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The Cosmological Eye. By Henry Miller.

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The Cosmological Eye, By Henry Miller. New Directions, Norfolk, Conn.
(363 pp., \$ 2.50)

It is comparatively easy, nowadays, to become a legend. Mr. Dali, for instance, succeeded in transforming himself into a mythological figure by jumping into the window of a Fifth Avenue store, and by presenting Columbus-with-an-umbrella and Venus-with-the-fish-tale (although, unfortunately, without a fish head) to the visitors of the New York World's Fair. The legendary reputation of Mr. Miller, however, is based on the fact that his books "Tropic of Cancer" and "Black Spring" had to be published abroad, since the American censors considered them as being indecent. Mr. Miller himself informs us that he is "against pornography and for obscenity" - which seems somewhat puzzling to me. I hardly succeed in understanding those authors who are in principle "for obscenity". Obscenity, of course, is all right, I certainly have nothing against it. Yet I feel it becomes a bore, unless it has an improvised, spontaneous character. The pedantic sins, the debauches par principe, ^{they are} are dreary and, therefore, actually, shocking.

"The Cosmological Eye", however, a volume of essays, prose poems and short stories, does not offer a great deal of obscenities, neither of the spontaneous nor of the dogmatic sort; I feel it as my duty to warn those among American readers who may be inclined to buy Mr. Miller's book, ^{merely} ~~simply~~ because they hope to get some kind of "hot stuff". They would be disappointed. I warmly recommend, however, Henry Miller's first American publication to all ~~of~~ the others, who are seriously interested in modern literature and the problematic state of modern men. I think indeed it is a very stimulating, fairly significant piece of work, and Henry Miller certainly is a gifted writer, although not a genius, as his publisher and admirer James Laughlin tells us in his preface. ~~Nor is it accurate that the author of "Tropic of Cancer"~~

~~represents American literature in Europe, while he remains tragically~~
~~misunderstood or ignored in his homeland. The cultured average man in~~
~~Paris, Berlin or Vienna doesn't have the slightest idea who Henry Miller~~
~~is. I guess that about half of those European intellectuals who are~~
~~familiar with the writings of Gertrude Stein, may know the name or even~~
~~a book of Henry Miller.~~

The book with the pretentious title and the impressive jacket, contains
some excellent pieces and some weaker stories. I like the melancholy
psychological and social study on a Jewish fellow by the name of Max;
here Mr. Miller shows that he has human features and is able to feel
sympathy and pity; ^{that} he is not merely an ego-maniac. In other pieces he
proves the penetrating, independent force of his intelligence. I found
inspiring remarks in two articles dealing with films, the first one
being dedicated to the French surrealist picture "L'Age D'Or", the
second one discussing "Extasy", a ^{production} ~~creation~~ of the Czech director Machaty.
The satirical and the poetical contributions are much less convincing.
A fantastic and voluptuous something, entitled "Scenario, A Film with
Sound", seems to me ~~me~~ rather silly and embarrassing. I could not
laugh very heartily about two humorous chapters, "Jabberwhorl
Cronstadt" and "Via Dieppe-Newhaven". "New Directions" say it is
like Petronius and Rabelais, but I don't agree. I don't think Mr. Miller
is a great humorist, and I definitely prefer his critical prose to
his grotesque or lyrical style. I was stimulated, even fascinated by
certain details in his literary or philosophical essays, "Hamlet"
(the complete version of which was published by "Carrefour", New
York), "The Universe of Death", and "An Open Letter to Surrealists
Everywhere". "The Universe of Death" is, in my opinion, the most intere=

sting piece of the volume. It includes enlightening and original statements on Proust and Joyce, both of whom Miller admires, although not without reservations. It also contains, however, some shocking mistakes or misinterpretations. (For instance: "Proust was touched only superficially by French culture" - , which obviously goes just a little too far...)

Even more shocking, however, than any literary details ever could be, are certain general elements, characteristic for Mr. Miller's proudly emphasized attitude. ~~He is obviously very pleased, very tickled by the anarchic elements in his own being.~~ He seems to be permanently amused by his own tendency to the "chaos". He is always fascinated by "the labyrinth", attracted by ~~any~~ every kind of disorder, enchanted by the wilderness of modern big cities, for "to me the city is crime personified, insanity personified." ~~This kind of observations makes me slightly nervous.~~ Mr. Miller hardly impresses me but rather annoys me when he utters: "All my life I felt a great kinship with the madman and the criminal." For I don't believe in his honesty. ~~Neither Arthur Rimbaud nor Van Gogh, to be sure, ever would have boasted of the dangerous, chaotic elements in their characters, as both of them actually were members of that tragic, doomed and sacred family.~~ ^{Here,} In the case of Henry Miller, however, ~~madness~~ madness seems to be a literary program, and even despair degenerates to a pose. He exclaims: "The point is that we are doomed. No god is coming to save us." Perhaps we actually are. But the statement as such is ~~neither~~ neither tragic nor original, unless it is the painful result of bitter struggles. It is very convenient to cry out that "civilization is rotten", which is partly true. Yet it does not help a great deal to repeat it, again and again. In times when civilization ~~seemingly~~ was solid, and pleased with itself, and seemingly indestructible, it may have been the task and

function of the poet to challenge fat old civilization, to épater le bourgeois". Nowadays, however, with civilization being endangered and chaotic enough, it strikes me as somewhat old-fashioned, frivolous and dull, if a writer stubbornly keeps on "challenging", and provoking, and screaming "daring" little things while the world is in flames. I rather think intellectuals should use their power for the defense and the improvement of threatened civilization, instead of wasting their wit for the sake of a radical and senseless attitude. Mr. Miller, who adores big cities but despises civilization, "seeks to release the instinctive vitality of the primitive". This tune sounds terribly familiar to me. The German tragedy started with gestures and declamations of the same ^{sort} ~~kind~~...

The fact that Mr. Miller is of German descent may have a certain significance. There is a definite relationship between him and some of the German, post-war "expressionists". The most talented among them, a fascinating poet by the name of Gottfried Benn, turned Nazi in 1933, praised Hitler, and lost his talent. So did another "anarchist", the French writer Céline, whom Miller apparently likes. He also admires ~~the~~ D.H. Lawrence, but only the most dubious ~~side~~ sides of his genius; he admires Nietzsche, but it is a dangerously simplified version of Nietzsche's philosophy; he admires Oswald ~~Spengler~~ Spengler - a weakness which usually has bad consequences - , and Keyserling, "Eys, Count Hermann Keyserling". Occasionally he mentions Goethe, whom he calls "the last good European". However, I fail to recognize the slightest trace of any Goethe ~~influence~~ influence in the structure of Henry Miller's character and work. For Goethe's aristocratic attitude did not have the destructive tendency toward anarchy and chaos. Mr. Miller is the contrary of an aristocrat, for he is a bohemian. The gifted bohemian obviously assumes that catastrophes are amusing. But he is mistaken. ^{For} ~~The~~ catastrophes are dull, the chaos is monotonous,

the "instinctive vitality of the primitive" is a bore. Mr. Miller too becomes somewhat boring by praising the primitive and shouting against civilization. He is ^{stimulating} ~~amusing~~ and bright whenever he analyses cultural affairs. But the sinister and pretentious prophet-like attitude is not becoming to him.

Klaus Mann.