

The University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers (Paper only)

HENRY MILLER. By George Wickes.
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
Press. 1966. \$.65.

Our reviewers covering this excellent series have sometimes complained that in the case of a given author or topic, the format simply will not allow an adequate statement. In the present instance, the problem is that the author simply cannot be summarized, nor his career adequately surveyed. Miller is, at his best, as Wickes says, a writer of attitudes, not ideas, but the attitudes are not consistent. Neither are the ideas which keep intruding. As for the career, either Miller didn't cooperate or Wickes hasn't asked him, for Henry Miller does not convey a satisfactory chronological record of its subject's life. Wickes is thus unable to answer either those questions about which we have legitimate curiosity (What was the proofreading job, as punctuator of catastrophes in Paris, really like? How long did Miller hold it?) or those which are none of our business (Was the subject of this or that sexual bout a real girl?). Wickes makes sensible judgments about Miller's books, and his survey of the order of their publication is good to have. He seems unnecessarily tentative, however, in handling Miller's mysticism (he often puts the word in quotation marks), failing to see, I think, that the joy in filth and degradation which he reports can be understood as part of a mystic's Way. Miller shares very explicit occult attitudes with other (and better) writers of what Tindall calls "poetic novels" -- Dostoevski, Melville, Joyce, Woolf, Salinger and so on -- and, since this is what the Zen-nicks and the Beat respond to most (next to the sex, perhaps) in Miller, it would be useful to have it all spelled out.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF ABSTRACTIONISM IN THE WRITINGS OF GERTRUDE STEIN. By Michael J. Hoffman. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 1965. \$5.00.

Mr. Hoffman's book is a rarity in recent literary criticism: it works both in intent and execution. Limiting his scope to Gertrude Stein's first productive decade (1903-1914), Mr. Hoffman traces the development of the stylistic concepts and techniques Miss Stein employed on her way to literary abstractionism. By sticking to close analyses of the stylistic structures of ten key works and by eschewing both evaluative and comparative criticism, the author maintains a clarity and discipline desperately needed in