Guide to the Henry Miller Correspondence, 1960-1981

Collection number: MISC 047

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Stanford University Libraries
Stanford, California

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Descriptive Summary
Title: Miller, Henry. Correspondence,
Date (inclusive): 1960-1981
Collection number: MISC 047
Creator: Miller, Henry
Extent: .5 linear ft. (53 items)
Repository: Stanford University. Libraries. Dept. of Special Collections and University Archives.
Abstract: Primarily Miller's letters to Frances Cleveland Karle. Also correspondence between Emil White, Karle, and Harry Griffon.
Language: English.
Access
None.

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Acquisition Information

Biography
Henry Valentine Miller was born on December 26, 1891, in the Yorkville section of New York City to Heinrich Miller and Louise Marie Nieting, second generation Americans of German ancestry. He was raised in Brooklyn where the family moved after his first year. After graduating from high school in 1909, Miller entered City College of New York, but, unable to conform to the academic routine, left after only two months. Over the next ten years, he travelled throughout the Southwest; married the first of his five wives, pianist Beatrice Wickens; and worked at an assortment of odd jobs before becoming employment manager of the messenger department at Western Union Telegraph Company in New York City in 1920. His first unpublished work "Clipped Wings," written in 1922, is based on his experiences there. By 1924, Miller had decided to leave Western Union and devote his energies entirely to writing. Supported by his second wife, dancer June Smith, he spent several lean years in New York writing for pulp magazines and peddling his prose poems door-to-door. A
1928-1929 European tour persuaded him to pursue his career abroad; and, in 1930, Miller left the United States for Paris, where he lived until 1939. The Paris years marked a decisive decade in Miller's writing career. His first published story, "Mademoiselle Claude," appeared in a 1931 issue of the New Review; and, by the end of the following year, Miller had completed Tropic of Cancer, his largely autobiographical account of life in Paris. The novel was published in 1934 by Jack Kahane's Obelisk Press; followed, in 1936, by Black Spring and, in 1939, by Tropic of Capricorn. During this period Miller was surrounded by literary and artistic friends, including Hungarian photographer Brassai, painter Hans Reichel, and writers Anais Nin, Walter Lowenfels, Michael Fraenkel, and Alfred Perles. It was also at this time that his interest in astrology was stimulated by a meeting with Swiss-French astrologer Conrad Moricund. In 1939, at the invitation of novelist Lawrence Durrell, Miller left Paris for a prolonged vacation in Greece -- an experience which inspired The Colossus of Maroussi (1941) -- but, with outbreak of World War II, he was forced to return to the United States in 1940. Following a twelve-month American tour, described in The Air-Conditioned Nightmare (1945), Miller, in 1942, moved to California. Two years later, he settled permanently on the coast at Big Sur where, over the next two decades, there grew up around him the artistic/literary colony depicted in Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymous Bosch (1956). During this period -- living first with his third wife Janina Martha Lepska and their two children, and later with his fourth wife Eve McClure -- Miller revived his passion for painting with watercolors, renewed his acquaintance with astrologer Moricund, pursued his fascination with Rimbaud, and resumed his autobiographical writings with the Rosy Crucifixion trilogy. The three volumes, Sexus, Plexus, and Nexus, were published in Paris in 1949, 1953, and 1959 respectively. In 1958, at a time when most of his writings were still banned in the United States, Miller was made a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. The next year, Barney Rosset of Grove Press approached him to secure the American rights to the Tropic books; and, in 1961, Cancer was finally published in the United States (Capricorn followed in 1962 and Black Spring in 1963). The printings provoked a series of obscenity suits, but the Supreme Court, in a 1964 decision, affirmed their right of publication. An American edition of the Rosy Crucifixion trilogy appeared soon after in 1965. Miller had, by this time, already left Big Sur, moving south to Pacific Palisades to be near his children and to escape the steady flow of visitors to his home. Here he married his fifth wife, Japanese jazz singer Hiroko Tokude, in 1965. Miller died in Pacific Palisades on June 7, 1980 at the age of 88.

Collection Scope and Content Summary
The Henry Miller papers span the years 1960-1981, with the bulk of the material falling into the period 1960-1961. By this time, all of Miller's major works -- the Tropic books, Black Spring, and the Rosy Crucifixion trilogy -- had already been published in Paris, but continued to be banned in the United States. Miller, concerned about the probable furor over American publication, plagued by a series of physical ailments, and facing the emotional and financial problems of the deterioration of his fourth marriage, began, in 1960, to turn increasingly to astrologers for guidance. The center of this collection is Miller's correspondence with Frances Cleveland Karle, a writer and astrologer from Menlo Park. In a series of 23 letters and 22 postcards written from Big Sur, Pacific Palisades, and places abroad, Miller, within the astrological context, reveals to Karle his most personal opinions and concern -- among them, medical problems, travel plans, problems with women, and his philosophy of life. The correspondence, written over the years 1960-1963, is most intense during the first eighteen months and provides, for that period, an unusually intimate look at Miller's life and thoughts. The other major component of the Miller collection is the Emil White correspondence. White was Miller's Big Sur neighbor and close friend, author of the book Henry Miller Between Heaven and Hell, and founder, in 1981, of The Henry Miller Memorial Library in Big Sur. The two correspondences -- a series of 6 letters and 4 postcards from White to Frances Karle, written between 1962 and 1966; and a series of 4 letters from White to Karle's son Harry M. Griffin written during late 1981 -- contain numerous references to Miller's extensive foreign travels. A 1960 letter from Miller to The Henry Miller Literary Society and a 1961 letter from Miller to Harry Griffon, are also included in the collection.

Access Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.
Griffon, Harry M.
Karle, Frances Cleveland.
Miller, Henry.
White, Emil.
American literature--20th century.

Series 1. Correspondence, 1960-1981
Box 1, Folder 1  
Correspondence from Miller to Harry M. Griffon 1961
Box 1, Folder 2  
Correspondence from Miller to The Henry Miller Literary Society 1960

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