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## CONTENTS

### 〈Article〉

Henry Miller and Shōri Ueno: A Transpacific Friendship

… Wayne E. Arnold … 1

THE UNIVERSITY OF KITAKYUSHU

Kitakyushu, Japan

## Henry Miller and Shōri Ueno: A Transpacific Friendship<sup>1</sup>

ヘンリー・ミラーと上野霄里：太平洋を隔てた友情<sup>2</sup>

Wayne E. Arnold

Within *Letters from Henry Miller to Hoki Tokuda* (1986) there are five references to a Japanese man named “Ueno-San of Ichinoseki City.” The editor, Joyce Howard, does not clarify the identities of people mentioned in Miller’s letters and therefore we are only left to surmise the role Ueno was playing in the relationship between Miller and Hoki Tokuda (ホキ徳田). The various appearances of Ueno’s name in these letters makes clear that he was more than just one of Miller’s fans, and that he was not writing a one-sided conversation from Japan. The argument of this article is to demonstrate the importance of the friendship between Henry Miller (1891–1980) and Shōri Ueno (1931–),<sup>3</sup> one that spanned a 15-year period and provided Miller with an inside view into Japanese culture and its interpersonal relationships. Deeply moved by Miller’s writing, Ueno initiated a correspondence with Miller in 1965. This exchange of letters

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<sup>2</sup> This article is a revised and expanded version of a presentation given at the Conference of the Henry Miller Literary Society of Japan, Tokyo, December 2017.

<sup>3</sup> I am using Ueno’s pen name, by which he is known in Japan. Miller and others who wrote to Ueno used his first name, Kenichi, often shortened to Kai or Ken.

would grow into one of Miller's last, great correspondences, continuing until his death in 1980. In total, the two men sent each other more than 400 letters, some reaching up to eight pages in length. Biographers of Miller have tended to give only brief accounts of his final twenty years in Pacific Palisades, California, but it was here that Miller was able to richly explore his interest in Japan and what he often referred to as "the Orient." By incorporating recently discovered letters from Miller to Ueno, Ueno's letters held at the University of California, Los Angeles, information compiled from Ueno's numerous publications, as well as personal interviews with Ueno, I argue that Miller and Ueno's transpacific friendship provided Miller a window into Japanese culture that was uniquely tailored to his interests and arose from Ueno's intimate knowledge of Miller's oeuvre. Their relationship also illustrates Miller's impact in Japan, and his ability to speak to writers who shared his world view.

Miller's numerous friendships with Japanese individuals dates back as early as the 1920s. Throughout the 1940s and 50s, his increasing popularity as a novelist and watercolorist brought many letters from his admirers in Japan. By the time Miller moved to Pacific Palisades in 1961, he had been communicating for five years with an ardent promoter of his watercolors in Japan, Sadajiro Kubo (久保貞次郎).<sup>4</sup> During the 1950s, Miller's most popular book to be published in Japan was *Sexus* (1953, Logos Publishers, ロゴス社), and it was this book that often became the first introduction to

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<sup>4</sup> In a future article relating to Miller and Japan, I will explore the connection between Miller and Kubo; in relation to this article, Kubo was an important source of financial help for Ueno, regularly sending money to Ueno from sales of Miller's watercolor prints—at the behest of Miller. Miller to Kubo, 22 Oct. 1970. Henry Miller Papers. Kubo Memorial Tourism and Culture Exchange Center (久保記念観光文化交流館).

Miller for readers in Japan. As Miller's name became more well-known in Japan and word spread of the scandalous American author being published, Miller's books reached the hands of Ueno, who was then a minister living in Iwate Prefecture. After establishing the initial correspondence, Ueno began to provide Miller with a variety of descriptions of Japan. He would send Miller magazine clippings depicting Japanese society as well as news articles about Miller, for which he provided English summaries. While Ueno was offering Miller insight into Japanese culture, Miller continued to formulate his own image of Japan, one that often led Ueno to point out that no such Japan had ever existed. We can consider the contradictions between Miller's impressions of Japan and the realities that Ueno shared from his everyday life by examining how Miller and Ueno discussed the intricacies of Japanese culture.

### **Ueno's First Contact**

On Tuesday, January 26, 1965, Shōri Ueno sat down to compose a letter to Miller, writing: "Dear Mr. Miller, this is the 1st letter to you [...] from the unknown lover, for the freedom to write and think in literature, in the Orient." Ueno's first line surely must have caught Miller's attention, as he touched on two key characteristics that are important for Miller: freedom in literature and the mysterious "Orient". Ueno's goal was to thank Miller for his writings, that, as Ueno told Miller, "enlighten my understanding."<sup>5</sup> This two-page letter would mark the beginning of what I consider to be

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<sup>5</sup> Ueno to Miller, 26 Jan. 1965. Box 59, Folder 6, Henry Miller Papers (Collection 110). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

Miller's last great correspondence. What is incredible about the Miller-Ueno friendship is that it has been completely overlooked by Miller scholars in the West. In his own writing, Ueno has discussed their relationship and provided much critical analysis on Miller. The January 1965 letter would be followed by several hundred more, and both men would benefit intellectually as well as publicly from their correspondence. Through Ueno, Miller would be provided answers and descriptions of Japan that directly dealt with his curiosity about the country. The letters from the 1960s and early 1970s are the richest in material between the two men, as they often discussed life philosophies. Ueno was consistent in his communication, occasionally surprising Miller with his copious output. Through the years, the content varied, at times dealing with Miller's troubled relationship with Hoki Tokuda as well as discussing the stunning events surrounding Japanese author Yukio Mishima's ritual suicide. From his very first letter, though, Ueno was establishing himself as one who desires to serve his master, in whatever manner he can be of use.

### **Background on Ueno**

Ueno was born in Kanuma City, Tochigi Prefecture (栃木県鹿沼市). In his youth he spent part of his time being raised by his grandparents in Ōta City, Gunma Prefecture (群馬県太田市). During World War II, Ueno attempted to become a fighter pilot, but he failed his entrance exam and was thereby prevented from joining the air force. Beginning in his elementary school period, he had been teaching himself English and was then greatly assisted in high school by a foreign teacher. His English ability was sufficient enough that by the age of 19, he was hired to work as an

interpreter at the Nikko Kanaya Hotel (now named the Chuzenji Kanaya Hotel, 中禅寺金谷ホテル), then under the control of the US Army. While at the hotel, Ueno met many French speakers and soon learned his third language (“The Philosopher” 60). After one year working at the hotel, he left with the intention to enter seminary.<sup>6</sup> At the age of 23, Ueno graduated from seminary and became a protestant minister, moving to a church in Higashiyamato-shi, Tokyo (東京都東村山); however, he became disillusioned with the increasing urbanization and the changes he was witnessing in the post-war, westernizing Japanese society. During this period, he also worked as an interpreter at the Johnson Air Force base in Saitama Prefecture (now called the Iruma Air Base, 入間基地). Moving from Tokyo, he took up residence in a traditional thatched roof house in Ichinoseki, Iwate Prefecture (岩手県一関市).<sup>7</sup> There, he and his wife spent the next twenty-five years raising a family of three boys.<sup>8</sup>

While living in Iwate Prefecture Ueno continued to be a minister, but he soon gave up the profession to pursue a writing career. After he first read Miller’s work, Ueno began writing Miller about his struggles to break free from the ministry work he no longer enjoyed. Over the years, Ueno had been developing himself by studying Japanese culture and philosophical

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<sup>6</sup> Ueno to Miller, 2 Jan. 1967. Box 59, Folder 10, Henry Miller Papers (Collection 110). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>7</sup> This thatched-roof house had once been the home of Japanese novelist, Ryuichiro Utsumi (内海隆一郎).

<sup>8</sup> The source of Ueno’s history is a letter from Yoshiaki Nakui (名久井良明) to Sawaya Shoten book publishers (さわや書店), and from text messages with the author. Nakui lives in Morioka, Iwate (岩手県盛岡市), and has been a supporter of Ueno’s work for almost fifty years. Nakui, Yoshiaki. Letter to Sawaya Shoten. 2018. Author’s personal collection. Nakui, Yoshiaki. Text messages to Wayne E. Arnold. 12. Dec. 2018.

topics, while also learning several languages; in order to make ends meet, he opened a small private school where he taught English, German, and French. Miller's literature left an indelible mark on Ueno and convinced him there were more possibilities for life. Quitting his ministry to pursue writing had both positive and negative consequences for Ueno and his family, as it brought them to near poverty while Ueno struggled to publish his writing. During a four-year period beginning in 1967, Miller helped Ueno by sending the money needed for Ueno's middle son's medication after the son was diagnosed with nephrosis. Miller's financial help during this time caused Ueno to consider Miller his benefactor, as Ueno believed Miller had saved his son's life by providing the means to purchase the necessary medicine. By 1970, Miller's association with Ueno had helped bring Ueno a larger reading audience, and Ueno would be contacted by magazines and newspapers to contribute articles on Miller. The letters between the two men would continue until Miller's death in 1980, but before his death, and with the financial help from one of his readers, Ueno had the chance to meet Miller in 1977, twelve years after they started their correspondence.

Miller never read Ueno's writings, as translations of Ueno's works have still not yet appeared in English; however, there are clear affinities in Ueno's letters that resonated with Miller. Ueno has written in numerous places that his new direction became vindicated after discovering Miller. Two years after reading Miller's *Nexus*, published in Japan in 1965, Ueno penned "My Justification" (1967), which provides the following analogy concerning his altered perception of the world:

'Suddenly, a revolution occurred within me. I realized that I was

completely innocent. The tens, no, hundreds of death sentences bestowed upon me up to this point were all mistakes, and I lodged my appeal. I was awakened to the fact that I was the plaintiff, and I was prosecuting all of society as a defendant. I became an unforgiving, ruthless public prosecutor. Day and night, I took extensive notes. In other words, all of society was a serious criminal culpable of a crime deserving over ten thousand death sentences, and those notes were long, long plans for a closing argument to prove that crime. I continued writing like a man possessed. I was lumping all of civilized society together as a whole, and my rage could not possibly be pacified until I sat them in the electric chair. Once I had fastened them tightly in that chair, once I had wrapped them in copper wires, then and only then could I breathe a sigh of relief.' (qtd. in Nakui 20)

「突然に、私の内部に革命が起った。私は全く無実だと判ったのだ。今迄、何十回、何百回宣告されたか知れない死刑は、凡て誤りだったと判明したのだ。私は突然に、自分が原告になったことを悟った。世間凡てを被告として、私は訴えを起こしたのだ。私は情け容赦のない、冷酷な検事となった。私は、日に夜に次いで、膨大なメモを取る。つまり、世間の凡てが重大犯罪人であってそれは一万回以上の死刑に価する罪であることを証明する長い長い論告文の原案なのだ。私は狂ったように書き続ける。私は今、文明社会の一切をひっくるめて、彼等を電気椅子に座らせる迄、決して怒りを鎮めることは考えられない。彼等をしっかりと電気椅子に、銅線で幾重にも縛りつけたら、その時こそ、ほっと一息入れよう。」 (qtd. in Nakui 20)

The echoes of Miller's diatribes against society find reverberation in Ueno's justification to pursue his new life, outside of social norms. Often in letters to Miller, Ueno would assume a much harsher stance against Japanese society than Miller had perhaps ever perceived of American society, even in his most critical moments in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945). Certainly, the cultural situation of the late 1960s is to be considered when reading Ueno's reasoning. The somewhat unstable political and social climate in Japan further encouraged Ueno to continue espousing his views. In his letters to Miller, Ueno espoused similar views, engaging Miller's interest and bringing the two men into an intellectual conversation, where their Eastern and Western ideas were repeatedly challenged.

Ueno's literature spans a wide field of investigation, from philosophical treatises to novels of the geisha and samurai, as well as specific works examining Miller. Spanning nearly fifty years of writing, Ueno is still being republished, with his most recent work comprising a large collection of essays, entitled: *Lyrics: Collected Essays* (幽篁記, 2015). Ueno's books were originally published by a private press named Actum Books, owned by Hirohiko Yoshinaga (吉永博彦), and focused solely on Ueno's publications. Actum advertised their company as being "the experimental publisher for the coming age of human crises,"<sup>9</sup> clearly tying into the idea of a crumbling society, prevalent in both Ueno and Miller's work. Ueno's works have received various republications over the years, and two specific books contain a heavy emphasis on Miller's writing. The first notable work on

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<sup>9</sup> Advertisement for Ueno's books. Actum Books, 1972. Ueno's work is now being republished by Meisou Publishers (明窓出版), <http://meisou.com>. There is also the New Behavior Publishers (新行動社) website that features more publications by Ueno, as well as various photographs and historical information about the author: <https://shin-koudousya.jimdo.com/>.

Miller is *Single Cell Thought* (単細胞的思考, 1969).<sup>10</sup> For this publication, Miller provided the introduction, wherein he described his correspondence with Ueno and praised his prolific writing ability. The second volume with a significant focus on Miller is *Tropiques en Voyageur* (放浪の回帰線, 1972),<sup>11</sup> for which J. Rives Childs provided the introduction. Childs and Miller had been friends since 1939, and after the publication of *Collector's Quest: The Correspondence of Henry Miller and J. Rives Childs, 1947-1965* (1968), Ueno initiated an exchange of letters with Childs. Around the same period, George Warren Polley<sup>12</sup> began communicating with Ueno, sharing a common interest in Miller's writing. Like Miller, Ueno used his vast letter writing to help spread his work, recruiting Miller, Childs, and Polley to provide essays relating to his publications. In Polley's review of *Tropiques en Voyageur*, published in the small Ohio State University journal, *Under the Sign of Pisces: Anaïs Nin and Her Circle*, he notes that:

Ueno is not only a man of prodigious learning and intellectual power, but shares Miller's deep spiritual insight and his appetite for life. Ueno is, in a true sense, Miller's spiritual heir. He strips away the veneer and trappings of civilization and plunges back to that elemental man who has what Ueno calls 'the harakiri spirit':

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<sup>10</sup> The French title, which Ueno gave the publication, is *Pensée Unicellulaire*. This book is catalogued as B208 in Shifreen and Jackson's *Henry Miller: A Bibliography of Primary Sources*. It has since been republished in 2002, by Meisou Publishers (明窓出版).

<sup>11</sup> Miller's Japanese translator, Shigeo Tobita (飛田茂雄), informed Miller that the correct English translation of Ueno's Japanese title should be *Tropic of Vagabondage*. Tobita to Miller, 19 Apr. 1972. Box 9, Folder 108, Henry Miller Papers (YCAL MSS 472). Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>12</sup> Polley's correspondence with Miller first began with a fan letter in October of 1956. After several years of intermittently exchanging letters with Miller, in 1969 Polley published an article, "The Art of Religious Writing: Henry Miller as Religious Writer," in the *South Dakota Review*.

the courage to live in a first-hand way in relation to everything he meets; to 'own the element of polarity,' as he says, both birth and death, in order to create a new world out of himself. (Polley 13-14)

Polley's review highlights the correlation I see between Miller's nihilist perspective and the corresponding stance that Ueno assumes. The impact of Miller's writing helped provide Ueno the direction in which he could pursue his own unique form of social critique against the westernizing Japanese society, and therefore, in some sense, he extends Miller's societal diatribe a step beyond, attempting to awaken his fellow citizens with a shocking attack against those whom he views as committing crimes through their conformity.

### **Intellectual and Public Benefit**

In Ueno's letters, he often discussed his impressions of Japan and the disillusionment he felt with the direction of his country. It becomes clear to Ueno, however, that Miller had his own image of Japan. In one letter from late 1965, Ueno wrote, "I write about Japan and myself in relation to Japan because I want to arouse your interest in Japan. But actually, you have a more ideal Japan in your mind than has ever existed on earth."<sup>13</sup> This sentiment is repeated again in the letter, suggesting that Miller had been painting a picture of Japan that Ueno felt was overly glorified. Ueno would reiterate this opinion several times over the years, as in 1970, when he said to Miller, "I know, as you have mentioned, that you have been all

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<sup>13</sup> Ueno to Miller, 20 Sept. 1965. Box 59, Folder 6, Henry Miller Papers (Collection 110). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

over the most important spots in the Orient in spirit and mind. You know much more about Japan than most of the lifeless people here."<sup>14</sup> Ueno's view is important as he supports a common opinion among those close to Miller concerning why he never travelled to Japan. The general view is that Miller knew if he had travelled to Japan, he never would have found the country he envisioned and would ultimately have left Japan disappointed. Miller's friend, Brassai, gives a similar view when writing about Miller's fascination with Japan. Recounting a 1960 interview with Miller and an unknown Japanese woman, Brassai reflects on Miller's praise of Japan: "Maliciously, I wonder what cruel disappointments await him in Japan. The idea he has formed of it is such that the reality can only disappoint him. Won't he find a Japan that is more Americanized, more 'air-conditioned nightmarized,' than the United States itself?" (Brassai 41)". Brassai would have agreed with Ueno; that Ueno—a Japanese man living in Japan—would give the identical opinion strongly suggests that Miller truly had created an other-worldly Japan in his mind.

One key aspect of Ueno's early letters is that they helped Miller understand why his novels had become popular in Japan. Like the sensualization of Miller's work in the United States and Europe, book publishers in Japan also put emphasis on the scandalous in Miller's novels. When Miller's *Nexus* (1959) was published in Japanese in 1965, Ueno wrote Miller that the book "was ranked in the top ten best seller list in almost every city in Japan." He goes on to explain that the interest began because

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<sup>14</sup> Ueno to Miller. 9 May 1970. Box 71, Folder 7, Henry Miller Papers (Collection 110), Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

## Henry Miller and Shōri Ueno: A Transpacific Friendship

“people were first attracted to the sensational advertisement which stressed too much about the sexual part, and those who were just interested in that part have been disappointed with your not easy-story-like writing.” Ueno felt that Miller had given the Japanese people a great source of wisdom through his writings, but he lamented that “the great majority of Japanese are still interested [only in your] so called story. Isn’t it awful, Mr. Miller? The Japanese are still blind for the truth.”<sup>15</sup> Instead of looking for the wisdoms of the universe that Ueno believed Miller embodied, he felt that the Japanese reading public was too absorbed in finding Miller’s seedier side, and the Japanese readers’ misdirected interest in Miller’s work would continually cause Ueno frustration.

Ueno also reaped a public reward for his association with Miller. By the early 1970s, Miller’s fame was reaching its peak in Japan, and Japanese publishers were endeavoring to uncover any links they could between Miller and their country. Having shared Ueno’s name with various publishers, it did not take long before the intimate correspondence between the two men became a topic of interest. *Weekly Playboy*, the Japanese edition, soon contacted Ueno requesting he provide their audience with a glimpse into Miller’s connection with Japan. With its tabloidesque title, *Weekly Playboy* published “The Continued Letters of Love’s Struggles: The Man from Iwate who Astounded Henry Miller,” in March, 1970. The author erroneously states that the only Miller publication of letters available is the Miller-Childs correspondence, and this apparently pales in comparison to

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<sup>15</sup> Ueno to Miller, 20 Sept. 1965. Box 59, Folder 6, Henry Miller Papers (Collection 110). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

the Ueno-Miller letters, which, the author adds, are full of details about Miller and his relationship with Hoki Tokuda. The six-page article includes a picture of Ueno and one image of a postcard from Miller; the publication certainly helped Ueno's own status in Japan bringing him country-wide recognition concerning his communication with Miller. The article goes so far as to credit Miller's letter writing to Ueno with helping him through his "insomnia" period related to the relationship troubles with Hoki Tokuda ("The Continued").

### **An Emerging Trope: The Samurai**

While there are many themes that run through the Miller-Ueno correspondence, I want to highlight a key trope in Miller's tendency to praise certain Japanese individuals by comparing them to the samurai warriors. Miller's Japan was an idealized Japan—a Western-Orientalized land of mystery. Having never visited the country, Miller's affiliation with Japan was distant, he was left to willfully imagine a country that he could visualize, often only through artistic depiction, such as travel narratives, novels, films, pictures, and art prints. For Miller, there exists an ideal state for man, a constant moving away from the mainstream trends of commodification and breaking the binds that hold men to meaningless jobs. Miller knew very well about the personal and financial struggles that Ueno faced by abandoning everything to become a reformed artist of life, abandoning popular social tendencies. The true samurai, for Miller, is not a fighting machine against the wrongs of society, but rather one who has walked away from society, as Ueno was striving to do, and Miller saw a parallel between this imagined samurai and Ueno.

Miller's idolizing of the samurai morphed into his own interpretation and therefore his view is a bit disconnected from many historical realities of the samurai. An example of this Americanized Orientalism can be found in his letters to Anais Nin. Writing from Clichy, Paris in 1933, he encouraged Nin to see the 1932 American film *Madame Butterfly*, starring Sylvia Sydney and a relatively unknown Cary Grant. The film was dubbed from English into French, and, in contrast to the original English, Miller considered the French "a language more suited to the noble etiquette of the Samurai" (Nin and Miller 122). How Miller envisaged French and samurai decorum is not clear, but his was idealizing the samurai behavior. While there are no fighting samurai in *Madame Butterfly*, considering the impact this story had on Miller is fundamental to Miller studies concerning Asia. Mari Yoshihara of the University of Hawai'i has noted that, "while [*Madame Butterfly*] certainly echoed the numerous existing texts of European Orientalism, the specific narrative of *Butterfly* and the timing of its productions were also symbolic of America's power in creating its own Orientalism" (975). Elsewhere, Katrin Burtschell has noted in "Anais Nin, Henry Miller and Japan: An Endless Fascination," one of the few articles to discuss Miller and Japan, the significance of Miller's interest in Japan during the 1920s, when he first read Pierre Loti's original 1887 text, *Madame Chrysanthème* (Burtschell 41). Miller was certainly wrapped up in this American Orientalism, proudly stating in the same 1933 letter to Nin, that "whether it's because I am becoming so definitely Oriental or what, I don't know, but I am stirred all over again [because of this film]" (Nin and Miller 123). The letter to Nin makes only one specific reference to Japanese historical culture: that of the samurai—he does not mention the geisha,

around which the crux of the story revolves. This early clue into Miller's oriental focus, I argue, highlights his lifelong fascination in the samurai culture and serves, as a whole, as one of the main essences of Miller's interest in Japan. My opinion is directly supported in two letters written to Sadajiro Kubo in 1957, wherein Miller tells Kubo about his impression of the film, *Seven Samurai* (七人の侍) (1954). In the first letter, Miller recalls, "I was deeply impressed with those samurai, especially the leader. To me it was like seeing 'Zen' lived out."<sup>16</sup> A month later, he wrote, "I have [a] big book all about the Samurai. I am so very interested in that period of Japanese history."<sup>17</sup> It is clear to me, that from his earliest interest in Japan and throughout his life, the ideals of the samurai would direct Miller's impressions of Japan. Toward the end of his life, when he was living with Hoki and her Japanese friends, Miller would again return to *Madame Butterfly* to characterize his life. In the Playboy publication *My Life and Times* (1971), a photograph shows Hoki Tokuda, Puko Kurimoto, and Michiyo Watanabe singing at the piano. Miller's caption under the photo reads, "Music has always been an important thing in my life. Through my marriage to Hoki, a singer and pianist, it became more so. [...]. We have Madame Butterfly for breakfast, lunch and dinner" (Miller, *My Life* 30). The essence of *Madame Butterfly*, with its samurai and geisha themes, attached itself undeniably to Miller's paradigm of Japan and continually reappeared in his interpretations of Japan, a penchant that perhaps made it difficult to refrain from altering his persona of the real Japanese individuals who

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<sup>16</sup> Miller to Kubo, 17 Apr. 1957. Henry Miller Papers. Kubo Memorial Tourism and Culture Exchange Center (久保記念観光文化交流館).

<sup>17</sup> Miller to Kubo, 16 May 1957. Henry Miller Papers. Kubo Memorial Tourism and Culture Exchange Center (久保記念観光文化交流館).

entered his life.

It must have been intriguing for Miller to learn that Ueno was a descendent of samurai origins. To be exact, Ueno's lineage is connected to the Yamaguchi-ke (山口家継) samurai clan.<sup>18</sup> After Ueno told Miller of his samurai blood, Miller would occasionally make passing references to Ueno's ancestry. In some cases, Miller would directly quote Ueno's letters as a means to add emphasis to his letters to Hoki Tokuda. During their troubled courtship, Miller quoted Ueno in an April 1967 letter to Hoki in which Miller was imploring her to reciprocate his love. Miller emphasizes Ueno's words, suggesting that their meaning carried something more significant, as they originated from a worthy Japanese family lineage:

[A]s Ueno-San writes me at the end of his last letter: "May you be more crazy in this love, and so become so much younger. Forget everything and throw yourself into the fire of love until the fire melts you. I like burning love, dynamic love, terrible love! Life losing love! Harakiri love, Kamikaze love. Love as a rosy crucifixion, is no one's but yours. Hallelujah! Amen!" So speaks a descendent of the Samurai. And I, who imagine that my ancestors were Mongols, Huns, Tartars, echo his words. (Miller, *Letters* 51)

Miller's belief in the cultural legacy of the samurai found a foothold in his correspondence with Ueno and only further legitimized for Miller the continued significance of the samurai in modern Japanese society. While Miller's use of Ueno's heritage was designed to encourage Hoki's reciprocation of Miller's amorous attention, it also demonstrates how Miller

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<sup>18</sup> Ueno's wife's lineage is also directly related to samurai, specifically the Yonezawa clan (米沢藩), and she is a distant relative of Chisaka Hyōbu (千坂兵部).

was transfixed with the idea of a romanticized Japan. In his letter, Ueno uses the terms “harakiri” and “kamikaze” to describe his visions of love, first in the strength of the samurai and then as dedication to one’s country. Both forms of death are ritual in their nature, and perhaps these terms encouraged Miller to pursue Hoki’s love until some sort of climatic ending. Indeed, Miller began the letter to Hoki with: “This is another crazy letter, perhaps the last one,” dating it as the “Year of desperation” (Miller, *Letters* 49).

I do not want to infer that Miller was suicidal over his unrequited love with Hoki, but his rhapsodized portrait of her as his future wife is irrevocably coupled with his sentimentalized view of Japan. Miller again returns to the samurai theme in July of 1967, when his desperation had reached a crescendo concerning Hoki. He laments in a letter to a mutual Japanese friend that, “to live without love is something unbearable. If I had the Samurai spirit I would kill myself now. But I am not of the Samurai strain. I am ‘just a Brooklyn boy’, as I have often said. No matter what you may think of Hoki, for me she symbolizes Japan” (Miller, *Letters* 63). And so, when Miller finally married Hoki in September 1967, he achieved in connecting himself with his picture of Japan, but he had failed to allow for Hoki’s own individuality, thus aiding the quick dissolution of their marriage.

On May 27th, 1969, four years after the beginning of their correspondence, Miller helped support<sup>19</sup> Ueno’s upcoming publication by penning a two-page introduction for *Pensée Unicellulaire* (単細胞的思考) (1969). In the introduction, Miller describes their voluminous correspondence and

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<sup>19</sup> Such support was not rare, as Miller helped dozens of aspiring writings by allowing them to associate with his very publicly known name.

provides his personal impression of Ueno—whom he had yet to meet in person. Miller wrote, “though he does not like to use the word ‘artist’ in connection with his pursuits, Ueno-San is, or endeavors to be, what I have called an artist of life. By that I mean a man who realizes that the highest form of art is expressed in living.”<sup>20</sup> This opinion of Ueno still holds true today. When I interviewed Ueno he adamantly denied being an author, even though he has published over 20 books.<sup>21</sup> Miller takes his admiration of Ueno a step further in his introduction, exclaiming, “In some ways Ueno-San reminds me of those reformed, or better, ‘enlightened’ Samurai we see in Japanese films—I mean Samurai who have abandoned the sword out of disgust with senseless killing and who endeavor to live like simple, almost foolish individuals, firm on their convictions and wise as only simple human beings who live from day to day can be.” Ueno was quite pleased with Miller’s introduction, and wrote back, “[your words about] my resemblance to [the] Samurai is exactly what I feel sometimes.”<sup>22</sup>

When I first visited Ueno at his apartment in Gifu Prefecture, we spent nearly one hour talking about samurai culture, swords, and what true samurai should endeavor toward. At the time, I was a little confused and frustrated: I had come half way across Japan to speak to Ueno about Henry Miller, and he wanted to talk about something that seemed rather unrelated. He showed me the swords and katana he had collected, including his wife’s

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<sup>20</sup> For Kai Ueno. 27 May 1969. Box 68, Folder 11, Henry Miller Papers (Collection 110). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>21</sup> Ueno, Shōri. Personal Interview. 28 Dec. 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Ueno to Miller. 30 May 1969. Box 68, Folder 18, Henry Miller Papers (Collection 110). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

tantō (短刀), given to her by her father. In hindsight, I have a more insightful appreciation for this time spent with Ueno, and, as Ueno's letters to Miller intimate, the connection with Miller and the samurai helped form a meaningful parallel between the two men—the samurai trope seems more than just a superficial aspect of the two men's friendship. Miller self-associated with the "Orient", as noted in the letter to Anäis Nin, and elsewhere ("I find myself drawn to Japan," Miller wrote in *Plexus*),<sup>23</sup> and Ueno capitalized on Miller's Asian interest when he wrote the initial sentence of that first letter, "from the unknown lover [...] in the Orient." In return, Miller would utilize the fact that Ueno was well versed in the history and culture of Japan, a ready and willing instructor to answer Miller's questions.

Miller and Ueno would exchange several letters over the years touching on this theme of the samurai. In 1966, after going to see the samurai movie *Musashi Miyamoto* (宮本武蔵) (1954) with Hoki Tokuda, Miller praised the film in a letter to Ueno. Ueno replied in some detail about the author of the original historical fiction, Yoshikawa Eiji (吉川英治). He notes that while the story is very beautiful, it is historically inaccurate since the dueling samurai lived during different historical periods.<sup>24</sup> Ueno also sent a brochure about the film, which Miller then sent on in a letter to Hoki (Miller, *Letters* 26). The samurai connection between the two men would again resurface after the highly publicized ritual death of Yukio Mishima. The traumatic death of a fellow author, a man whom Miller had

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<sup>23</sup> (Miller, *Plexus* 65).

<sup>24</sup> Ueno to Miller. 11 Sept. 1966. Box 59, Folder 7, Henry Miller Papers (Collection 110). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

met briefly in Germany (Calonne 156) Henry Miller (1891–1980, made a deep impact on him. Miller’s lifelong interest in the samurai is likely what drew him so strongly to Mishima. But it was not until after Mishima’s death that Miller undertook his longest composition about Japan, “Reflections on the Death of Mishima” (1971). Ueno’s family lineage and Miller’s life-long fixation with this specific aspect of Japanese history helped form a bridge between their two cultures, and must have encouraged his publication on the death of Mishima.

### **Ueno’s Continued Association with Miller**

Ueno’s connection with Miller did not end with the American author’s death in 1980. During Miller’s life and for decades after his death, Ueno championed the messages he learned from Miller’s writing. With the advent of the Henry Miller Society of Japan in the 1980s, Ueno found a new venue in which to publish his thoughts about Miller. Writing in 1989, Ueno praised the life-giving force in Miller’s being: “Miller certainly lived a life he himself might be envious of. The way people live their lives and the foolishness that can be seen in all facets of his literature exactly reflect the beauty of our hearts as we turn to his works. If it is to live and write like him, I believe that any kind of sacrifice in life is worth it.” 「ミラーには、自分が嫉妬出来る位に確かな自分自身の人生があった。ミラーの人間そのものの生き方と彼の文学の全面に見えているあの愚さこそまさしく彼の作品に向う私達の心を熱くしてやまない美しさなのだ。彼のように生き又書く為になら私はどのような人生の犠牲を払ってもよいと思っている」 (Ueno, “An Irony” 45–46). Ueno also participated in various public events relating to Miller; for example, he gave a lecture on Miller at Miyagi Gakuin Women’s

University (宮城学院女子大学), in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, on December 5th, 1985. To an audience of over one-hundred, Ueno believed that “Miller’s letters are not yet widely accepted as literature, but the revelations they contain will surely have great influence on literature and thought.” 「ミラーの書簡は文学としてまだ市民権を獲得していないが、書簡に内包されている啓示は、これから世界の文学・思想に多大な影響を及ぼすことになるだろう」 (Honda 27). These letters to Ueno were, and remain, a marketable connection between the two men. Other areas of their friendship have also continued to be publicized: as recently as November 2018, *The Yomiuri Shimbun* (読売新聞), one of the largest circulating newspapers in the world, ran an advertisement of Ueno’s books currently for sale by Meisou Publishers (明窓出版). The advertisement lists for sale four of Ueno’s books, reiterating the fact that Ueno had exchanged more than 400 letters with Miller, and the advertisement refers to Ueno as a giant of wisdom.<sup>25</sup>

It might be argued that few authors have so publicly proclaimed their indebtedness to Miller—a bold statement to make considering Miller’s worldwide influence. My grounds for this position are based on the 15-year correspondence between the two men, as well as Ueno’s numerous publications concerning Miller. At one point in the early stages of their communication, Ueno wrote, “I can be satisfied with the Bible and your books. I wish I understood more about the Bible and what you write!”<sup>26</sup> Following in Miller’s footsteps, Ueno justified his life decisions because he

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<sup>25</sup> Advertisement for Meisou Publishers. *The Yomiuri Shimbun* (読売新聞), 19 Nov. 2018. Pg 1. (一面).

<sup>26</sup> Ueno to Miller, 4 Apr. 1966. Box 59, Folder 8, Henry Miller Papers (Collection 110). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

believed in the message Miller was trying to convey to his readers. It is not surprising that such commitment to Miller would arise in Japan, since, as Karl Orend notes, “Miller is a writer firmly in the European tradition with deep links to Indian and Oriental philosophy and religion” (16–17). Ueno understands Miller because Miller’s writing crosses cultural and religious boundaries that otherwise might prevent his accessibility in Japan. Moreover, Ueno realizes Miller’s ability to discover himself through writing: “Whenever I read Miller, I see the life rhythm of a person living freely and hammering out his emotions.” 「ミラーの作品を読むたびに感じる事だが、そこに在るのは自由な人間の感情の打ち出す生命のリズムだ」 (Ueno, “On Two” 52). The emotion carried over into Ueno’s endearment for Miller. Yoshiaki Nakui relates an experience with Ueno that conveys the intimate relation between the two authors: “Grabbing a handkerchief from his wife and wiping his eyes, Ueno once told me that everyone ought to have someone in his or her life who makes you tear up just by mentioning their name.” 「上野氏は「人生において、その人の名前を口にすることで泣けしまうような人物が、ひとりやふたり、居るようでないといけないね」と私を前にして言いながら眼鏡を外して、奥さんから手渡されたハンカチで涙を拭ったこともあります」.<sup>27</sup> Miller’s financial aid for Ueno’s son’s medical bills, his support of Ueno’s work, as well as the dedication to their correspondence were all additional proof to Ueno that Miller lived the way he wrote.

Within the realm of Japanese research, the relationship between Miller and Ueno has not gone unnoticed, although it is not a topic of extensive investigation. Beginning in 1986 and lasting through 1993, the Henry Miller

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<sup>27</sup> Nakui, Yoshiaki. Letter to Sawaya Shoten. 2018. Author’s personal collection.

Society of Japan published their first journal series, entitled *The Bulletin of the Henry Miller Society of Japan* (this journal eventually reemerged in 1998, as *Delta: Studies on Henry Miller, Anaïs Nin, and Lawrence Durrell*, and continues to this day). During the *Bulletin* years, Ueno submitted several articles on Miller; additionally, one critique was published: “Henry Miller and Shōri Ueno [ヘンリー・ミラーと上野霄里,]” by Daisuke Sadohara (佐土原台介). Sadohara’s article is worth quoting at length as he touches on some of the key similarities between Ueno and Miller, as well as Miller’s influence on Ueno. Concerning Ueno’s opinions on engaging with society, especially from the stance of an academic, Sadohara notes:

As pointed out in Ueno’s books, those who have been influenced or “enlightened” by Miller often fail. He also notes that all people considered “researchers” are failures from the get-go. Academic research serves to advance civilization and culture, thereby gleaning the respect of society. But to Ueno, the act itself of contributing to civilization and society marks failure, as it holds no relation to the miraculous, rejuvenation, or rebirth. (Sadohara 67)

「このことからすれば、上野が同書でしばしば言及しているように、たいがいのミラー研究家、ミラーに啓発 (!) されたとする作家、評論家、読者は、落第ということになってしまう。上野の筆法からするなら、「研究者」と名のつく人たちはまずもって落第である。「研究」と名付けられる学問的探究は、「文明」「文化」の発展に一役買っているからこそ「世間」の尊敬をかちえているわけである。ところが、驚いたことに、「文明」「文化」の発展に一役買うというその行為が、上野にとってはむしろ墮落であり、奇蹟、甦り、誕生とは何ら関わりのないものとなる。」 (Sadohara 67)

Japanese civilization, as Ueno wrote in 1967, is deserving of the “electric chair,” and Ueno serves as the “ruthless public prosecutor” willing to denounce his society and send it to its demise. Miller’s influence on Ueno encouraged him to leave behind his promising ministry work and embrace the ideas Miller propounds: “Practicing what one preaches is at the heart of the ideals Ueno received from Miller.” 「行為と言葉の一致は、上野がミラーから得た全思想の核心である」 (Sadohara 73). Modern society is to be avoided if it means sacrificing the self: “To Miller, or to Ueno, one’s greatness is measured by how they confront life and fight, not simply by their writings. Thus, to be a great person, one need not be recognized by society.” 「ミラーにとってあるいは上野にとって、その著作によってというより、人生と真向から対決し、賭け、ボロボロになって戦う人間こそ「偉大さ」の証とみなされている。たとえ歴史上の偉人でなくても、自分にとって人生とまともに向き合って果敢に生きていると思われる人物であれば、有名無名にかかわらず、偉人の列に加えてしまう」 (Sadohara 72). Ueno has certainly existed on the outskirts of society, and his work—while continuing to be published—has not received mainstream attention. Sadohara does not insinuate that Ueno is a failure for being influenced by Miller. Indeed, Ueno’s own literary path has brought him followers who discovered him through his own writing, not through his association with Miller.

## Conclusion

I want to suggest that the friendship between Miller and Ueno reveals Miller’s interest in understanding, from afar, the complex aspects of Japanese culture, including that of the samurai. The friendship also demonstrates Miller’s influence in Japan. I would argue that Ueno was the

only Japanese person with whom Miller had such detailed discussions over such a long period. Even though Miller knew Sadajiro Kubo for nine years longer than Ueno, the correspondence between Miller and Kubo is small compared to the Miller-Ueno letters. One might argue that Hoki Tokuda would have been Miller's greatest source of knowledge about Japan, but as Hoki herself has told me, she was raised in a Western-style Japanese family and did not have the in-depth knowledge of her culture that Miller was seeking, especially since by the time Hoki married Miller she had spent much of her adult life living in North America. The Miller-Ueno correspondence was Miller's last great correspondence and provided Miller direct contact to life in Japan through Ueno and his family, and insight into Ueno's life as a Japanese author. Ueno has long been unwilling to share Miller's letters with the public; in the 1970s, he was approached by the art magazine, *Geijutsu Seikatsu* (芸術生活) with a request to publish some of Miller's letters. Ueno refused.<sup>28</sup> To this day, Ueno has not published Miller's letters, as he told me, because he promised Miller that he would not do so.<sup>29</sup>

Miller understood that the vast chasm between the cultures of the United States and Japan could not be merged or joined, but during his entire life—from the streets of Brooklyn to those of Pacific Palisades, Los Angeles—he had been interacting with Asian cultures. He was deeply intrigued with the role of the samurai in Japanese history and even into modern times, as exemplified through his distress over Mishima's ritual suicide. I return to Miller's introduction for Ueno's 1968 book in order to

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<sup>28</sup> Ueno to Miller, 27 Jan. 1971. Box 74, Folder 2, Henry Miller Papers (Collection 110). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>29</sup> Ueno, Shōri. Personal Interview. 28 Dec. 2016.

highlight my impression that Miller grappled with and went to great lengths to understand the mind of the Japanese. In Miller's understand, Ueno appears to be a Japanese man who understands the dilemma of his fellow countrymen:

Though he is struggling for self-liberation he is still a rebel. In a way, he is very un-Japanese. He sees through the weaknesses of his country men, he exposes their faults and shortcomings, and endeavors to set himself apart. But deep down he remains Japanese. He can't help it, any more than I can help being American. If he can make the Japanese more Japanese than they are he will be rendering a service to his country. The Japanese have much to be proud of, and it is to their honor and credit, in my humble opinion, that they can produce a faithful, devoted renegade such as Ueno-San.<sup>30</sup>

Miller's mention of the rebel and renegade in Ueno parallels his own experiences as a writer, and while Miller was unable to read any of Ueno's publications—something he lamented—he was able to form a bond with Ueno through their correspondence. Miller envisioned a Japan that was beyond the reality, but from the relationship with Ueno he knew that Japan was continuing to be Westernized, just as Count Keyserling had noted in his *Travel Diary of a Philosopher* in 1925, and Lafcadio Hearn before him. Japan's Western turn, so to speak, worried Miller and he viewed Ueno as one of the few who might help the Japanese be more Japanese.

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<sup>30</sup> For Kai Ueno. 27 May 1969. Box 68, Folder 11, Henry Miller Papers (Collection 110). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

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