvident artists or would-be artists; like the dandy, what they produced was something that would not be recognized as of value in the world of modern capitalism.¹¹ In that way, both partake of the rebellion against modernity and industrialism, especially in the form of the marketplace.

¹¹ That bohemians, for instance, produced works of art, does not necessarily make of them producers, within the capitalist system, if their works are not generally perceived to have value. Vincent Van Gogh, for instance, lived a life of poverty, sold virtually nothing during his lifetime, and died a failure. Both Baudelaire and Rimbaud were only coming to be recognized artists at their respective deaths. Finally, a bohemian who makes money on art seldom remains a bohemian, as Henry Murger illustrates in the conclusion to his *Scènes de la vie de Bohème*.

Miller in *Cancer* records, along with his sexual exploits and his meanderings through the day and through Paris, his difficulty in obtaining a good meal, day after day, proclaiming even his willingness to eat rotten food. "Bad or good what difference? *Food!*" (*Cancer* 79). Likewise, since his living situation is often precarious, he boasts of his recurrent fear that someone will "take the chair from under my ass" (32). While it is a fear, it also underscores Miller's relative freedom: he is unfettered by possessions or a regular job, hence this fear of being forced on the streets to scout another "situation" is presented with a swagger. He is not paying rent, he is sleeping on the floor, he is eating meals paid for and prepared by others, but he is not contributing anything more than his abilities as a conversationalist, for which he is recognized, valued--by his friends though not by society at large.

Rimbaud's boastfulness, which peppers his poetry, seems an equally dandyesque or bohemian element. As we have already seen, he revolts against the work ethic, and threatens to lash out to the left and right at the bourgeois class which would force him to submit. In "Vies," a poem from *Illuminations*, he writes

Exilé ici, j'ai eu une scène où jouer les chefs-d'oeuvre dramatiques de toutes les littératures. Je vous indiquerais les richesses inouïes. J'observe l'histoire des trésors que vous trouvâtes. Je vois la suite! Ma sagesse est aussi dédaignée que le chaos. Qu'est mon néant, auprès de la stupeur qui vous attend?

[Exiled here, I had a stage on which to perform the dramatic masterpieces of all the literatures. I pointed out to you unknown treasures. I regard the trivial story of treasures that you discovered. I see the end! My wisdom is as disdained as chaos. What is my nothingness in comparison to the stupor that awaits you?] (250-51)

Like Miller, the narrator in Rimbaud's poem realizes he has not eluded all the traps, that he is substantially incorporated by contemporary society, but he also believes he has not been completely taken in and celebrates his difference. His "wisdom," which

"is as disdained as chaos," because it is out of step with the times, allows him to perceive what others cannot, just as Miller-the-lighthouse examines the chaos, invisible to most others, raging all around him. Rimbaud concedes a certain failure to take flight, to break free of constraints, but relative to the failure of others he believes his has not been so complete.

Charles Baudelaire, the one among the three writers considered here who most closely approximated a dandy (in the years 1843 to 1845), flaunts his dandy-ish disinterest in politics in *Mon Coeur mis à nu*:

Je n'ai pas de convictions, comme l'entendent les gens de mon siècle,
parce que je n'ai pas d'ambition.

Il n'y a pas en moi de base pour une conviction.

Il y a une certaine lâcheté ou plutôt une certaine mollesse chez les
honnêtes gens.

Les brigands seuls sont convaincus,--de quoi?--qu'il leur fait réussir.
Aussi, ils réussissent.

[I do not have convictions, as understood by people in my century,
because I do not have ambition.

There is in me no base for a conviction.

There is a certain cowardice or, above all, a certain lethargy in honest
people.

Thieves alone are convinced,--of what?--that it is made for them to
succeed. And they do succeed.] (*Oeuvres* 407)

For Baudelaire, success in modern society is a sign of debasement. Success is based upon simplification, upon an unwillingness to acknowledge complications, for example an intentional disregard of moral questions. A person with ambition has direction, attributes importance to certain things over others based upon the goal in view, and can then act accordingly. Without ambition, there is no way to organize the data of daily existence or, rather, less inclination to organize it purposefully.

The dandy, who affects the refinement--to an extreme--of the aristocracy and often descends from the aristocracy, evokes the pretensions and the uselessness of the

aristocracy. Pamela Genova, in her study of the dandy as a terrorist whose weapon of choice is style, points out that "dandies challenged the practicality of the commonplace" as well as "negating the quotidian, scorning the social icons of family, marriage, labor, profit and love" (76). The artificiality of the dandy's appearance implicitly asserts that much in society has only show-value and contains little or no intrinsic value. The dandy, thus, is someone whose cause is change, though dandies would almost certainly repudiate any notion of "causes," since they flaunt their uselessness within their society. The bohemian, meanwhile, generally arises from the bourgeois class and discards the outward appearance of respectability so important to that class, but adopts almost the same posture as the dandy, choosing to live without much that "normal" society requires--a job, a regular meal time. Both the dandy and the bohemian constitute a general attack on modernity as well as the classes they arise from. Both are extreme in self-presentation, in order to attract attention.

Baudelaire writes of the dandy:

tous participent du même caractère d'opposition et de révolte; tous sont des représentants de ce qu'il y a de meilleur dans l'orgueil humain, de ce besoin, trop rare chez ceux d'aujourd'hui, de combattre et de détruire la triviale.

[all participate in the same character of opposition and revolt; all are representatives of that which is the best in the human spirit, of the need, so rare among those of today, to combat and destroy triviality.] (*Ecrits* 390)

By "triviality," Baudelaire intimates much the same thing Miller does when writing that earning a living is different from living, when Miller decries the ugliness of cities or the blind pursuit of the accumulation of commodities or the modern conception of progress. Action steeped in immediate results or convenience or even simple short-term goals frequently results in triviality--in buildings, products, or actions containing

only vestiges of the human spirit and, hence, are not durable, are hollowed-out, and will not endure as representations of human spirit.

And dandies, like Baudelaire,¹² did combat the notion of progress. Genova recounts the legend of the dandy famous for taking his pet lobster for a walk "on a leash of powder blue ribbon" (82). This, she writes, is the "first step in his terrorist strategy: he captures the attention of his audience" (82). This "terrorism" represents, as do most if not all acts of terrorism, an attempt to put forth a message that differs quite radically from that of the dominant elements within the society under attack. Benjamin reported a similar tale, perhaps another version of the same tale, of a dandy taking a turtle for a walk, conceiving it a "strategy" as well, where what he calls *flâneurs*, but clearly means dandies as well, used to take turtles for a walk and "liked to have the turtles set the pace for them. If they had their way, progress would have been obliged to accommodate itself to this pace," Benjamin writes (*Illuminations* 197, 6n). Once noticed, then, the dandies attempted to introduce another pace, a pace far more humane as well as refined, but the theorists of work triumphed, as Benjamin recognizes, and "Down with dawdling" became the refrain (197 6n). Dandyism, as a sort of demonstration of another way of life (and bohemianism as only a little less passive), rather than a literal attack, could not truly compete with the active incorporation functioning in the modern industrial state.

Miller makes a prototypically dandyesque statement in *Capricorn* when he writes, "fundamentally, I have no desire to work and no desire to become a useful

¹² Baudelaire is a figure who bridges the gap between dandy and bohemian. He spent much of his inheritance, after finishing school, as a dandy in Paris. After almost financially ruining himself, he lived a life of near poverty, dedicated to his art.

member of society" (*Capricorn* 102). Such a statement, however, occurs in the same book where he had earlier asserted:

I was constantly urged not to be too lenient, not to be too sentimental, not to be too charitable. Be firm! Be hard! they cautioned me. Fuck that! I said to myself, I'll be generous, pliant, forgiving, tolerant, tender. [...] I heard every man to the end; if I couldn't give him a job I gave him money, and if I had no money I gave him cigarettes or I gave him courage. But I gave! (27)

Miller's declaration, as an extreme statement, puts him in a category with the dandies and bohemians who were given to extreme pronouncements as well, whether through verbal means or by illustration. Such an assertion of uselessness, however, must be read as quite different from a typical dandy-ish declaration of uselessness, which has given Orwell and those who assert Miller's "passive acceptance of evil" so much artillery. When Miller writes that he had no wish to be "useful," he means specifically within that segment of society fixated on the utilitarian, but not within the society of human beings where he wishes to be supportive, to contribute--if nothing else--"courage."

True Progress

For Miller, life and work--*his* work--is an end in itself rather than a means to an end; it is an accumulation of experience rather than of wealth or commodities. That we are alive here and now and that we must act within the here and now, without constantly looking to the distant future, appears to be one of the shaping forces within his works. Miller's example of generosity, giving money or cigarettes away, suggests that the future was less of a worry for him than the present, that his actions were not generally future-oriented so much as a determination to resolve immediate problems, a

strategy reminiscent of Brecht's slogan, "Eats now, morals after." For Miller, as for Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Benjamin, and others, the present must be the main focus. Just as Benjamin criticizes the modern notion of progress by forcing readers to address the world as it is, for progress is the *now*, Miller proposes "the life more abundant"--now.

In *The Wisdom of the Heart*, Miller describes time not as linear but circular. "There is no progress: there is movement, displacement, which is circular, spiral, endless" (22). Certainly he is indebted to Spengler for this conception of time, but Miller and Spengler are not alone in subscribing to this circular understanding of time. De Grazia writes that for most of the world outside the west, "the wheel is a better symbol of time than the line" (319). Such a vision of time connotes a certain acceptance of the world as it stands and perhaps a more "natural" perception of the world, as well, because everything that happens is understood as seasonal (319) and little is considered "singular."

This circular perception of time helps explain, then, Miller's concern with the present and near-future rather than solely with long-term goals. The distant future bears upon present actions but cannot be a repository for hope, cannot be an excuse for delays in a widespread enjoyment of the benefits of "progress." It is important, for Miller, that people realize time is circular so they "become imbued with the idea that the age of plentitude is inevitable" such that "all the current world views, petty, destructive, mutually exclusive, will vanish like dust" (*Remember* xix). If a world of plenty is not something that needs to be struggled for, but something inevitably coming in the future, so much that people struggle to achieve is unnecessary. People can work at their own pace, live their lives and contribute to the growth of society, without sacrificing everything, especially the present. They should, instead, struggle

against this system that portrays life as linear, presenting a mirage where the goal always remains equally distant from the present.

Contrary to what might be expected, therefore, Miller does not entirely reject the concept of progress, as does Baudelaire and, to a lesser extent, Rimbaud. Miller believes, as we have seen, that progress has been yoked to selfish pecuniary aims, hence it has been restricted. But, as he suggests in the introduction to *Remember to Remember*, if the energies now expended in the dead-end pursuit of technological progress could be redirected, away from selfish pursuits and toward improving the lot of all, true change, true progress would at long last come about. Progress must simply be focussed less on financial gain and more on improving existence (xix-xx).

Such a change in perspective, however, is not as simple as Miller sometimes seems to suggest; rather, it is revolutionary, requiring a complete break with the last two to four hundred years. "New beings, yes! We have need of new beings still. We can do without the telephone," Miller argues, "without the automobile, without the high-class bombers--but we cannot do without new beings" (*Capricorn* 293). A change in human perspective, to that which recognizes human beings first, seems perhaps an impossible demand under the present capitalistic system, but that is just what Miller calls for. All other forms of progress have only secondary importance, at best.

As an advocate for the underdog, for the individual on the margins, Miller does not wish to erase individuality but to free it. Max Horkheimer shares just such a concern for the individual. He asserts that progress will consist in transcending humanity's adaptability, the mimetic impulse, into a broader and more complex form of reasoning that lies somewhere between objective reason (based on "god-given"

reason) or subjective reason (what is good, serviceable at this moment) (*Eclipse* 115).

Such a reliance on the individual means that sooner or later individuals will have to live up to their promise, something they have yet to do but that it is not impossible they will do. Miller writes,

Only a new mentality, a new consciousness, only a vision capable of embracing all the conflicting tendencies, of seeing around, beyond and above them, will permit men to adapt themselves to the order and the ambiance of this new world. (*Remember* xix)

Miller, like Baudelaire and Marx, is linking progress to human beings rather than technology or the simple remaking and expansion of cities. If progress is conceived of as an energy source that requires direction then its use becomes, much more obviously, a moral issue.

Herbert Marcuse writes that progress, as Miller appears to define it, would constitute a challenge to the system: "In a society that reproduces itself through economic competition, the mere demand for a happier social existence constitutes rebellion" (99). To suggest that the commodities produced for consumers at breakneck pace are not valuable in and of themselves, that they are not the ultimate source of satisfaction, is a direct attack upon the life-source of most corporations. To reduce hours worked, to reduce pay, could mean less money in circulation, fewer commodities purchased, and smaller profit margins. While many workers in the past have gladly chosen fewer hours and less pay, for corporations it is not an optimal situation and one that shows the workers markedly less consumption-oriented than those who profit from their purchases could wish.

Miller also suggests, in "Murder the Murderer," that a sure sign of progress would be marked by the end of nations, assuming the major rivalries would die out.

Certainly there would be no cessation of petty rivalries, personal and/or regional, but there is the likelihood that there would be less potential for global events such as the Second World War, which is the subject of the essay. All that divides people, that is imposed on them from without (patriotism drummed up by politicians and then channeled by the military) should be done away with. The competitions that strengthen people, that sharpen their wits, must remain, but the imposed, contrived conflicts can be eliminated. And it is here where Miller recognizes the strength of the fears people have toward ideas that involve considerable change, whereas a new product, such as a flamethrower, is generally welcomed: they do not necessarily foresee a flamethrower's direct application on them.

For Miller's vision of progress to really take place, it would likely require that energy currently spent tearing down old buildings and raising new ones, producing products for the military and for the general consumer, all the energy directed toward producing things be halted and redirected toward thoughtfully purposive actions that eschewed any idea of producing a profit of any kind--though profit there would have to be, but this time for everyone along the line. Progress would involve transforming cities, work, and nations into entities that offered individuals the chance to discover their own work, to enjoy themselves and other people (community), to focus on the here and now wisely (and not to use such a focus as an excuse to destroy the environment), so that human communities could form nurturing environments, public spaces.

Certainly there is a utopian element in Miller's works, as in *Remember to Remember's* "Artist and Public," utopian in the negative sense where he constructs a vision of the future equal to Charles Fourier's most unlikely prognostications (which

only form a part of Fourier's philosophy); but "utopian" does not deserve the negative connotations so often associated with it. Utopia offers direction, something to strive for, and without direction there can be no sensible change, only more chaotic action. Those who would do away with utopia, who would discredit it, would eliminate all change that they were not responsible for themselves or that did not benefit them. These people, naturally, would be the producers and beneficiaries who stand to lose profits if society really were to change.

In *Capricorn*, Miller describes--in three sentences--the world that would arise if he were in control:

If I were running the boat things wouldn't be so orderly perhaps, but it would be gayer, by Jesus! You wouldn't shit in your pants over trifles. Maybe there wouldn't be macadamized roads and streamlined cars and loudspeakers and gadgets of a million billion varieties, maybe there wouldn't even be glass in the windows . . . maybe people would kill each other when their patience was exhausted and maybe nobody would stop them because there wouldn't be any jails or cops or judges, and there certainly wouldn't be any cabinet ministers or legislators because there wouldn't be any goddamned laws to obey or disobey, and maybe it would take months and years to trek from place to place, but you wouldn't need a visa or a passport or a *carte d'identité* because you wouldn't be registered anywhere and you wouldn't bear a number and if you wanted to change your name every week you could do it because it wouldn't make any difference since you wouldn't own anything except what you could carry around with you and why would you want to own anything when everything would be free? (*Capricorn* 281-82)

Such a paradise seems to almost approximate a Marxist worker's paradise, only with even less structure, for it is order, reason, structure, in a word, civilization, that for Miller kills everything, that threatens generosity, that sustains misery, that defies optimism, that strips people of their humanity and orders them to accept it, for they must.

One of Orwell's criticisms of Miller is that he was happy. It is a sentiment that Miller maintains throughout his works though some, like *Capricorn*, have a far more bitter edge to them than others. Still, Miller's protests against progress and modern life demonstrate his affirmation of life. *Life can be better*, he wants people to know. It does not have to be reduced to work and to accumulating merchandise. Likewise Rimbaud commands, "Esclaves, ne maudissons pas la vie" [Fellow slaves, let us not curse life] (222). Both see possibilities for another world, another way of life, for "Noël sur la terre!" [Christmas on earth!] (222). That Miller does not simply reject life as not worth living can be understood as one step toward the rebellion that Marcuse prophesies above. If life is not worth living, the choice is suicide or passive acceptance of all that transpires; if it is worth living, but merits improvement, then change is the only thing worth fighting for.

Conclusion / Reading Miller Now

[T]he most wonderful proof of my fitness, or unfitness, for the times is the fact that nothing people were writing or talking about had any real interest for me. (*Capricorn* 54).

La liberté consiste à savoir vivre et parler en même temps que les événements se déroulent. Phillippe Sollers, "Le grand style est-il révolutionnaire? Chateaubriand, Lautréamont, remparts contre la bêtise" *Le Monde* Friday, May 15, 1998
[Liberty consists in knowing how to live and to speak at the same time as events unfold.]

For Henry Miller, a writer must confront the real issues of the day--not through the aegis of some party or clique but following the call of his or her own conscience. When Miller claims in the epigraph to this chapter "that nothing people were writing or talking about had any interest for me," his lack of interest can be attributed to his belief that the issues most people concerned themselves with were not real issues or certainly not the truly important ones, that they were concerned only with improving material comforts rather than with improving the system itself, that concerns revolved around short-term, even immediate, benefits rather than middle- or long-term costs.

Miller's "fitness for the times," then, would refer back to his role as adversary, for his is one of the great "oppositional" voices of this century, and *Tropic of Cancer*, *Tropic of Capricorn*, and *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* rank at the top of the list of rebellious works produced this century; his "unfitness" rests in that he was perhaps ahead of his time, rejecting the current world as superficial and inhumane, rather than celebrating the advances it continually announced. Miller attempted to expose the forces dominating in the West: to cut through the pretense, hype, illusion, deceit and self-deceit, which obscures the functioning of a capitalist system that in some cases better serves the average citizen than previous systems had, but whose failure to

eliminate poverty and war, among other maladies of human civilizations, certainly demonstrates it cannot be the last word in the progress or evolution of forms of government.

Rather than moving backward, Miller wanted to help lead America and the West forward, into a truly post-industrial age, where people take control of technology, where they are not set up by mass media and other tools of mass society to make certain seemingly pre-programmed selections, where life assumes a greater variety and people shake off the simple and deadening routine of work-home-television-bed life has come to consist of for so many.

Miller writes about the death of community, in reflecting upon a time when community once flourished, when life followed a different routine. He never wrote about returning to some earlier golden age, though in such pieces as "The Tailor Shop," from *Black Spring*, he describes something of what the world has lost, as it becomes more and more impersonal.¹ He seems to have known America and the West and the rest of the world would not regress into a pre-industrial age, but he believed people could change the way they currently viewed the world, for, historically, it was not that old and ingrained. Though, of course, it *was* that ingrained. Still, Miller's reading of Spengler offered him hope for a world beyond capitalism or at least in a different shape than it had come to assume by the nineteen-twenties and -thirties, if not considerably earlier.

¹ Impersonal, it should be noted, not in the way Sennett articulates in *The Fall of Public Man*, for there people are impersonal and social; here, it is impersonal and asocial.

That Miller is often better known in America, to people familiar with his works, as a pornographer demonstrates, among other possibilities, (1) that readers come to Miller's works with certain expectations and, like George Orwell, refuse to allow the text to amend them; (2) that people rely more on second-hand sources of information rather than their own reading of his works; or (3) that people are as obsessed with sex today as they were in the days when Miller was first writing and their reading of Miller functions as something of a Rorschach test. Readers confronting the works of Henry Miller today, if they look beyond the sexual themes in his works, will likely notice that most of his criticisms of his world, as described in this essay, are still relevant today, that often they have only become more persuasive, and thus Miller's "fitness or unfitness for the times" remains just as debatable as ever. The capitalist system that he decried as inhumane has only become more so, and technological developments such as the automobile, with their debilitating impact on cities and the environment, have only compounded the problem in the years since Miller began writing.

Miller's Criticisms Today

Though most readers will have grasped the relevance of Miller's critiques to modern America and the West, a few of his primary targets bear further albeit brief investigation. New attacks on human communities and humans in general have been unleashed in the so-called Postmodern era. Concerns, here, revolve around globalization as well as the fall-out from new technologies, especially the computer which brings with it, naturally, much that is beneficial.

Miller's criticisms of cities, especially of New York City, still hold true. In *The Assassination of Paris*, historian Louis Chevalier—who several times cites Miller as a writer who appreciated Paris—laments that the same attitude which has made such a mess of New York and other American cities has come to inform, to an even greater degree than before, the viewpoint of those who decide the future of Paris. "People are beginning to use [the term 'Developer']," writes Chevalier, "without understanding very clearly, as their usage shows, what the word signifies, or better what it conceals" (30). What is concealed, certainly, behind the label is simply a businessman looking to make money in real estate by building whatever will be most lucrative at the moment. Nothing is sacred to such people, Chevalier repeatedly notes, and the new buildings going up all over Paris, as well as the highways now cutting through the Right Bank demonstrate that those making decisions about Paris' future lack the organic vision of Paris so many in the past have to greater or less degrees upheld. These "developers" hardly view Paris as a historic text to be embellished or improved. Instead, Paris has come to signify, more and more, nothing other than an especially lucrative investment.

Chevalier criticizes the arch of La Défense,² the area to the northwest of Paris dedicated to skyscrapers, which was "built to line up with the Arc de Triomphe, destroying forever 'the door opening on infinity' that Barrès [the designer of the Arc] had celebrated" (268). The I. M. Pei-designed dome, in the Louvre courtyard, at the other end of Barrès' "door," has also been aligned with the Arc and the arch, something more in the nature of a Disney-like gimmick, now that the three points form

² La Défense, it should be noted, is a compromise with business interests who hope to make France even more economically powerful. Rather than razing vast regions of Paris for skyscrapers, they were placed a short distance outside the city.

a line, rather than the one that simply opened onto a vast, unbroken vista and which, thus, engaged the imagination. It must be recognized, however, that the alignment of the three points does acknowledge the physical if not the historical context.

Writing in the middle nineteen-seventies, Chevalier argues, "In barely fifteen years [Paris] will be gone except when we conjure up its image--always inadequate--from books (11), though in an addendum written for the English translation in the early nineteen-nineties, Chevalier acknowledges, "despite the intrusions of men and things, what still endures, here and there, of the Old City, unchanged and miraculously preserved, always has a strange fascination for me" (271). Paris has not been completely wiped out by the "developers," but latter-day Baudelaires like Chevalier remember another Paris, one that died with the destruction in February 1969 of *Les Halles*, the vegetable and meat market that for centuries had formed the heart of Paris. The desire to instill order on the city, one of the reasons given for the removal of *Les Halles* to the outskirts of the city, has sounded a death knell, according to Chevalier, for disorder is an intrinsic element of human beings and their communities.³

Parisian "developers" active in the era 1960 to 1968, he accuses, "do not understand that history is an essential part of the present city" (168), and their wish to transform the city from a place of pleasure to one of work (180), their ideas for re-designing the city, take the United States as "the model and the vocabulary" (188), the very thing Miller warned against and which some still fear today, given the

³ For more on the idea of disorder in community, see also Richard Sennett's *The Uses of Disorder* and *The Conscience of the Eye*.

proliferation of American businesses, products, and images, not to mention ideology.⁴ Some of Miller's greatest fears, regarding America and cities, have thus come to pass, or nearly so, in Paris.

Paris, for Chevalier, is continually under attack from "developers." The more the old buildings are destroyed, the more the surviving ones become decontextualized, hence curios, simulacra for the old city. Like American cities, Paris has also been ravaged by the automobile. While American cities have increasingly been designed around the automobile, hence the zoning restrictions which force people to live in one place, shop in another, and work in yet another, such designs, argues James Kunstler, have further atomized people and destroyed communities, decimating inner cities as well as the American countryside. Numerous Parisian planners, according to Chevalier, have planned highways in the center of Paris, cutting huge paths through old and ancient neighborhoods, though none of these have been implemented. Still, the threat seems to recur with a dangerous regularity, despite Paris' public transportation system which provides extensive coverage over a wide area and despite the damage the older buildings themselves suffer from the exhaust of too many cars, trucks, and buses passing down narrow streets. These highways would, as they have

⁴ American images abroad are almost ubiquitous: Michael Jordan, for instance, is a hero in Germany; professional baseball, basketball, and football jerseys and caps are worn by Europeans; *Walker Texas Ranger* and many other American television series appear, dubbed, on German and French television. This list ignores businesses in Europe exported from America--McDonalds, Burger King, Pizza Hut--which tend to make a city like Prague less different from London or Frankfurt.

in New York City, and many other cities, cut off pedestrian traffic, destroy local businesses, and divide and/or isolate existing communities.⁵

French writer Philippe Djian, who has many affinities with Miller, recently reaffirmed some of the problems with America that Miller earlier noted. In a 1994 interview, he explains why he moved from Boston, Massachusetts, one of the more European of American cities, to Florence, Italy:

Voilà ce qui manque, aux États Unis. Ce n'est pas un pays où l'on s'assoit. Et puis à Florence, vous avez la douceur de la campagne qui s'insinue dans la ville, la campagne est comme apprivoisée. Les Américains ne savent pas faire ça. Leurs villes ont besoin de s'imposer à l'environnement, de manière brutale. En Italie, la ville hypnotise la campagne et s'ouvre à elle, adopte sa lumière, ses couleurs, son rythme. Beaucoup d'Américains sont installés à Florence. Et ceux que j'ai rencontrés ne voulaient pas repartir.

[This is what is lacking in the United States. It is not a country where one sits down. And then at Florence, you have the gentleness of the countryside which infiltrates the city, the countryside is as if tamed. The Americans do not know how to do such things. Their cities must be imposed on the environment in a brutal fashion. In Italy, the city hypnotizes the countryside and opens to it, embracing its light, colors, rhythm. Many Americans live in Florence. And those that I have met do not want to leave. (Djian 173-74)]

Djian, here, sounds very much like the Miller we encountered in Chapter One, the one who complained that in New York City he could find no space that offered the citizen peace, no place to sit and reflect, no place that did not simply encourage him to keep walking. Americans, it appears, must leave their country in order to find community, to find organic and hospitable cities.

The current situation for workers in America, far worse than that in Europe, has only worsened in the years since Miller's death in 1980. While there has been a

⁵ See Chapter Five of Marshall Berman's *All That is Solid Melts Into Air* for a moving description of the destruction of sections of New York City in the nineteen-fifties and -sixties.

movement toward the thirty-five hour week in Europe, most notably in the France of Lionel Jospin, the Socialist prime minister, the American system, rather than becoming more humane has only succeeded in becoming *less so*. Richard Sennett, speaking at a panel discussion at St. Paul's Church, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, on the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Revolution of 1848, warned the German audience that soon they might face some of the same choices Americans had unwittingly made in the nineteen-seventies and nineteen-eighties. One result of these "decisions" was the shipping of American jobs south of the border, to Mexico, where workers receive considerably less pay than their American and European counterparts and usually no benefits.⁶

Another result, Sennett added, is that work in America has become more and more brutal, especially for the office worker. What Sennett called "flexible work," learning specific skills for a specific job before moving on to another job requiring an entirely different set of skills, has effectively destroyed the notion of a "career" in America for many people, essentially making the craftsman a button-pusher yet again. It has, Sennett elaborated, destroyed, in part, some of the "narrativity" of our lives. No longer does one job lead to the next, one set of skills build upon another; now, employees simply learn what they need to for *this* job, recognizing that, in all likelihood, it will not serve them in their next job.

⁶ The history Sennett provided was more complex. Factory jobs in the unionized north were moved to the largely non-unionized south, where labor was cheaper, and, when such moves were legalized, from there to Mexico and to third-world countries where labor was even cheaper. If nothing is done to prevent such movements, German factories could relocate to the former Eastern Europe, or to southern Europe, where labor is cheaper and social benefits fewer, and from there to third world countries, throwing many Germans out of work in order to increase the profits of investors.

People have become short-term employees, who may hold as many as ten to fifteen different jobs in their lifetime, Sennett estimated, and who therefore feel little or no loyalty to the company and no bond with fellow workers, so that community--like the workers themselves--is further effaced. The church, dancing clubs, reading clubs, bowling leagues, as a replacement for the community usually created in and around a work environment, are generally much less successful in establishing a sense of community, Sennett argued, because they account for a far smaller percentage of time than work normally does. The modern worker, as a result, has lost, in job security, job satisfaction, and health benefits, much more than he or she has gained in pay, and in the meantime become an itinerant worker who sets down shallow roots.

Writing in *USA Today*, Stephanie Armour describes work-related stress as a major problem that costs American companies approximately \$200 billion dollars yearly (7A), an expense surely passed on to consumers. Many, certainly, in an era of "downsizing" (a codeword for mass layoffs/firings) and reduction of social services, worry about losing their job, even if they perform their jobs well (8A). Armour's experts say, "There's no cure-all, but there is hope" (8A), to which Miller might respond, yet again, "Earning a living has nothing to do with living," warning these experts that the system itself is still the problem, since the bottom line is profits and workers remain only "means to an end."⁷ Workers without job security, workers who feel themselves over-worked, all awaiting the technological development that will leave them unemployed or simply performing a different job, will feel stress. These

⁷ In his lecture, Sennett described one of Microsoft's practices: They assign several groups the same task and give them an impossible deadline. The group that accomplishes the task first is rewarded, while the members of the other groups are fired.

people, whether over-worked or under-worked, will have little leisure time because neither can forget work or their worries long enough to focus on something else. Stress, thus, does not disappear but proliferates, as workers face the threat of obsolescence with only a foundering social system to fall back on.

Miller's anti-World War II stand, though it may put him in an even smaller minority today, demonstrates he had a better understanding of American history--and a better sense of the capitalist tendency to act upon vulgar self-interest in virtually any situation--than most Americans of his day or even, perhaps, of today. One of the outcomes of that war, as Miller predicted, was the further entrenchment of the capitalist powers and their expansion such that today we have a more "pure" capitalism than ever, a trans-national global economy, as evidenced not least by cities around the world that have begun to look alike, each with several McDonalds, Burger Kings, Pizza Huts, each with a Body Shop, Aldi, Benetton, and other international businesses. These apparently innocuous developments signal the monopolization of giant corporate interests as well as a reduction in the choices available, the education of modernity serving to focus taste on the products of fewer and fewer companies.

Miller's critique of the movie industry, especially Hollywood, holds true today, as well, for it still churns out predictable melodramas and action thrillers, even if, as in *Fried Green Tomatoes* or *Waiting to Exhale* they address them to narrower or specialized audiences. It is true that independent films have finally received greater praise and wider distribution than heretofore and Quentin Tarrantino's *Pulp Fiction*, Spike Lee's *Malcolm X*, and Jane Campion's *The Piano* seem a sort of highwater mark for these films, but whether these films are any less "affirmative," in Marcuse's sense, of American or capitalist culture than a Hollywood film is arguable. Moreover,

Hollywood, with its high-priced stars and its financial backing often lures away these independent filmmakers, who believe they can demand the same freedom they always enjoyed. How well they succeed remains to be seen.

It might be asked, finally, what relevance Miller can possibly have for readers in the "Postmodern era," an era that would severely tax certain of Miller's pet notions. The concept of the individual, as we have already seen, has been further problematized, making it an even more unstable concept than it was already in the era of Freud. Binaries--good and evil, true and false, authentic and inauthentic--have been similarly attacked as simplifications that require rethinking.

One binary of possibly paramount importance for Miller is that of surface versus depth. As mentioned throughout this essay, Miller bases many of his criticisms of America and Americans on just this notion of surface and depth, specifically the American refusal to look beyond the surface facts to the depths, the underpinnings, the significance. His criticism of commodities and cities, his refusal to support the Second World War and his renunciation of money, even his endorsement of a true charity that gives left and right, are all based on the notion that there are depths, that there is a surface that can distort and a depth that must be discovered and disclosed.

Miller's notion could not be replaced, I think, by what Fredric Jameson has called "multiple surfaces," and which he discovers in painting and architecture and intertextuality (*Postmodernism* 12). Miller's insistence on "the reality behind the facts," on a certain distance, seems to require the surface-depth relationship. Today we might conceive this relationship as far more intricate, much more closely related than Miller did, rather than simply denying its existence. Still, Miller's non-linear

prose, as well as its often provocative nature, generally attacks any notion of a simple surface-depth relationship.

A more satisfactory reading of the this binary, however, might involve interpreting the surface-depth relation somewhat differently. If we take a specific example, the Second World War, his use of surface versus depth assumes an added dimension. Miller perceives other issues behind those popularly thought to be the impetus for war and articulates other goals for the war. In this case, his reading of the war might be understood as an attempt to perform what Walter Benjamin has described as the task of the historical materialist: "to brush history against the grain" (*Illuminations* 257). Miller refuses to accept the pronouncements of political leaders at face value and searches, dialectically, for other causes for the war, for other goals. The surface-depth binary could then be reconceived as a dialectical strategy.

Miller, despite throwbacks to the modernist era, retains a certain pertinence to the "Postmodern era." His opposition to the dominant culture may be harder to maintain now that "even overtly political interventions like those of *The Clash* are all somehow secretly disarmed and reabsorbed" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 49) by a system that allows most anything and thus defuses rebellion from the start. A prose like Miller's, which invites or elicits responses from the reader, still functions oppositionally, even if its impact is somewhat impaired.

Coda

To those unfamiliar with Miller's work, it probably bears reiterating that his works do not contain a simple and unremitting negativity. Instead, they are replete with images of his exuberance and enjoyment of life. His optimism, his humor, his

exaggerations differentiate him from many Modernists who betrayed little hope for the future, little love for the present, and, as Miller accused, buried themselves in the dead dust of books. Change, in such a desperate climate, would just not be worth the effort, and Miller spurns such despair.

One might expect that such a figure worthy of academic consideration, but there has been little published, especially in the last ten years. On the centennial of Miller's birth (1991), two biographies were published. In the years since, works by Miller and on Miller have come out, but generally outside academic circles.⁸ Ronald Gottesman published a collection of critical essays on Miller in 1992 but of the thirty-six contributions no more than seven were recent. In the intervening years, at best a handful of studies have been produced.

For some 30 years,⁹ Miller exemplified the rejected artist--just as Van Gogh had in the last decades of the nineteenth century--though he did not always live up to his ideals.¹⁰ Nevertheless, he represented the artist committed to his or her work, the bohemian artist who will not bend, who will never sell-out. Such an attitude is visible in Miller's veneration, throughout his life, of the little person, the ignored artist whose

⁸ Roger Jackson has published works by Miller as well as pieces on Miller but these are rarely academic. James Decker's just published analysis of Miller's prose is an exception, being an abbreviated version of his dissertation on Miller.

⁹ From first publication of *Cancer* in 1934, in Paris, until final publication, in America, in 1961.

¹⁰ Poet Kenneth Patchen, approached about contributing an article to a book of praise of Henry Miller, wrote to Miller that the people organizing the venture--published as *The Happy Rock*--were sycophants, just the sort of people to be avoided. The biographies of Miller by Dearborn and Ferguson depict a man caught between his own ideals, his desire for recognition, and his struggle for survival, an ominous combination.

work is filled with passion, vision, but who never reaches a wide audience, for one reason or another, generally from avoidance of what is currently fashionable. In a way paralleling his "oppressors," those concerned only with "the great men," Miller rarely concerned himself with the famous figures, but instead the ones not quite famous, nearly forgotten, even (or especially) those who have no chance at recognition. Albert Camus says somewhere that it is the job of the thinking people not to be on the side of the executioners. For Miller, most people of his era acted in the interests of the executioners, and the ones being executed were people like him, the little guys who yearned for an alternative way of life, people he felt called upon to defend, "convinced," as Benjamin asserts a historian must be, "that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy" if the other side succeeds in imposing its values, interpretations (*Illuminations* 255). Miller's works can be read, consequently, as a record of his struggle, as a sort of Everyman.

Miller attempts to provoke, on the part of his readers, a general rejection of currently accepted values, especially relating to a certain utilitarian notion widespread in Western culture that denies the value of pleasure as a value in itself. Max Weber writes, "the reason for the entirely negative attitude of Puritanism to all the sensual and emotional elements in culture and in religion [is] because they are of no use toward salvation and promote sentimental illusion and idolatrous sensations" (105). In his works, Miller's depictions of sex and sexuality expose people's fantasies as well as their fears, just as his calls for a radical change in society did. A society where pleasure is denied a central role, when it is not actually repressed, is a life-denying society for Miller. Miller challenges readers to seek out the life more abundant. People dare not hope for a change which will remove them from servitude--to an

economic system as well as to a puritanical sexual morality--for fear that they will lose the little freedom they have and for fear of the freedom they might gain, for then, as Miller pointed out, they would be forced to discover for themselves what it is they wish to do with their lives.

Those who would criticize Miller for not drawing a picture of the new world he wishes to see replace the one already in existence, for not outlining a solution to the current dilemma, would, if he were to do so, charge him with depicting, what in these jaded times has come to be associated with failure, a utopia. As we saw in the last chapter, he was not afraid of being utopian, for better and for worse. Miller, however, should be read both for his critiques and for his love of his world. He saw possibilities everywhere, but he believed that radical changes had to come about first. Though often disappointed in people, he rarely despaired of them, believing that if they had the courage at last they could effect the changes becoming more and more necessary in an inhuman capitalist-industrialist world.

He was out of step with his times, both ahead of them and behind them. He knew something of what had been lost and something of what had to be gained back, though he also recognized that the forms alone would never be enough. He understood, as we saw earlier, that people had to begin to perceive the driving forces. James Kunstler, in concluding *The Geography of Nowhere*, writes:

The coming decades are still bound to be difficult. We will have to replace a destructive economy of mindless expansion with one that consciously respects earthly limits and human scale. To begin doing that, we'll have to reevaluate some sacred ideas about ourselves. We'll have to give up our fetish for extreme individualism and rediscover public life. In doing so, we will surely rediscover public manners and some notion of common good. We will have to tell some people, in some cases what they can and cannot do with their land. (275).

We will have to learn, he adds, "to live locally" (275). We must, in short, move beyond this capitalist system that Miller so much decried, move beyond the era of free market, and realize that people have responsibilities to others, that a "free market" does not exist in a vacuum and without repercussions on others.¹¹ Such a system will be accused of being "socialist" because it will be a system that acknowledges responsibilities not just to business interests but to public interests--and not simply a monolithic public such as "The American People," which does not exist, but one which acknowledges diversity of interests, talents, hopes.

"What is it that people fear?" Miller asks in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*:

What they don't understand. The civilized man is not a whit different from the savage in this respect. The new always carries with it the sense of violation, of sacrilege. What is dead is sacred; what is new, that is, *different*, is evil, dangerous, or subversive. (172)

We have to change, Miller argues repeatedly, if we are to be happy, if we are to live comfortably in this world, with other nations. As the American Century, as many have called it, comes to an end, these issues that have weighed on us will have to be dealt with, profoundly, if America and the West are to play a positive and powerful role in making the twenty-first century a century for people. Miller, in his attempts to free himself, was calling for just such a change.

¹¹ "Free Market" can also be seen as yet another misnomer at this stage of capitalism. The market is "free" if you have enough money to participate, to compete on a larger than local level. Locally-owned stores have largely disappeared from the American landscape and are in grave danger of doing so, where they have not already done so, in Europe.

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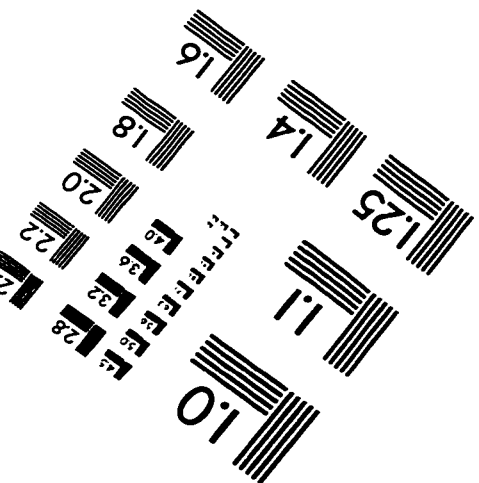
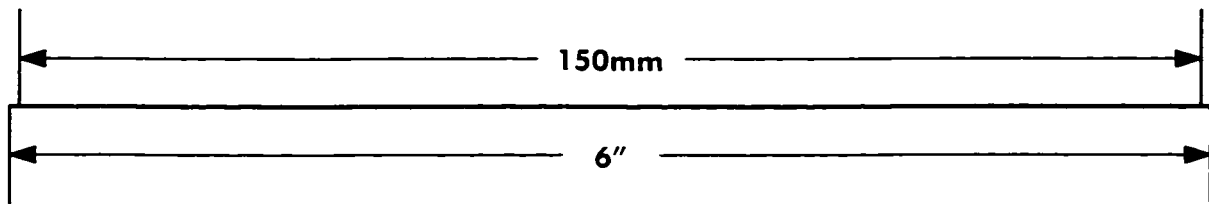
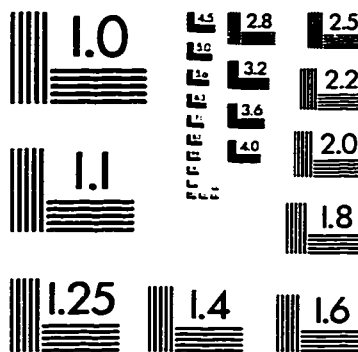
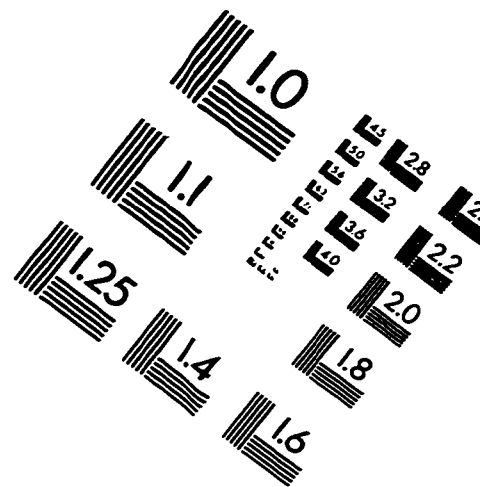
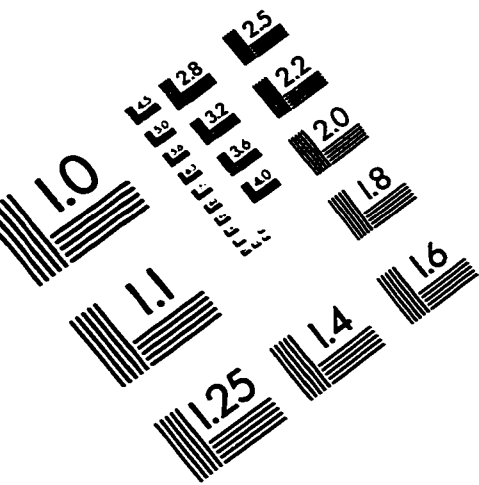
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