



“From America Sent”: Reading Henry Miller Today

International Conference, Sorbonne Université, Paris, 18–21 May 2027

Call for papers

Joint sponsors: Sorbonne Université (VALE UR 4085), Université Paris Nanterre (CREA UR 370), Henry Miller Memorial Library (Big Sur, California)

Organizers: Emma Frigo (Universités Grenoble Alpes and Paris Nanterre), Clément Oudart (Sorbonne Université), Michael Paduano (Independent scholar), Benoît Tadié (Université Paris Nanterre), Magnus Torén (Henry Miller Memorial Library)

Correspondence occupied a central place in Henry Miller’s writing life. During his years of literary apprenticeship in 1920s New York, Miller approached his correspondence as something separate from his art. “The letter writing was for me what shadow boxing is to a pugilist,” the narrator of *Plexus* (1952) recalls. “But imagine a pugilist spending so much time fighting his shadow that when he hooks up with a sparring partner he has no fight left! I could spend two or three hours writing a story, or article, and another six or seven explaining them to my friends by letter. The real effort was going into the letter writing, and perhaps it was best so, now that I look back on it, because it preserved the speed and naturalness of my true voice.”

It was only after arriving in Paris in the winter of 1930 that Miller began to recognize in his letters the outlines of a distinctive first-person literary persona, as well as a form that could imitate the onward flow of thought—what he later called “the circular or spiral form of progression.”

Among the most important of these letters were those sent to Miller’s boyhood friend, Emil Schnellock. The recent acquisition by the Bibliothèque nationale de France of the Emil Schnellock collection—the world’s second-largest collection of manuscripts, notes, letters, and original artwork by Miller, much of which dates from his transformative 1930s Paris period—offers a unique opportunity to reassess the epistolary dimension of Miller’s work and the wider role of personal and professional correspondence in his writing life. More broadly, it invites reflection on the role of epistolary practices in twentieth-century literary culture.

Yet the 2027 “From America Sent” conference seeks to explore correspondence not only, or even primarily, as epistolary exchange. Instead, we interpret “correspondence” in the broader sense of the term: as affinities and resonances between places, languages, media, traditions, and forms in the work of Miller, his coterie of fellow artists, and twentieth-century literature more generally.

The arrival of the Emil Schnellock collection in Paris may be understood as a kind of homecoming, one that extends beyond the material return of the archive itself. In *Aller Retour New York* (1935), a book-length letter addressed to Alfred Perlès, Miller signs off “from America sent,” echoing a line from Walt Whitman’s poem of global salutation, “Salut au Monde!”: “Health to you! good will to you all, from me and America sent!” Miller was acutely aware of his ambiguous position as an American writer remade in France, and of the different kinds of dialogues his work sustained within American and French literary cultures. The title of the first published review of *Tropic of Cancer* (1934), Blaise Cendrars’s “Un Écrivain américain nous est né,” captured something of this transatlantic identity. Miller’s work emerged from a dense web of correspondences: between New York and Paris, autobiography and fiction, American vernacular speech and European avant-garde experiment, as well as between the writers who shaped him and those who later wrote in his wake.

Such correspondences extended beyond literature. Miller was also a prolific painter, and his visual practice developed alongside his writing life. His manuscripts, notebooks, watercolors, letters, and published works invite reflection on possible correspondences between painterly and writerly modes of composition. At the same time, they raise broader genetic questions about the relation between methods of composition and the forms they produce. What kinds of texts emerge from different methods of planning, composition, and revision? How might creative habits migrate between literary and visual media?

Correspondence also suggests contemporaneity: the ways in which works from the past continue or fail to resonate with the concerns, values, and critical frameworks of the present. Nearly a century after the publication of *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller remains a profoundly divisive figure. Celebrated by some as a pioneering modernist and advocate of artistic freedom, he is regarded by others as a disturbing and somewhat out of step writer, whose representations of women and sexuality sit uneasily within contemporary criticism. Questions surrounding obscenity, censorship, sexual liberation, misogyny, and self-mythology continue to shape the reception of his work.

Rather than seeking to resolve these tensions, the conference welcomes critical engagement with them. How should Miller be read in an age shaped by feminist, queer, and intersectional approaches to literature? How might his work be situated within longer histories of sexual representation, counter-cultural dissent, and challenges to moral and aesthetic convention? What place, if any, should Miller occupy within contemporary literary canons, classrooms, and public culture? By bringing these questions into dialogue with archival research, transatlantic studies, and the study of artistic networks, the conference seeks to reconsider Miller’s work while also reflecting on the changing critical frameworks through which twentieth-century literature is read today.

We welcome proposals from scholars, translators, archivists, librarians, publishers, artists, writers, and curators. While contributions directly concerned with Miller are encouraged, we also welcome proposals addressing related figures and movements in twentieth-century literature, as well as broader questions of transatlantic exchange, artistic practice, and

reception. Suggested topics for individual papers, joint panels, roundtables, and practice-based presentations include but are not limited to:

- Epistolary form and modernist or mid-century aesthetics
- Correspondence and transatlantic networks: Miller's letters and the people in them; epistolarity and literary friendship; distance as a literary resource
- Miller's contested place in the canon: why is Miller hard to place in the canon? What is the status and role of canonization in the 21st century?
- Sex, gender, and obscenity: Miller after #MeToo; representations of sexism, misogyny, and gender; reception, controversy, and censorship; comparative studies with other twentieth-century authors who foreground sexuality in their work
- Miller and the archive: the Schnellock collection and its implications for Miller studies; editing, textual scholarship, and the reconfiguration of the oeuvre through new material; archives, curation, cataloguing, and institutional histories
- Paris, exile, and return: Miller and Paris; expatriation and the idea of homecoming; the city as subject and as myth; Franco-American crossings
- Intermediality: Miller and painting; Miller and music
- Miller in translation: linguistic, stylistic, and cultural correspondences across languages
- Circulation: publishing history; the clandestine and legitimate lives of Miller's texts; reception and rejection across languages and decades

To apply, please submit an abstract of 300-400 words to the following address by 31 October 2026. Please include your institutional affiliation (if any) and a short biographical note (150 words) along with your abstract:

millerparis2027@gmail.com

Acceptance notifications will be sent by 30 November 2026.

This conference is part of a larger international program. In spring 2027, the Bibliothèque nationale de France will present an exhibition of selected materials from the Emil Schnellock collection at the BnF Museum. Concurrently, the Henry Miller Memorial Library will host a week-long series of events across Paris, including public readings and talks, theater performances, concerts, film screenings, writing workshops, and walking tours of Miller's Paris. The conference will take place across four mornings.

Scientific committee:

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