



ISSN 1989 – 9572

DOI: 10.47750/jett.2023.14.02.021

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Journal for Educators, Teachers and Trainers, Vol. 14 (2)

<https://jett.labosfor.com/>

Date of reception: 25 Jan 2023

Date of revision: 20 Feb 2023

Date of acceptance: 07 Mar 2023

Syed Zamanat Abbas, Aashish Pande (2023). Purging the Sexual Neuroses and Perversions of Twentieth Century America in Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*. *Journal for Educators, Teachers and Trainers*, Vol. 14(2). 217-228.

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at discussing the one of the two 'Tropic' novels of Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* with respect to its role in exposing the unhealthy repression of sexuality in the American society in the early part of the twentieth century. With the publication of this novel, Henry Miller challenged a number of things; especially the censors and the accepted standard structure of a novel. He exposed the rot that lay in the American society in terms of sexual hypocrisy and morality. His novels are called as 'autonovels' and had been banned for obscenity. In this paper we also look at the contribution of *Tropic of Cancer* role in exposing sexual hypocrisy in erstwhile America and bringing sexual revolution. *Tropic of Cancer* is a milestone in the journey that America undertook from being Puritan America to a sexually liberated America and his warning for the future against becoming complacent about the war against hypocrisy.

Keywords: sexual neuroses, hypocrisy, perversion, autonovels, freedom, purgation

INTRODUCTION

Henry Miller's name was popularized by the Pulitzer Prize winner author Karl Shapiro who called him 'Gandhi with a penis' (In Henderson, 2018). While Gandhi is known for liberating a country from the clutches of a repressive foreign rule, Miller is infamous for writing novels that were banned for many years during his lifetime. His real contribution to American Literature and society is little acknowledged. If a problem exists somewhere, it continues to be a problem until some action is taken against it. Acknowledging the problem and talking about it is the first step towards its resolution. At the same time, one must also remember that social change does not come overnight, but is gradual. Henry Miller liberated American society from its sexual perversity hidden under the garb of hypocrisy. Miller openly talked about what was actually happening in the society and also at the same time in his life. Others used comedy to talk about such a serious issue since it was hard hitting to the society. Donald Gutierrez writes about this attempt of Miller:

Miller's comedy is undeniably low. Yet, as Wylie Sypher observes: "low' comedy is as legitimate as 'high.' In fact, the lower the range, the more authentic the comedy may be." Low comedy has a stronger visceral appeal than high comedy; it is cruder, more earthy, more animalistic and physical. The lowness of good low comedy, however, is not merely a question of gross subject matter or abundant physical action; rather it has also to do with the level of response which it excites in the audience: it appeals to the lower levels of our being and in so doing operates to explore our own baser tendencies, our darkness. (Gutierrez, 1978)

For becoming a writer of the lower form of Comedy, Miller created a fictionalized version of himself and wrote about the exploits of that character in Paris. In this journey, he discovered themselves and purged a lot of impurities from his own personality as well. He also tried to make sense of what was going on with himself and the world. This endeavour borders on the absurd. Absurdity in literature has been associated with Albert Camus, but, a stronger and more concrete proponent of the concept of the Absurd is Samuel Beckett. Beckett showed in his plays how life has lost its meaning and has become formless, meaningless and useless. Henry Miller has also been compared with Samuel Beckett since both of them have been termed as proponents of an "anti-literature," Beckett as "minimalist" (Abbas, 2019), and Miller as "Renegade" (Turner, 2012). They have been identified as writers who aspire to invert the popularly accepted narrative through the aesthetics of revelation. The major difference between the two writers is that Beckett leaves us with a world depleted of life, where nothing short of a miracle or the appearance of a messiah can transform that lifelessness and hopelessness into a world full of life. On the other hand, Miller presents a world which is on the verge of transformation and

radical change. One of the greatest changes that this world is about to undergo is change in its approach towards sexual morality. The hypocrisy and the puritanical approach that had plagued America since the Pilgrim's Fathers landed had reached its acme in the nineteenth century. Nathaniel Hawthorne's depiction of the treatment meted out to Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter* depicts this hypocrisy and moral rigidity. The problem with such an approach to life and sexuality was that it wasn't leading towards the development of a healthy moral society; on the contrary it led towards a society which appeared to be in order on the surface, but under the surface lay a deep rot of perversity which was hidden by the veil of hypocrisy. Literature in the twentieth century has been remarkably noticeable for its shock value. New styles, new forms and experimentation with the language and structure of compositions have emerged to a great extent. This lack of form, organization and deviation from the conventional norms of literature is a result of the change in the pattern and the structure of life itself. Henry Miller also tried to unravel the secrets of the human heart and at the same time to give a picture of his age. He was a writer who spent his life in the exploration of the art of living and celebration of life. In his own words, "The aim of life is to live and to live means to be aware, joyful, drunkenly, serenely, divinely aware" (Miller, 1993).

It was in the art of Miller that had something that offended not only in its language but also but also by "the tone of the thing," and "by the fact that the most outrageous, even criminal behavior was related with a certain cheerfulness that compounded the offense of the obscene language" (Turner, p. 317). Turner also asserts that "A slaving pornographer by comparison looked better" but Miller's case was different and it "seemed not to titillate so much as to take a fiendish delight in rubbing the reader's face in filth just for the pleasure of it" (ibid.).

Below we aim to highlight how Miller, "a patron saint of the sexual revolution" (Murphy, 2013), in his magnum opus *Tropic of Cancer*, almost created a new form to expose the rot of hypocrisy beside redeeming sex from its status as a taboo by playing a chaplinesque role in debunking a sort of perversity in the modern society for which an unhealthy repression of sex was the norm.

Genesis and Form of Tropic of Cancer: A Step Towards Revolution

Garland (2011) says, "the idea that humankind might have created its own terrors is not as occult as Miller's purportedly ahistorical ravings would at first suggest" (p. 207) and she goes on to quote Michael Fraenkel's *Genesis of Tropic of Cancer* where Fraenkel remarks the unification of an "'outer stain' with an 'inner death,'" which "binds outer warfare to inner corruption" (Garland, 2011, p. 207). The genesis of *Tropic of Cancer* thus becomes not only interesting but also reveals an honest admission on part of Miller for futility about which Decker says, "Miller's obsessive endeavors to retrace his artistic and personal genesis reveal an acute awareness of the inability to move truly beyond the 'chaos of appearances'" (Decker, 2005, p. 25).

"[T]here is a perversity to the way that Miller begins *Tropic of Cancer*" (Garland, 2011, p. 202) in 1930, after he left for Paris where he began working on his 'Paris' book that was published as *Tropic of Cancer*. The origin of title of the two most controversial books was Miller's pet names for his second wife June Mansfield's breasts: 'Tropic of Cancer' and 'Tropic of Capricorn.' Kingsley Widmer's allusion to June as a "Dark Lady of passion" (Widmer, 1982) works well in Miller's handling of "both June's hypermutability and his own profound artistic transformations" (Decker, 2005, p. 102).

Moreover *Tropic of Cancer* is a semiautobiographical story of the growth of the artist usually classified as *Auto novels*, and by doing this, the author challenged the conventional pattern of storytelling, narrative technique as well as the focus on plot and character. Miller used the "first person spectacular" in his fiction for the first time, a point of view he had avoided in his earlier fiction, working "at it in a kind of pre-artistic paralysis, wondering how it was that the dross of life could be transmogrified into imperishable passages of literature" (Turner, 2011, p. 237). He also used models and sources such as Knut Hamsun, D.H. Lawrence and Marcel Proust, soliloquies of William Shakespeare and James Joyce, which resulted in a "high-toned, often ecstatic narrative style" that "fits as well into the 'epiphanic' model of modernism as it does into the modern quest for new ways of living," suiting his style and ideology that could be "read as a voracious version of the kinds of pragmatic and home-spun responses to modernity" (Garland, 2012, p. 206). Miller was also influenced by Brassi's photography, Pablo Picasso's nudes, Japanese Shungas and Indian sculpture's explicit yet sacred depiction of sex and the diaries of Anais Nin "known more as Henry Miller's sex kitten than as a formidable literary talent herself" (Turner, p. 281).

The significant feature about Miller as a writer in *Tropic of Cancer* is that he brings out the harsh realities of life out in the open. The reason he does that has to do with a catharsis, initially for himself and then for the readers. He makes them aware of the bitterness, the hypocrisy and the evil that surrounds the world on the surface and more so underneath it. What is quietly done and not talked about in the open is a termite that plagues the societies that claim to live under the garb of a false morality. In an interview by George Wickes for *The Paris Review* Miller replied "Taboos after all are only hangovers, the product of diseased minds, you might say, of fearsome people who hadn't the courage to live and who under the guise of morality and religion have imposed

these things upon us. I see the world, the civilized world, as largely irreligious” He added “The religion in force among civilized people is always false and hypocritical, the very opposite of what the initiators of any religion really meant” (Miller in Wickes, 1962). It is as if he opens the rotting sewers of his times for the world to see what is to be done to live in a clean and healthy world. He says it is not just another book but a “libel, slander, defamation of character.” It is not a book “in the ordinary sense of the word. No, this is a prolonged insult, a gob of spit in the face of Art, a kick in the pants to God, Man, Destiny, Time, Love, Beauty. . . what you will” (Miller, 1993, p. 4). In Ihab Hassan’s view, works such as *Tropic of Cancer* and *The Unnamable* “reflect inverse worlds” (Hassan, 1987), and are stylized autobiographies of such extreme self-absorption, self-examination, and self-consciousness as to challenge the very idea of meaningful articulation. *Tropic of Cancer* recreates and redefines the creative process for the working-class writer. It has been termed as an (un)American, ungentle, uneducated (but not unlettered) middle-aged-man’s version of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. One of the reasons that is given for such a classification of the novel is that nobody likes a mirror that reveals or magnifies their faults. The work has also been compared to Marcel Proust’s (1982) *Remembrance of Things Past*. Critics have condemned the novel for its sexuality (Rembar, 2015), but the other areas dealt with in the book have been completely ignored by them. Such an area which is more revolutionary is the attitude towards life. The author must not only express himself or create something for the reader to enjoy a good afternoon. The idea of literature as an anodyne or a sedative has been challenged by Miller with the publication of *Tropic of Cancer*.

Exposing the Rot of Hypocrisy

Henry Miller confessed in one of his letters to Stanley Fleishman that after having investigated the “emasculative process which Anglo-Saxon literature undergone these last few hundred years... it became more than obvious to me, and others, that our literature was not rendering a picture of the known behavior, sexual behavior particularly, of the citizens of the Western world” (Miller, 1968). Political correctness, religious morality and other norms imposed by the society in order to bring order into the society had a very bad impact on the western world in terms of mental health. One could not express one’s sexuality out in the open. This led to the adoption of a number of double standards by the people in general for centuries in the western world. Leading double lives had a pathological impact on the psyche of men and women both, which in turn resulted in sexual crimes and perversions. People who dared to expose these were not allowed to do so by the censors. Not long ago Oscar Wilde had been jailed in England for being gay and the works of D.H. Lawrence banned on charges of being obscene. With such a terrifying background and history, what Henry Miller attempted was nothing short of extraordinary, almost “obedient to every urge—without distinction of morality, ethics” (Miller, 2016).

Ezra Pound remarked about *Tropic of Cancer* that at last humanity had got an unprintable book that’s readable. The reason why Pound said this was that the society at the time as well as literature was going through a phase of struggle. The Great Depression was making life miserable for most of the people. Families were breaking down in the U.S. People found relief in drugs and breaking the rules of the society. At the same time many women were forced to become prostitutes in order to feed their families. Newspapers and novels did not acknowledge the problem openly. Miller talks about these in his novels, particularly *Tropic of Cancer*. In the U.S. where Henry Miller lived, he had seen prostitutes as a common thing since his childhood. At around the same time, the theories of Sigmund Freud had begun startling the society and changing as well as challenging the ideas that had acted as a lighthouse to the societies (especially the western world) for about two millennia. Most of the things that he does in *Tropic of Cancer* are deliberate and done with a purpose; “the deliberate taking of risks to create an improvisation that would lift the writer and the reader above the quotidian Where and What to the existential Why” (Turner, p. 285). The purpose is rebellion against traditional norm of moral values, literature and other things. It opens with a statement by the author that “I am living” at Villa Borghese. In the next line he says, “We are all alone and we are dead.” The very first paragraph of the book is full of paradox. Why does he choose to make such a statement is the question that comes in the minds of the readers and the answer is provided in the third paragraph when he says— “The cancer of time is eating us away” (Miller, 1993, p. 3). Miller further writes, “Our heroes have killed themselves, or are killing themselves. The hero, then, is not Time, but Timelessness. We must get in step, a lock step, towards the prison of death. There is no escape. The weather will not change” (Miller, 1993, p. 4). The author then goes on to narrate the nature and function of the book. In fact he boasts of his ‘anti-art’ like “Miró, the renegade Spaniard, who had most boldly articulated the anti-art impulse that united the avant-garde across all mediums and national boundaries” (Turner, p. 246), being a kick in the pants of God, defamation, a slander and being a song (Fuchs, 2011). The author then dedicates the book to a Jew named Tania “with an obscene love song” (Turner, p. 354). And for what, for, perhaps, the human denial and disavowal to come to terms with the absurdity of human condition, where man “will debauch himself with ideas, he will reduce himself to a shadow if only for one second of his life he can close his eyes to the hideousness of reality” (Miller, 1993, p. 197). Wolke (2021) quotes Miller “In connection to Jefferson’s claim

about Nordic hypocrisy” that Miller holds that “neither my father nor my mother had ever shown any religious inclinations. Though always upholding the church to others, they themselves never set foot in a church” (In Wolke, 2021, p. 79).

James M. Decker (2006) praises Miller’s honesty since he “will not couch the textual record of the supraself’s desire in the euphemisms of the hypocritical living dead” but will be rather blunt. In his opinion, “Miller occasions the supraself to revel without shame in sexual abandon. Far from enacting what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar pejoratively label a “theology of the cunt,” Miller seeks to celebrate his liberation in all realms of existence” (Decker, 2006) because only by being honest about himself could one expose the hypocrisy in others.

Acknowledging the Taboo called ‘Sex’

Miller is acknowledged as an iconoclast in the sense that he broke a number of taboos in the nineteenth century. In an attempt to break and acknowledge the taboo Miller exposes the ‘dirt’ and moral corruption in the society that he sees around him in Paris in *Tropic of Cancer*. Decker (2006) remarks that “Miller evinces an unrestrained joy that, although ephemeral, suggests the supraself’s ability to flout the hypocrisy of a society that clothes sex in the furtive garments of taboo” (p. 99). After describing all the bad things that drive him insane, the intradiegetic narrator comes to one thing that helps him stay alive and that is food. He says that food is one thing that he enjoys the most. The next thing that kept him from going mad in isolation and desperation is also mentioned—it is not the faith in God, nor is it any Guru or spirituality but sex, sometimes “a profoundly forbidden form of sex” (Turner, p. 18). He openly talks about the ‘cunt’ of Tania and about fucking her so that she remains fucked forever. This idea may seem absurd to people but this is a statement that carries very deep connotation. It talks about the absurdity of the desire of the flesh and also echoes the idea of Osho (2013) about the reason for humans to have gone mad after sex and ways and means to control the madness and move towards spirituality. One cannot help but notice two things here; the first being that Miller talks about sex, and genitals; the other being that it is talked about with a sense of mundaneness and being ordinary like going to the market to get groceries. The religious and puritanical approaches had led people to believe that sex was an evil act, the “original sin” for which humanity had been punished for eternity till one man took upon Himself all the burden of humanity and suffered for its sins. Hence people indulged in the act of sex due to innate desires and impulses, yet they did it with a sense of guilt due to the sense of taboo indoctrinated by the society and religion. Miller tries to break this in *Topic of Cancer* by writing about everything openly, confessing his most neurotic desires as well. In confession he equals Mahatma Gandhi who in his *My Experiments with Truth* openly confessed the kind of sexual desires he felt for his young wife while he pressed the feet of his father. In Gandhi, we see a kind of guilt associated with sexual desires, while in Miller it is absolutely free of guilt. Perhaps it was for this reason that Shapiro compared Miller to Gandhi.

The author also communicates to the readers his feeling of alienation and the sense of waste he feels. He is reminded of another Paris that of Maugham, Ganguin and George Moore. What he sees before him is a waste. He even wonders if the days of the ‘grand narrative’ are over, therefore foresees post-Modernism. The lack of someone to whom he can communicate his feelings frustrates him a lot thus further intensifying the feeling of alienation. In this sense of waste and desolation besides food and sex that keep him alive, he is interested in only one thing about which he writes:

There is only one thing which interests me vitally now, and that is the recording of all that which is omitted in books. Nobody, so far as I can see, is making use of those elements in the air which gives direction and motivation to our lives. Only the killers seem to be extracting from life some satisfactory measure of what they are putting into it. The age demands violence, but we are getting only abortive explosions. Revolutions are nipped in the bud, or else succeed too quickly. Passion is quickly exhausted. Men fall back on ideas, *comme d’habitude*. Nothing is proposed that can last more than twenty-four hours. We are living a million lives in the space of a generation. (Miller, 1993, p. 19)

One can see the artist genuinely concerned about the society and the nature of life people are living or being forced to live by unknown forces. In fact, to rebel against the convention and to raise voice through poetry has been the function of a writer. Hence in these lines, the author is fulfilling his duty as a poet. But unlike Shaw or any other writer, he is not being didactic or putting things before the reader in an artificial or creative way, nor is he being didactic in his approach. He is simply speaking his mind out to the reader until the telephone interrupts his train of thoughts. He compares the struggle of people to live with the image of a person scratching his skin due to itch. The person scratches until there is no skin left and blood oozes out. In the same way, people make a deliberate attempt to live until they are left with no other option but to succumb to the cruelties of times. The author narrates various people that he come across—misers, prostitutes and people who have no interest in life. He is reminded of the bad times he had to face when he arrived in Paris. Miller had to go without food for days, living in apartment filled with cockroaches etc. He passes his time by looking at the beauty of the statues and the beauty of the river Seine that makes him feel ecstatic. He describes his encounter with a prostitute named Elsa. The author uses a comparison between her and Belgium. Elsa narrates her misfortune of being used by

various men and then having gone through the pain of abortion. Miller compares her experience with the romping of Belgium by the Germans.

An old man who has written a book called *A Man cut in Slices* approaches Miller. Miller congratulates him for the work he has done and at the same time laments not having thought of a title like that. He even ridicules the title of the book that he has written called *Crazy Cock*. Miller talks about the books that he has read over the past few months and about a prostitute whom he calls Germaine. He feels that Germaine was quite different from other prostitutes that he has ever come across. He becomes poetic while describing her. This particular prostitute is not limited to physical act of lovemaking. She even introduces the writer to her friends and when he needs money, she lends him. When she has no money to lend it to him, she apologizes. Therefore, the relationship that he has with her is quite different from other prostitutes. Even in times of desolation, the author finds friends and the kind of friends he has are different. It is remarked that prostitutes are like leeches and they suck the last penny out of one's pocket. But, in the case of Miller, it is a different cosmos. He lives off the money of a prostitute (though he is not her pimp). After checking his mail at American Express, the author goes on to draw the comparison between Paris and New York. He feels that Paris was like heaven for everyone and even beggars felt proud and important to be in that city. On the other hand, in New York, even the rich people were aware of their unimportance. He even criticizes Manhattan that Whitman sang of. It gave him a feeling of ennui, the houses seemed like prisons and people were full of monotony.

Exposing the Rot Hidden Everywhere

Tropic of Cancer is generally perceived to be a chronicle of Miller's adventures, both imaginary and real in Paris and America. He depicts the moral corruption, hypocrisy and sexual perversions that are rampant in the western society as well as in people from all over the world. Miller recounts of his memories of his Hindu friends from India when he goes to a concert and his thoughts drift apart in all the directions. Miller even tries to imagine what it feels to be woman during coitus—he feels nothing but pain in his groin. Later he is reminded of New York and some of the Hindu friends that he tried to help with the position he had. He also narrates the incident of a friend Gupte whom he tried to help and was found with his throat slit one morning from ear to ear. He is forced to think of Hindus as he is staying with a Hindu called Nanantatee who is playing a Samaritan to him. Miller feels that he did nothing for Nanantatee in New York and therefore he was presenting himself as a wealthy person to him. Miller describes everything about Nanantatee who is a Gujarati and has got weird habits including putting Rose buds in tea. Miller also describes the relationship that Nanantatee has with his God—perfectly commercial i.e. in exchange to the offerings that he makes to his God, his God allows him to survive. When a disciple of Gandhi arrives at their apartment, Miller is asked to show him around and he asks Miller to take him to a prostitute. The author does that and describes in detail how the disciple of Gandhi makes a complete fool of himself by making a faux pas and then by dropping 'turds' in the bidet. Henry Miller almost predicted the future leaders of India with the description of the follower of Gandhi who attends meetings and conferences during the day and spreads the message of Gandhi. At night he becomes a totally different person. This follower of Gandhi, Miller claims is one of the 78 followers who marched with Gandhi from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi beach. He drinks champagne, snaps his fingers at the garcon and wants the author to take to him to a cheap brothel where he could have two or three girls at the same time. When Miller takes him there, he ridicules himself by dancing naked with three women. The author takes leave from the Hindu after borrowing a few francs to keep him alive. In the meantime, he delves in introspection. He chides himself for being a pest, a hyena who was spiritually dead. By depicting the characters who are supposed to be morally upright due to the fact that they come from India (the wisdom of the east that T.S. Elliot regards highly in *The Waste Land*) Miller subverts the perception of morality. Miller thus not only depicts the rot of sexual perversions and hypocrisy not only in the US but also in the entire world especially India. But the interesting thing to note in this narration is that Miller does not use a tone of contempt or a judgmental attitude towards these characters. He merely depicts things as they are. The reason for doing so is explained by Harold T McCarthy in his article "Henry Miller's Democratic Vistas". He writes:

Miller believed in "spreading" nothing-neither gospel, nor education, nor the wealth, nor brotherhood. To try to do so was to interfere with the sacred privacy of others. He saw "the brotherhood of man" as a permanent delusion common to idealists everywhere in all epochs; it always fails because it reduces men as individuals "to the least common denominator of intelligibility." Individuals and peoples, he believed, can only be helped and should only be helped-after suffering has played its necessary part in the resurrection of the spirit. (McCarthy, 1971, p. 232)

By writing about people from all over the world and exposing the double standards, hypocrisies and perversions in people all over the world, Miller broke a number of myths about virtue or corruption being endemic to cultures or civilizations. He proved that humanity at large suffered from the disease of self-deceit and hypocrisy and the basic human nature remained same across cultures.

Playing the Fool to Expose the Perversity and Hypocrisy

Instead of proclaiming himself as a social reformer or the saviour of humanity, Miller is satisfied to depict humanity as it is with a comic version of himself as well. Van Norden is another character who is introduced in the book. He is interesting because of the tales he talks about the types of women he has had relationships with. He talks about virgins, married women and French girls. In his opinion the French girls either want money or want to get married. He finds married women most disgusting as they have no shame and after sex they talk of love. Through Van Norden's character the author has shown the real picture of the society in Paris. Feminists have criticized him for this and Gandhi's followers would also criticize him for the depiction of Gandhi's follower who made a fool of himself. The point to be noted, however, is that he does not spare anyone—not even himself. It would be redundant to use the same argument mentioned above that people do not like to see a mirror that magnifies their ugliness. Further in the novel, Henry Miller also describes the sexual exploits of a character called Van Norden and the episode of his wife's visit to Paris. After his wife leaves, he is propositioned by a pregnant woman. It takes his appetite away. The author then compares the attitude of the people of US with that of the people in France especially Paris:

I have never seen a place like Paris for varieties of sexual Provender. As soon as a woman loses a front tooth or an eye or leg she goes on the loose. In America she'd starve to death if she had nothing to recommend her but a mutilation. Here it is different. A missing tooth or a nose eaten away or a fallen womb, any misfortune that aggravates the natural homeliness of the female, seems to be regarded as an added spice, a stimulant for the jaded appetite of the male. (Miller, 1993, p. 166)

From the above description it is evident that Miller does not critique only the US but France and Europe as well. This again is not done with malice but as a general statement of facts without any moral high ground or judgment. The next incident that is described in detail is the adventure with Tania, the Jew who wants him to quit his job as a proof-reader so that he can make love to her day and night. But, the good sense prevails over him and Miller keeps his job. In his office also he is about to be fired because he uses some 'good' words. This hurts the ego of his bosses who sarcastically tell him that he is more than qualified for the job of the proof-reader. This makes the author change his approach and he never utters a polysyllabic word in front of his boss. Every now and then he approaches his boss and asks him the meaning of some simple word. This makes his boss happy and contented. Here Miller has exposed the love of conformity and mediocrity in institutions and the society.

Hard Times Inflicted by Society

On a particular Fourth of July, Henry Miller is fired from his job because of cost cutting. During the time of despair the people who help him are the Jews (for selfish reasons of course). They make him write articles in their name for newspapers for a meagre amount as low as twenty five francs. One of the worst jobs that the author undertook in his opinion was to write a thesis for a deaf and dumb psychologist about crippled children. He hated writing it but then again it bought him breakfast each morning. He even poses nude for some photographs that are meant for 'some degenerates in Munich'. The photographer who makes him do it becomes a good friend of Miller. There is some good time that the two of them (Kruger and Miller) spend together until one day the author is ill—so much so that both of them think that he is about to die. Miller wanted to die in the studio of the photographer. Kruger forcibly takes him to a place to recuperate. After the author is better he meets two compatriots and spends some time with them. When the time to say goodbye comes the three of them get sentimental about the idea of America. This idea of America being idolized leads the author to find faults with Paris. He compares it to a whore. Then he narrates his encounter with two women who try to gain his sympathy by acting as if they were in distress. One of them is a prostitute. She has just buried her dead child and claims that her mother is dying. The author gives her one hundred francs and then pinches the money back when she is out of the room. An encounter with a Russian girl called Macha who claims to be a princess is also mentioned in detail. The whole history of how she got there from Russia with millions of francs in her account and how she was fooled by a film director is mentioned. After getting venereal disease she tries to commit suicide by drowning herself in the Seine. In the winters she disappears. Moved by the incidents of the plight of these women, the author is forced to think about the condition of women in the world. He is so disgusted that he laments the condition of all things feminine including the earth. Henry Miller writes:

The earth is not an arid plateau of health and comfort, but a great sprawling female with velvet torso that swells and heaves with ocean billows; she squirms beneath a diadem of sweat and anguish. Naked and sexed she rolls among the clouds in the violet light of the stars. All of her, from her generous breasts to her gleaming thighs, blazes with furious ardor. She moves amongst the seasons and the years with a grand whoopla that seizes the torso with paroxysmal fury, that shakes the cobwebs out of the sky; she subsides on her pivotal orbits with volcanic tremors. (Miller, 1993, p. 251)

The above quote is a fine piece of poetic prose. It describes the plight of the earth as well as women not in a didactic way like G.B. Shaw but a matter-of-fact way. The incidents of the women's exploitation is also not

narrated with Chekhovian pathos or the vivid description of Leo Tolstoy but a matter of fact ordinary way. The affair of the author's friend Fillmore with a French girl called Genette is also an import part of the novel. The affair is tempestuous and the author learns that Fillmore is ill and has been admitted to a hospital. The doctors are not able to diagnose his illness. Most of the times, he behaves like a mad man. They even pull out all his teeth. This restores his sanity. The affair then returns to its normal tempestuous condition. Fillmore is about to marry Genette because she says she is pregnant. In the meantime, Henry Miller is able to find from a prostitute that Genette is a parasite and the swelling in her stomach is due to excessive consumption of alcohol. Fillmore marries Genette and is soon bored as well as suffocated by the life that he leads. His wife does not let him spend any money and snatches all sorts of pleasures from him. She even threatens him that if he tried to get rid of her, she would follow him and kill him. The author comes to his rescue and gives him an idea of running to America via England. Henry Miller plans everything for him and sees him off. Meanwhile Fillmore gives him money for Genette. The author makes no qualms about spending all the money on himself. Towards the end of the book, he contemplates going back to America while he feels the flow of the river Seine across himself.

In a way Miller "brings late Romantic and early twentieth-century texts from Nietzsche, Spengler, Strindberg, Goethe, Joyce, Ibsen, Proust and Giovanni Papini together to articulate a late apocalyptic modernism" in tracing these "belated expatriate moment(s)" (Garland, 2011).

Character and Characterization

As far as characterization is concerned, the only real character in the book is the author himself. As it is, there is no chronological or linear plot in the book. The author keeps encountering things as a Picaro or a travelling mirror down the road. About this attitude and writing style of Miller Karl Shapiro is said to have remarked "Miller writes hundreds of pages describing the minutest and the clearest detail of his exploits in bed. Every serious reader of erotica has remarked about Miller that he is probably the only author in history who writes about such things with complete ease and naturalness" (In Glicksberg, 2012, p. 122).

The question then arises whether Henry Miller's writings are a way to liberate the society from its hypocrisy or is it the same as any roadside cheap pornographic literature that one gets to read these days, or is it a crude version of Playboy and other pornographic magazine. One will be able to find that the aim, the intention and the style of the pornographic novels is quite contrary to the writings of Henry Miller. A book of the style aforementioned is so simple that even a functionally illiterate person if listens to the passages from pornographic books would be able to understand that the idea is to titillate his/her fantasies. It would be far from the idea of sublime. Applying the same test to the writing of Miller, it would be impossible to get any pleasure of the baser level in Miller. On the contrary instead of such baser pleasure readers claimed it to be liberating:

...because it is a naked, vivid account of one man's struggles with almost insuperable odds, because it is a revelatory account of this man's life, sparing nothing. Many of these readers confessed that it was the first time in all their reading experience that the whole man had been portrayed. They saluted the author as one who had restored a new kind of integrity to literature, to our literature... (Miller, 1968)

Many readers found it to be liberating since expurgated and "bowdlerized" editions of classics were available in the market since Thomas Bowdler who was a physician by training published Family Shakespeare in 1818. This inhibition, reached its acme in Victorian era and filtered over to the rest of the English speaking world including the United States which was already full of the do's and don'ts inflicted upon its society by the Puritanical inheritance.

This led the critics to label Miller's writings as pornographic. There is another reason that is attributed to accusation of pornography. James M. Decker opines that "the text's heteroglossia" along with Miller's attempts to distort "the supraself's subjectivity via the anecdote rather than plot, a fact that contributed to accusations of the narrative's pornographic intent." (Decker, 2006) In other words, the society gave the dog a bad name and hanged him. It has been seen that society tries to control the individuals under the garb of maintaining order and showing the fear of lawlessness and chaos. In his attempt towards self-expression and becoming a fictionalized version of himself, Henry Miller destroys a number of accepted norms and customs, some on purpose and some unknowingly. Only by dismantling these does he accomplish to show the seriousness of the disease that infests America. On the surface what seems to be normal and functional is in fact deeply dysfunctional. In this regard McCarthy remarks:

Order, system, pattern, these are aspects of the disease which must be destroyed. All taboos must be challenged because they are taboos; the only authoritative totem is the self. Miller was to describe America as "the schizophrenic Paradise" and as "a far-flung empire of neurosis"; in Cancer what is given is the process of analysis through which the author heals himself. Other American characters in the novel, like biblical scapegoats, are heaped with the narrator's afflictions and abandoned to the devils of the American wilderness. A young Hindu, infected with the virus of America, demonstrates that "America is the very incarnation of doom. She will drag the whole world down to the bottomless pit." (McCarthy, 1971)

Thus, Miller had demonstrated that ill effects of repression of one's impulses not only in the American society but also upon the entire human race. In spiritual philosophies across the world also, it is imperative that one must acknowledge and embrace one's own darkness and shadow instead of avoiding it. Miller does that to the reader with *Tropic of Cancer*. He shows the reader what filth and abnormality, the human mind is capable of indulging in. Once the person acknowledges his darkness, the journey towards redemption begins.

CRITICAL ACCLAIM AND MIXED RECEPTIONS

Sexual perversions and depression in people had reached its acme before Miller started writing. The Great Depression was engulfing jobs and everywhere there was the atmosphere of gloom hanging over. It was in such a moment of uncertainty that he took this bold step of going to Paris. He had a marriage, two children and a decent living standard. It took extreme to leave everything and move on to become a writer, and not just a conventional author who would produce bestsellers and mint money, but a rather unconventional one. One who could expose the hypocrisy of the society, by showing it the mirror. The veracity of the above arguments can be endorsed by the statement of the Pulitzer Prize winning author Karl Shapiro. Karl Shapiro has been very benign in his appreciation of Henry Miller. He calls him the 'greatest living author'. The reason Shapiro attributes to this is because he thinks that Miller is one writer who has achieved a miracle. The miracle in the eyes of Shapiro is that he has been able to be funny without making fun of sex, the way Rabelais was. He calls Miller accurate and poetic to the highest degree without taunting anyone. Karl Shapiro confessed that there was not a smirk in any of Miller's writings. On Henry Miller's style of writing, Karl Shapiro feels that each and every word that he writes is autobiographical. He compares the way in which the writings of Henry Miller are autobiographical to *Leaves of Grass*. He believes that the writings of Henry Miller are not 'confessional' like the other confessional writers. He is an unusual and an unclassifiable writer. He is a genre in himself. He did not even try to prove that he was an intellectual by indulging into theories and showing concern about the Great Depression (just as the way the author of *Grapes of Wrath* did). He did not take up the side of the conservative people by denouncing the sexual corruption that had crept into the society (like T.S. Eliot did in *The Waste Land* where he advised people to show restraint and turn towards the wisdom of the east) at the time he was writing and was rampant in both the places – the place of his origin and the place where he had gone to fulfil his ambition of becoming a writer. He does nothing of the sorts aforementioned. Henry Miller breaks the norms and mores of becoming a writer and he does three things:

1. He picks up the most mundane theme- his stay in Paris (while he moves back and forth into time)
2. He does not stick to form- he writes in the first-person narrative and the technique that he uses is not used ever by any other prominent writers—not even by the Stream of Consciousness writer.
3. Not satisfied with debunking form and content used by great writers in the past he used the F word so freely that it would become repugnant to the public taste.

When he was told by Bradley, the agent in Obelisk Press that *Tropic of Cancer* was the book that could be published. Crazy Cock on the other hand was far inferior in his opinion. Henry Miller was shocked because in his opinion *Tropic of Cancer* was only a narration of his miseries in Paris. Jay Martin comments:

Henry wanted to force Crazy Cock down their throats. *Tropic of Cancer* was not the book he wanted to write, he crazily asserted, not the story he really wanted to tell. He had promised himself in 1927 that he would dedicate himself to writing the story of his life with June. If Americans wanted a book by him now, they would have to take Crazy Cock. He wanted to make it a big success in the United States, he said, so that he could take down his pants and show his ass to his countrymen and say: "I'm crapping on it, disowning it. So much for you, America, of thee I sing! That's just the kind of shit you've been eating for the last fifteen years!" (Martin, 1979, p. 82-3)

Whatever Henry Miller wrote was out of disgust for the taste of his times. All the great works of art had been written and what survived was an imitation or a kind of an anodyne to provide a feel-good factor to the diseased souls. What needed to be done was to cure that and not just kill the sensation. In a way, Henry Miller, like a surgeon, cut out the disgust and the anguish from his mind and soul and put it before the people so that they may be aware of the real nature of the disease. Jay Martin further tells that Henry's fury over American interests also worked its way into *Tropic of Cancer*. Henry Miller expanded the book since he was sure of its publication by Obelisk Press. He reports that Miller was removing or editing everything from the *Tropic of Cancer* except that was "fire and dynamite". It seems that he wanted to ignite the minds of the readers, as if "[D]etermined to affront readers and to make his book completely unacceptable to the public taste." Miller introduced "several new sections whose frankness would be almost certain to offend. He also added contentious preface in which he connected his own world-view of Duhamel's violent attack of American values in *Salavin*" (Gottesman, 1992, p. 83)

Jay Martin (1979) tells us that Henry Miller wanted to throw his critics overboard or sink their ship. He signed his book "Henry Miller, Pseudonym," and then went one step further and typed a new title page "*Tropic of Cancer* by Anonymous". Still when Henry Miller was not satisfied with what all he had done to insult and awaken the dead spirit of the people, he rather "vowed that the fact of publication being merely an incidental

occasion in his expression of himself,” and that “he would not revise in order to please the public, mollify the censors, or perfect his art. Only his own integrity, he decided, mattered to him. He was even willing, if need be, to accept expulsion from France as a consequence of the publication of *Tropic of Cancer* and to wander the earth like an untouchable” (Gottesman, 1992, p. 83).

This attitude of Henry Miller shows one thing which is very important in a writer who wants to change things—integrity. Only by showing the kind of integrity could Miller have liberated the people, showed them the disease that lay underneath. A number of critics have remarked about Miller’s writings being transformational towards shaping the society and bringing a revolution. Stephen Foster (1964) said about *Tropic of Cancer* that “Annette Kar Baxter has called the novel “surrealist autobiography.” Although convenient tags are rarely exact, this one provides access to an analysis of structure, and so is useful” He also said that “the novel does seem to fit the category; certainly, Miller is writing about himself, and in a grotesque manner which cannot but invite questions as to the reality of his self-image. But the reader is continually aware of the surrealist technique in the novel; it constitutes a paradox not easily solved” (Foster, 1964, p. 196). The paradox lay in Miller the person and Henry Miller the character in the book. A trained reader would be able to distinguish between the two.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND REDEMPTION OF CHARGES

In spite of the controversies discussed above, both *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn* remained popular, notorious and unpublished in America and other English-speaking nations until Barney Rossett and his Grove Press won the battle to publish the book in 1962. In a 1962 ruling that initiated changes in the laws of literary and artistic censorship, Judge Samuel B. Epstein found that *Tropic of Cancer* was not obscene. Henry Miller had dared to take the bold step of questioning the nature and the function of literature. The question of the nature and the function of literature mentioned earlier was much feared and people chose to stick to the definitions provided by the textbooks and the great literary dictators like Dr. Johnson. Novelty and deviation from the norm have been much frowned upon and looked down upon since a long time. Any person who breaks the convention is first called as a heretic, and then is proclaimed as a prophet. The lines about literature being different from reality are the core lines on which most of his works are based. The question is why he has to say that whatever is not there in the open or in the streets is false and is literature. Miller tends to raise a question mark on each and every person who frowns on mentioning reality in the novels. It had to be polished and edited so that one does not mention anything that might offend the gentile sensibility or may cause the censors to ban the book. It is said that literature is the mirror of the society. If everything was to be polished and bowdlerized then the kind of people that would be produced would not be different from Don Quixote. In *Don Quixote*, Miguel De Cervantes hits out at the same idea, the false and the pretentious life of chivalry as described in the books. If a person was to reconstruct the realities of life from the books that were written earlier, he/ she would be doomed and meet the same fate as that of Don Quixote. The person would not be able to cope with truth and thus would see the world from his or her own view. That is the reason Miller wrote what was considered offensive besides being true to his conviction.

Earlier, it was said that certain expressions were colloquial and could not be put into print. He revolted against this convention; he wrote and got printed the unprintable (‘unprintable’ according to the conservative society) and that is why he is considered a prophet of freedom. He rids people of the ‘lives of desperation’ as termed by Thoreau, the lives of people who constantly lived their lives according to ‘they say’ and ‘what will they think?’ The purgation part of *Tropic of Cancer* is also cited by Donald Gutierrez wherein he mentions the effects of the novel on people, especially men. He writes:

Our responses to Miller's characters indicate our complicity in the comic tragic anarchy of our sexual drives and relations; they reflect as well the dangerous and vicious attitudes towards women latent in much male sexual comedy. Like all good comedy, *Cancer* purges if properly experienced. And it is this cathartic dimension.... The experience of reading *Tropic of Cancer* may not lead inexorably to moral elevation, but seeing something of one's self or one's male acquaintances in the work should have the effect of alerting us to some of the less desirable and ultimately non-comic areas of our nature and culture. (Gutierrez, 1978, p. 33)

Gutierrez thus brings forth the purifying effect of the novel on the readers. He calls it a comedy that ‘purges’ with the only condition that it has to be experienced properly. It does alert the readers of his or her own foibles especially the guilt associated with sexuality and the villainous role played by the social conditioning upon the individual since his or her socialization starts. Children are taught to repress their sexual instincts in the most unhealthy way instead of being taught how to control or channelize the sexual energy into a creative or spiritual force until the time for procreation or enjoying conjugal love is ripe. The hidden effects of repression of the sexual impulses were also explored in detail by D.H. Lawrence. An eminent critic who saw the similarity is Herbert J. Muller. He compares Henry Miller to D.H. Lawrence. He writes:

Mr. Miller’s world also contains, however, elements not to be found in Lawrence: daredevil adventure, lusty laughter, exuberant fancy, extravagant caprice, a wild gaiety and gusto that temper his bitterness. He is in many ways a more natural and more attractive primitive than Lawrence. At the same time, his love of grotesquerie has

been intensified by his defiant, rebellious attitudes; and so it finally carried him all the way into Surrealism and Dada.... He also committed himself to the fundamental negations: the principle of scorning all principles, the logic of being illogical, the value of turning all accepted values inside out. Indeed, he is still more thoroughgoing in his anarchism. (Muller, 1940, p. 313)

By comparing the two authors and explicitly stating that one complemented the other, Muller further strengthens the argument that Miller strove for freedom of expression of the 'primitive' extinct which had been declared a taboo by the society for a long time. By openly talking about things which were an integral part of the human life, Miller and Lawrence liberated the human race (especially in the western civilization) from guilt, shame, hypocrisy and perversions associated with sexuality.

The effect of any comedy or a book that is said to bring radical change in the society is not merely purgative. Purgation gets rid of the unwanted elements, but leaves a sense of vacuum or ennui. In order for a work to be truly useful to bring change, it has to be transformative. It must replace the harmful and the useless with something positive and invigorating. Al Katz has summarised the transformative effect of *Tropic of Cancer* upon the author or a reader in the following lines. He writes:

A critic can properly say that the *Tropic of Cancer* involves the hero's quest for his place in the world through a series of adventures which lead to a rebirth, or is an account of a man's self-realization in a mad world—a world filled with depression and misfortune wherein the individual has been corrupted and dehumanized by automated forces. They can say the book is mainly "about" the affirmation of life in a culturally eroded world or they can characterize it as a didactic work prescribing moral revolution (Katz, 1969)

Tropic of Cancer is seen as the quest of hero by Katz. Katz (1969) has elevated the comic Miller to the status of a hero. Till now we have quoted the critics who have called the work to be a comedy, an 'autonovel' or an obscene work. Natalija Bonic (2010) terms Miller's character in *Tropic of Cancer* a tragic hero. She writes:

In a certain sense, Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* can be read as an inverted tragedy. It takes off where tragedies end: with the main protagonist having suffered total loss and degradation. Miller's "tragic hero" has already met his downfall through a series of misfortunes. He has even lost all hope that things can change. Yet, far from being crushed by the experience, he discovers that he is enjoying it. (Bonic, 2010, p 2, 3)

By equating Miller with a tragic hero Bonic elevates the stature of Miller the character to the status of a classical tragic hero who suffers and enjoys his hardships.

CONCLUSION

It can be said that the stance of Henry Miller was not only different from other writers who wanted to bring change in the society, he also simply showed the public the distorted mirror in the laughing gallery in which the image of the world looked more ridiculous than it actually was. This was a kind of a warning that he sent to the people of what could happen if things were not taken care of when he said that the cancer of the times is eating us away. He cautions the people of his age not to become "The Hollow Men" even in the vagaries and the drudgeries of the life. No one can deny the role played by Sigmund Freud, D.H. Lawrence and Henry Miller in liberating humanity, especially the modern western world from guilt associated with sex and in accepting sexuality as an important part of life.

Tropic of Cancer not only broke a number of taboos in the print medium, it also set a milestone towards liberation of humanity from perversity, neuroses associated with sex and the hypocrisy associated with one's sexuality in the society. In the twenty first century, the role of Miller might appear insignificant as far as sexuality is concerned, but if one looks closely and thinks deeply, one cannot rule out the possibility of the society becoming more regressive by the hour. False sense of nationalism, trying to hold on to a no longer relevant culture seems to be driving the public around the world towards a frenzy which ultimately leads to the exploitation of the downtrodden especially women and children. Abortion laws around the world, dress codes for women and growing religious extremism around the world points out to us the dangers against which the freedom fighters and prophets of freedom like Henry Miller pointed out. In order to prevent history from repeating itself, one needs to understand the causes and symptoms that led to the creation of horrible circumstances like the Puritan extremism pushing the society towards hypocrisy and perversion. Miller's writing especially *Tropic of Cancer* stands as a lighthouse in showing us the way towards freedom from hypocrisy and independence of mind and spirit.

Conflicts of Interests: The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interests in producing and publishing this article.

Acknowledgements: "This study is supported via funding from Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University project number (PSAU/2023/R/1444)"

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