Chapter II

Tropic of Cancer: The Poetry of Destruction

Anarchism, in the popular mind, is associated with destruction. But if the stray historical incidents of physical destruction that took place in the name of anarchism can be ignored, the destruction that is proposed here is essentially metaphysical – of values, norms, and the status quo. It is a destruction, which seeks to subvert attitudes, perceptions, and concepts. It also has an aesthetic plane. This is why Michael Bakunin, a great exponent of anarchism, says, “The passion for destruction is a creative passion, too” (qtd. in Marshall 631). Thus he calls the anarchist manifestation of destruction the ‘poetry of destruction’, suggesting that the element of destruction contained in anarchism is there as a precedent to the creation of the new, which is founded on freedom. Proudhon too reinstates this view when he makes “I destroy in order to build up” his anarchist slogan (qtd. in Marshall 630).

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6 Regarding this David Miller says, “Only a small proportion of anarchists have advocated terrorist methods – and only an even smaller proportion have tried to practise them [. . .] Looking at the picture in another way, acts of terror have been performed by republicans, by nationalists, by revolutionary socialists and by fascists, and if one tried to quantify the anarchist contribution to this catalogue of horror, it would turn out to be relatively small” (109).
**Tropic of Cancer** is the work in which Miller found his 'voice'. As Gordon says, "*Tropic of Cancer* communicates the first sense of form arising from the sense of self, what Miller called finding his own voice"(45). The anarchic 'sense of form' corresponded with the realization of the need for destruction of the rules of fiction writing, in order to represent the anarchist self of the narrator in its verisimilitude to the nature of consciousness.

Finally, in his view of the natural course of events Miller accepted the destruction of what already exists. In personal as well as social structures, destruction had to pave way for creation. Since he disapproved of the state of affairs pretty generally, even on the individual level, he had to accept destruction, even encourage it. (Gordon 44).

Before the writing of *Cancer*, Miller tells George Wickes, "I felt very keenly [...] that one should have some sort of story, a plot to unroll: I was more concerned then with the form and manner of doing it than with the vital thing" ("Henry Miller: The Art of Fiction" 51).

It is therefore a voice of literary anarchism resulting from the espousal of chaos and rebellion, both in subject matter and style, in its course towards freedom to set its own independent rules of creativity. As Erica Jong says,

[...] the main question Henry Miller poses: how does a writer raise his voice? How does a writer take the chaos of his life and transform it into art? The raising of a voice is the real thread
through the chaos. The raising of a voice is the essence of freedom” (42).

Miller raises his artistic voice of freedom through its representation in the consciousness of the narrator Henry’s anarchist self, whose chaotic existence becomes a symbol of the absolute freedom from the fixities of the artificial order of authority, discipline, norms, and ideas, thereby manifesting the higher order of nature.

In Cancer, Henry perceives chaos or apparent disorder as the essential nature of reality. But humans have imposed their own authoritarian order on this world. This order is the cancer that is eating it away. At the very beginning of Cancer there is a statement that perfect order, the human order imposed on reality, is a sign of death. Henry is mentioning the ‘order’ that is in Villa Borghese, the residence where he stays with his friend Boris: “I am living at the Villa Borghese. There is not a crumb of dirt anywhere, nor a chair misplaced. We are all here and we are dead” (9).

Regarding the symbolism of cancer in the title of the book Jay Martin says, “Cancer is the sign of the poet who observes and exposes the disease of a civilization which is proceeding in the wrong direction. Cancer is also the sign of death in life [. . .]” (80). The cancer symbol has been there in anarchist parlance also: “When asked what would replace government, numerous anarchists have answered “What do you replace cancer with”’ (Marshall 13). For anarchism believes that government/state is the most potent of the cancerous orders created by man and imposed on this world, which stifle the free existence
of the human spirit. So the anarchist perception of reality first concerns itself with the need of the destruction of this order.

Michael Fraenkel says something vital about the (artistic) element of chaos in Cancer, though without differentiating between Henry and Miller:

Henry Miller would speak out of this chaos [. . .]. He would not seek to interpret and define this chaos; he would seek only to give it utterance. [. . .] His was not to understand and reflect, but to witness and report. His life was chaos and the world was chaos, and he would reflect the chaos of his life and the chaos of the world. He was ready for the task. He was ready for the Tropic of Cancer. (59)

In Cancer therefore we see Henry employing symbols of chaos in human form and glorifying it:

The world is a cancer eating itself away. [. . .] When into the womb of time everything is again withdrawn chaos will be restored and chaos is the score upon which reality is written. You, Tania, are my chaos. It is why I sing. It is not even I, it is the world dying, shedding the skin of time. I am still alive, kicking in your womb, a reality to write upon. (10)

In having sexual intercourse with Tania, Henry is then communicating with reality itself, which is chaos.

Henry invents images to concretize the chaos he wants to apotheosize. One such image is a man called Moldorf. He is the personification of chaos and
therefore incomprehensible to the man tuned to the values and codes of society. Henry says, "It is the caricature of a man which Moldorf first presents" (15). He is chaotic by virtue of being unpredictable and inconsistent. Henry continues,

I have had opinions about him which I have discarded; I have had other opinions which I am revising. I have pinned him down only to find that it was not a dung-beetle I had in my hands, but a dragonfly. He has offended me by his coarseness and then overwhelmed me with his delicacy. He has been voluble to the point of suffocation, then quiet as the Jordan (16).

Chaos, when it is personified, takes on a protean nature. Henry perceives this fact:

There is his [Moldorf's] mind. It is an amphitheatre in which the actor gives a protean performance. Moldorf, multiform, and unerring, goes through his roles - clown, juggler, contortionist, priest, lecher, mountebank. The amphitheatre is too small. He puts dynamite to it. (16).

Henry says that his effort to approach the core of Moldorf is ineffectual. "It is like trying to approach God, for Moldorf is God - he has never been anything else. I am merely putting down words" (16). Henry’s acceptance of the metaphysical authority of God - through deifying Moldorf - while rejecting human authority through his multifaceted rebellious stances, can be read as spiritual anarchism's (Marshall 6) preference for the nature's (God's) order and power to
that of human authority manifested mainly in the state. And the natural order manifests in the chaos of the world, which is here symbolized by Moldorf. Henry now links him directly to anarchism: "The word in your mouth is anarchy. Say it Moldorf, I am waiting for it. Nobody knows, when we shake hands, the rivers that pour through our sweat" (18). Henry's anarchist consciousness experiences freedom by subverting the concepts of time and space: "We stand on five minutes and devour centuries", and establishes Moldorf as the concretization of an anarchist self, while admitting the impossibility of language to appropriate the full meaning of his thoughts:

You are the sieve through which my anarchy strains, resolves itself into words. Behind the word is chaos. Each word a stripe, a bar, but there are not and never will be enough bars to make the mesh."

(18)

But it would be a mistake to think that Henry would go on apotheosizing Moldorf. His anarchism does not spare his own favorite creations. Destruction of fixities becomes the ultimate purpose of Henry's existence. In the lapse of a few pages Henry trivializes him in "a surreal fantasy of dismemberment which illustrates Miller's [Henry's] savage contempt for [the] ordinary familial" (Widmer 29) because even Moldorf is prone to the social code of being a loving husband to his wife Fanny:

Moldorf is jumping around in front of her like a fat toad. His flesh quivers. He slips and it is difficult for him to roll over again on his belly. She prods him with her thick toes. His eyes protrude a little
further. "Kick me again, Fanny. that was good." She gives him a good prod this time - it leaves a permanent dent in his paunch. His face is close to the carpet; the wattles are joggling in the nap of the rug. He livens up a bit, flips around, springs from furniture to furniture. " Fanny you are marvelous!." (42)

Conventional morality is a potent instrument, which lends society the authority to invade the freedom of the individual. Self-respect and self-reliance may be considered as universal moral values. During the upbringing of an individual these concepts become so embedded in his set of values, that he considers death better than a life bereft of them. A man who compromises these virtues for the achievement of anything (in Henry's case the becoming of a writer) is seen as degenerate, especially in the American society which makes upward mobility in social status the raison d'être of the individual. Shamelessness thus becomes one of the most despicable conditions.

Henry puts to his axe these values when, through his experiments for survival in Paris, he exposes the baselessness of such values when a person is driven to the wall of his own destruction. Michael Woolf says in this regard,

The narrator of Tropic of Cancer is a parody of that most American of archetypes, the self-made man. He is essentially an "unmade man" who has cast off all sense of a public self; has become an embodiment of a consciousness without status or power, an appetite without obligation or responsibility [. . . ] He is stripped of
those accoutrements by which we define the social, public and political self.

(168)

Henry lives the life of a parasite through out the life depicted in Cancer. He earns his own living only on a few occasions. His existence is bereft of all the finer aspects of life, and he becomes an empty belly that walks sniffing like a dog shamelessly for food most of the time. Sometimes his friends buy him food out of pity. Sometimes they don’t. Henry grudges not them their insensitivity to his condition. He does not fall prey to sentimentalism.

The question of self-respect and its moral entanglements like upright earning of one’s own bread and refusal to beg under any circumstances do not ever occur to Henry. This amoral stance that he takes in matters of food, sex, and other basic human needs proclaims anarchy, by way of subversion of the authority of moral values. It is a proclamation of freedom from such values that Henry registers here. It is a state in which shame is viewed as being imposed by culture to keep people tame to moral authority, and hence rejected rebelliously. Instead, a new attitude to life which is primeval and thus more natural is advocated. It is an attitude that establishes the supremacy of life itself above all man made abstract values, and upholds the need for survival at any cost as the only value worth observing.

The moral questions of self-respect and shame occur only to the mind of the reader who is conditioned by such concepts. They do not occur to the anarchist mind of Henry as for instance when in Cancer he schemes the strategy
of getting free meals from his acquaintances with great survival instinct and absolutely no moral pangs:

And then it occurred to me, like a flash, that no one would refuse a man a meal if only he had the courage to demand it. I went immediately to a café and wrote down a dozen of letters. "Would you let me have dinner with you once a week? Tell me what day is most convenient for you." It worked like a charm. I was not only fed [. . .] I was feasted. Every night I went home drunk. They couldn't do enough for me, these generous once a week souls. What happened to me between times was none of their affair. Now and then the thoughtful ones presented me with cigarettes, or a little pin money. They were all obviously relieved when they realized that they would see me only once a week. And they were still more relieved when I said—"it won't be necessary anymore". They never asked why. They congratulated me, and that was all. Often the reason was I had found a better host; [. . .] but that thought never occurred to them. Finally I had a steady, solid program — a fixed schedule. (62)

Morality is inextricably linked to religion. Other than the political power, that which enforces the authority of the state is the power of religion over the masses. In the West, religion is symbolized by the church. By church is meant the clergy and the followers of the dictates of the clergy. The enormous number of followers of religion makes it perhaps the greatest of institutions. Anarchists
have been wise to the nexus between the church and the state. As David Miller says,

the church may be used directly to legitimize the state — the priest may use the authority of his position to propagate doctrines of obedience to the political authorities. For this reason Bakunin claimed [...] 'There is not, there cannot be, a State without religion.' (9)

Miller attacks religion through a scene he depicts in Cancer in which Henry and Fillmore pay a visit to a church where a mass is in progress. The whole process of the mass, inside the dimlit interior of the church with the priest and the flock as the participants, is trivialized in order to realize the perspective of anarchism when Fillmore says that they would go to the mass "For the fun of it". Parkin rightly says regarding this episode that "the narrator drowns the celebratory aspect of the Mass in sarcasm" and that he attacks "the ritual nature of the occasion, its spiritual irrelevance and the cynical commercialism underlying it" (149). Thus from the very beginning Henry and his companion alienate themselves from the religious ambience by virtue of their attitude as well as their appearance. Henry says:

I felt somewhat uneasy about it; in the first place I had never attended a mass, and in the second place I looked seedy and felt seedy. Fillmore, too, looked rather battered, even more disreputable than myself; his big slouch cap was on assways and his overcoat was still full of sawdust from the last joint we had been
in. However we marched in. The worst they could do would be to throw us out. (261)

For the anarchist attitude of Henry the mass appeals only as idiocy. To his sensibility, the situation enlivens a hoard of sordid images, most of them related to death and putrefaction. The interior of the church seems to him “A huge dismal tomb [. . .] with mourners shuffling in and out” (261). The congregation are “People in shrouds [. . .] chewing away with that hopeless, dejected look of beggars who hold their hands in a trance and mumble an unintelligible appeal” (261). He equates the church to slaughterhouses and morgues one instinctively avoids. For him religion, because of its dead routine, has lost all its significance and has degenerated to a sort of mass dementia:

Two thousand years of it has deadened us to the idiocy of it [. . .]
All over Christendom, at certain stipulated hours, people in black are groveling before the altar where the priest stands up [. . .] and mumbles to them in a language which, even if it were comprehensible no longer contains a shred of meaning. (262)

As the episode progresses Henry gains an insight into the drama of mass and religion. This insight strikes a pungent criticism at the hidden motives of religious fervour and prayers, which has echoes of the radical Hegelian critique of religion.

The radical Hegelians held that religion was a form of alienation: the religious believer abstracted certain of his own essential qualities or aspirations, and projected them upon a transcendent
deity. This process diminished him, for he now saw himself as a relatively impotent and worthless creature, whereas the God he had created possessed every desirable attribute. (David Miller 22)

Hegelians go on to state that in order to come out of the force of religion one has to reappropriate the human essence, which means that one has to understand and see that the qualities attributed to God are one's own essential qualities. Max Stirner, the anarchist philosopher, extends this critique to every idea man has hypostatized, and attacks the idea of 'human essence' itself. He calls it another product of human thought "and so could not serve as an independent standard by which we ought to direct our endeavours" (qtd. in David Miller 23). He says that only the human self is real and calls all other mental entities "spooks".

Henry's protest at the excessive influence of religion/Church on the life of common people bears probably Miller's own contempt of it that originated as a reaction against the puritanical American background in which he grew. Henry, as he stands in the church, realizes the motive of desire behind the prayers, evincing a consciousness that is free of the process of sublimation of 'human essence' contained in prayers. It is very conspicuous that he does not mention the 'big' human desires for the larger powers of authority. He sees that the congregation is basically composed of the mediocre and lesser individuals, who form the grassroot level of society. They lack the potential even for grand dreams. The strength they pray for is only for achieving the categories mentioned below. The church survives on the petty desires of such individuals, while the
powerful ones stand on the other side of the altar, and dictate the poor ones
even their dreams. The people pray

So that God's blessing may rain down upon the king and country
and battleships and high explosives and tanks and air planes, so
that the worker may have more strength in his arms, strength to
slaughter horses and cows and sheep, strength to punch holes in
iron girders, strength to sew buttons on other people's pants,
strength to sell carrots and sewing machines and automobiles,
strength to exterminate insects and clean stables and unload
garbage cans and scrub lavatories and chop tickets in the subway.
Strength . . . strength. All that lip chewing and hornswagglng just to
furnish a little strength. (263)

The church episode closes with an action (or reaction) of Henry that
destroys another moral spook - 'courage' or 'standing one's ground like a man'.
He does this by acting in a way that is quite unheroic and clownish, again
symbolizing a self that is anarchical through its freedom from such moral
yardsticks. Seeing their unceremonious appearance and behaviour inside the
church, a priest gets hold of Henry and Fillmore and throws them violently out of
the church. But to his surprise Henry and Fillmore break into a fit of laughter in
his face. As Hassan says, in Cancer "we follow each incident with riotous
disbelief, as if the whole world has suddenly gone mad. [...] Anarchy prevails in
the most clownish forms" (63).
The priest gets enraged and comes running down with the intention probably of manhandling them. Fillmore wants to fight back. But Henry pulls at him and runs to safety:

By this time some preservative instinct warned me to get a move on. I grabbed Fillmore by the coat sleeve and started to run. He was saying like an idiot: “No, no! I won’t run!” I yelled, “We would better get out of here. That guy is mad clean through. (264)

This for Henry’s cold and shameless confession of the true reason, that it is better to run for life at the face of madness – the madness of religion personified in the priest. Courage here would be foolish and self-destructive; Henry’s prime commitment is to life and freedom of life, and before these the moral ideal of courage loses significance. As Widmer says regarding this episode:

[. . .] the insistence and ebullience of his [Henry’s] refusal either to commit himself to the common fraud or to take a moral stance depends on a rebellion against the usual institutional values. (Henry Miller 36)

The criticism of the religious institution for its being a centre of power and its consequent lack of human sympathy, and the luxury that goes with it is further seen in one of the recollections of Henry. It is an episode in which he remembers an experience in America, when he and a friend had gone to seek help from a catholic priest for food and a place to lie down. They were turned out, and after sometime, to the rage of Henry, he sees the same priest coming out his residence in a limousine, enjoying complacently his drive with a costly cigar in his
mouth (267). The image of this priest provides a veritable message of protest at the exploitative powers enjoyed by religious institutions.

Miller has been accused of indifference to the political and historical realities of his times. This criticism has been particularly pungent in the case of Cancer as it was written at a time when the debris of World War I had not still been removed and the clouds of a second war were taking form upon the firmament of Europe. George Orwell in his essay "Inside the Whale" addresses this issue and tries to put Cancer in a favourable critical light. Speaking about the political circumstances contemporary to the early 1930s, the historical time depicted in Cancer and also the time of its writing, Orwell says,

[... ] Italians were marching into Abyssinia and Hitler's concentration camps were already bulging. The intellectual foci of the world were Rome, Moscow, and Berlin. It did not seem to be a moment at which a novel of understanding value was likely to be written about American dead-beats cadging drinks in the Latin Quarter. (7)

Orwell, however, defends Miller's political indifference saying that the greatness of Cancer lies in "revealing what is familiar" (8) in the everyday realities of a drab existence. He compares Cancer with Ulysses on this ground and draws the similarities in this regard.

Another defense of Miller by Orwell is that, in Cancer he accepts reality as such instead of protesting. Orwell elaborates what it meant to say 'I accept' in that age. It was to say one accepts "concentration camps, rubber truncheons,
machine guns, putsches, purges, slogans [. . .] press censorship [. . .]

crimes" (13). Orwell continues that in Cancer since Miller (i.e. Henry) equates himself with the ordinary, familiar man, he becomes passive.

Within a narrow circle (home life, and perhaps the trade union or local politics) he [the ordinary man] feels himself master of his fate, but against major events he is helpless as against the elements. So far from endeavouring to influence the future, he simply lies down and lets things happen to him. (Orwell 14)

He says that this is the nature of the passiveness that informs Henry's attitude in Cancer.

Finally in a famous metaphor of Jonah in the belly of the whale from Bible, Orwell identifies Miller's politically indifferent attitude with the condition of being inside the belly of the whale. He says:

Short of being dead it is the final, unsurpassable stage of irresponsibility. [. . .] All his best and most characteristic passages are written from the angle of Jonah, a willing Jonah. [. . .] In his case the whale happens to be transparent. Only he feels no impulse to alter or control the process that he is undergoing. He has performed the essential Jonah act of allowing himself to be swallowed, remaining passive, accepting. (18)

It is true that Cancer, and the whole of Miller's writing for that matter, is patterned on the familiar. Though it is also true that there is a Jonah-like acceptance in the attitude of Henry in Cancer, Orwell's claim that there is no
protest in that attitude is disputable. Orwell's position is the result of the misunderstanding regarding the scope of Henry's 'acceptance'. A close reading of the book will make it clear that he accepts unconditionally and wholeheartedly only his personal destiny, which consists of being a poor, starving, and unsuccessful expatriate writer living in Paris. He accepts this fate without any protest because it is chosen willfully in order to achieve the purpose of becoming a writer.

Orwell, however, fails to see the devastating protest that lies embedded even in this acceptance. By choosing to be poor and unsuccessful he is conspicuously protesting at American materialism which estimates success only in terms of the amount of money made by a person. John Parkin too says as much when he asserts, "Cancer can be seen an as [sic] intensely political work given its uncompromising rejection of America by an American" (184).

Other than his personal fate Henry accepts nothing. He protests against state, authority, and conventions. If he seems to accept this it is because the reader fails to perceive the irony contained in it. Orwell does not see the anarchism in the passive attitude of Henry in which lies the refusal to be affected by the power of authority. If Henry's attitude seems to be politically indifferent because of its lack of awareness of the specific political realities of his times, it is the result of his anarchism, which banishes with contempt the state and its machinations like war and coercion from its field of attention. "What Orwell failed to see was that Miller had formed his basic philosophy [. . .] through anarchism" (Gordon 39). As Wallace Fowlie says:
He [Miller] has always been the pure singer of individual freedom who was a-political because he believed that to give up a capitalistic regime for a socialistic regime was simply to change masters. (189)

If Henry's protest does not take on definite contours of a consistent stance it is because anarchism itself is not essentially a well-defined ideology.

"[Anarchism] is a moral protest against existing economic and political institutions, and it relies upon moral indignation to initiate revolutionary change" (David Miller 76). Just one instance would suffice to show Henry's protest and contempt towards the absurdity of power and state, and also the sacrifice of individuality, which is highly priced by anarchists, a person is forced to make for enabling the state to assert its power. It is an instance when he looks at a military barrack and thinks:

On a rainy day I used to stand by the window and look down on the activity below, quite as if it were something going on on another planet. It seemed incomprehensible to me. Everything done according to schedule, but a schedule that must have been devised by a lunatic. There they were, floundering around in mud, the bugles blowing, the horses charging—all within four walls. A sham battle. A lot of tin soldiers who hadn't the least interest in learning how to kill [. . .]. Utterly ridiculous the whole thing, but part of the scheme of things. [. . .] And then sometimes the artillery was dragged out and they went chattering down the street on parade and people stood and gaped and admired the fine uniforms. To me
they always looked like an army corps in retreat; something shabby,
bedraggled, crestfallen about them, their uniforms too big for their bodies, all the alertness, which as individuals they possess to such a remarkable degree, gone now. (224)

Anarchist destruction has its creative aspect. It lies in the sense of freedom that ensues such destruction. "Freedom [. . .] is what our hero finds; in his jungle world of violence and deceit a black apocalypse gathers slowly" (Hassan 62). Through out the course of Cancer there are several instances in which Henry is overcome by a peace that is beyond comprehension, and the resultant experience of freedom. It is a freedom that he could not have known in America where his anarchical impulses have been in constant clash with the environment consisting of family, society, culture, and institutions, all puritanical. It was an America where "the anarchists ran afoul of the most sacred traditions of American society. In addition to their attacks upon the institutions of government, which caused the most vigorous reaction, the anarchists attacked Puritanism [. . .]" (Gordon 41).

But the ambience of Paris with its anarchist traditions (David Miller traces the origins of anarchism back to the French Revolution in 1789 (3)) is so congenial to Henry that his natural self burgeons. Miseries caused by tension consequent on a willful rejection of social conventions, like having a steady income through work, are there. But to the anarchist in Henry these miseries of poverty and struggle for physical as well as artistic existence are welcome, if the self of the man is given free leash to realize itself. As Gordon says:
[Miller's] attitude in *Tropic of Cancer* is not peaceful acceptance [...]. It is rather the first assertion of the self against all that seeks to enslave the self, against disgust for the forms life may take, against conventional easy adjustments to reality [...]. It proposes to face frankly the biological facts of existence and especially to treat these facts in the most immediate terms available. (88)

Self passes through its stages of realization, and in each stage Henry experiences an ineffable sense of freedom, which happens to be the reason for existence of his anarchist self. In *Cancer*, the instance of such an experience takes the form of "excremental vision" in anecdotes which "will indicate how Miller turns the mucky flux into a metaphysical flux in an ebullient defiance which provides much of the shape of *Tropic of Cancer*" (Widmer, *Henry Miller* 22); in which excremental happenings lead to vision of universal truth. In one of them, Henry takes a young Gandhian Hindu to one of the brothels in Paris. The Indian is not used to the Parisian ways of life, and in the brothel before having sex, he, out of ignorance, happens to defecate in a 'bidet'. This action enrages the woman and a nasty scene of verbal abuse follows. Henry is surprised to see the stool floating in the bidet, which is a utensil used only for washing face and hands. The fuss made by the brothel manager and the prostitute, and the frustration and humiliation suffered by the Indian friend, lifts Henry into an insightful vision of reality.
The stool becomes a symbol of human disillusionment. Against the background of the Indian youth's religious fervour for Gandhism and of the general plight of humanity Henry thinks:

For some reason or other man looks for the miracle, and to accomplish it he will wade through blood. He will debauch himself with ideas, he will reduce himself to a shadow if for only one second of his life he can close his eyes to the hideousness of reality. Everything is endured – disgrace, humiliation, poverty, war, crime, ‘ennui’ – in the belief that overnight something will occur, a miracle, which will render life tolerable. (102)

But Henry sarcastically says in his liberating anarchist vision, that this miracle man craves for turns out to be nothing more than human excreta. He thus reveals the fake legitimacy of the escapist psychological dependence of humanity on ideology, which curtails its freedom:

What if at the last moment, when the banquet table is set and the cymbals clash, there should appear suddenly, and wholly without warning, a silver platter on which even the blind could see that there is nothing more, and nothing less, than two enormous lumps of shit. (103)

The realization of the disillusionment that is lying in wait for humanity takes Henry to the realm of the experience of freedom. It is a freedom that results from the absurdist conviction that there is absolutely nothing to be hoped for. Erica Jong too believes that “In Tropic of Cancer he [Henry] freed himself to see
the absurdity of the world stripped of all myth and illusion. This totally irreverent angle of vision allows Henry to see things that nobody else would see until decades later"(106). In Cancer Henry says:

[. . .] and now suddenly, inspired by the absolute hopelessness of everything, I felt relieved, felt as though a great burden had been lifted from my shoulders. [. . .] I decided [. . .] to make not the least resistance to fate [. . .]. Nothing that had happened to me thus far had been sufficient to destroy me; nothing had been destroyed except my illusions. I myself was intact. (103)

One sees that Henry's anarchism is complete in the sense that the freedom he asserts/experiences is not conditioned on external events, but is inward and based on the shedding of psychological dependence on values. It is the wholehearted acceptance of an extreme situation where all that is human made, and hence transient, becomes irrelevant. It is the espousal of the situation of being non-human or an outsider. He feels free in that acceptance of everything by which he defies belonging to anything particular in a society founded on authoritarian norms because "no allegiance is due such a world" (Widmer, Henry Miller 37). Henry says:

I made up my mind that I would hold on to nothing, that I would expect nothing, that henceforth I would live as an animal [. . .]. Even if war were declared, and it were my lot to go, I would grab the bayonet and plunge it [. . .]. (104)
The only motive that would now govern his spirit would be the one to live at whatever cost. It is a new world that his newfound freedom gives him — a freedom that is built on destruction and chaos. “If to live is the paramount thing, then I will live, even if I must become a cannibal” (104).

Henry realizes that a person with such an extreme assertion of freedom would be out of human history, for history is a record only of the politically and morally visible. His anarchism should throw him out of it, and in his being out of history is his freedom because, in so being, he stands morally liberated from the obligation to conform to any set of ideas or principles which form the basis of historical events —

As far as history goes I am dead. [...] I am only spiritually dead. Physically I am alive. Morally I am free. The world which I have departed is a menagerie. The dawn is breaking on a new world [...] (104)

It can be seen that in *Cancer* Henry's freedom is largely founded on the rejection of social roles. Coming to Paris, he lays behind perhaps all the social roles that he had enacted in America, and also the roles society would want to impose on an individual. He is out of roles like that of husband, father, son, citizen, patriot and even friend. His rejection of roles makes his self a symbol of anarchism by virtue of its destruction of social identities. Such an existence can be disastrous, because the shedding of identities will bring an impasse in social interaction. Henry welcomes such impasse, because his assertion of freedom lies in his non-conformity with social identities/roles which
are modeled on the repressive values formulated by socio political authority.

Hence we see that his interaction is restricted to the exclusive society which consists of like-minded people with anarchic orientation.

By rejecting social roles Henry is rejecting society itself. It is an assertion of what is called 'individualist anarchism':

Individualist anarchism is the most uncompromising form of anarchism. Socially, the individualists conceive society as an organic whole but as a collection of separate and sovereign individuals. Morally, they celebrate individuality as the supreme value, and are fearful of the individual submerging himself or herself in the community. (Marshall 10)

Societal life is conditioned on roles and the observation of the parameters laid down by these roles. See how Henry rejects these roles and acknowledges himself as being inhuman in doing so, for humans cannot live except in society –

If I am inhuman it is because my world has slopped over its human bounds, because to be human seems like a miserable affair, limited by the senses, restricted by moralities and codes, defined by platitudes and isms. (257)

Marshall says that anarchism holds up the bewitching ideal of personal and social freedom, both in the negative sense of being free from all external restraint and imposed authority, and in the positive sense of being free to celebrate the full harmony of being. (xv)
Henry, through his picaresque existence in Cancer, is celebrating his freedom, in spite of his physical miseries. He is living up to the 'full harmony of his being' through freeing himself from social/political codes of conduct and attitudes.

As an anarchist Henry is dissatisfied with the existing order of things. He has thus his own utopian vision of the world. In a sudden burst of eloquence his Utopia seeks a total escape from the burden of the past into the river-like flux of the present. Henry's utopia also is a call to free oneself from myths, and to replace myth by the eternal present of culture and literature. For anarchists have realized that that which enslaves humanity are primarily the beliefs and superstitions inherited from the past in the encoded form of myths. As Ernst Carsriter says, "[...] men who live under the sway of myth are never conscious of the fact that their lives are dominated by images and symbols which took form and shape in the dim recesses of the past" (qtd. in Reichert 14). He continues to say that anarchism therefore seeks to liberate people through the destruction of the myth systems. Henry in Cancer says:

I want a world of men and women, of trees that do not talk (because there is too much talk in this world as it is!) of rivers that carry you to places, not rivers that are legends, but rivers that put you in touch with other men and women, with architecture, religion, plants, animals – rivers that have boats on them and in which men drown, drown not in myth and legend and books and dust of the past, but in time and space and history. I want rivers that make
oceans such as Shakespeare and Dante, rivers that do not dry up in the void of the past. (258)

We see in Cancer Miller asserting Henry's anarchism through his positions that are destructive of norms and traditional values. But human life cannot be sustained through destruction; nor can destruction be justified unless it is followed by or leads to creativity. Anarchism has suffered its stigma because of the popular misconception that it is a one way course of destructiveness. But according to anarchist theory anarchy is order. The order that is envisaged by anarchism is not an artificial order imposed on society by authority and power. Its order is a natural order – the order that is embedded in human nature in its pure and uncorrupted state. Anarchists believe that society without government will be more peaceful and productive. Marshall says,

Indeed, it [the society without government] would seem closer to [. . . ] state of nature in which people live together in a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, within the bounds of the law of nature, and live according to reason, without a common superior on earth, with authority to judge between them. (x)

In Cancer, the order that Henry's vision projects is thus a natural order, the order of human nature which is founded on the self and its realization. It is an interior order experienced by the individual, and is characterized by being at peace with oneself and one's state of affairs, however desperate and hopeless they might look to others.
The anarchist confidence in the advantages of freedom, of letting alone, is [. . .] grounded in a kind of cosmic optimism. Without the interference of human beings, natural laws will ensure that spontaneous order will emerge. (Marshall 14)

In Cancer Henry himself is a symbol of natural order. He always asserts his optimism and power of endurance.

Henry evinces a peaceful existence with oneself, a state without internal conflicts. His misery and poverty in Paris is something he has courted willfully. He takes to this kind of living in order to 'be' an artist, though his anarchism destroys even the concept of the artist. Henry becomes the symbol of wisdom that is mystical in it that his being is conflictless and is in a state of absolute peace and unconditional optimism, which is not founded on hope. This optimism is the result of the faith in the self, its permanence, and its innate freedom. It is in sharp contrast with the lives of the people around –

Everywhere I go people are making a mess of their lives. Everyone has his private tragedy. It is in the blood now – misfortune, ennui, grief, suicide. The atmosphere is saturated with disaster, frustration, futility. [. . .] However the effect upon me is exhilarating. Instead of being discouraged, or depressed, I enjoy it. I am crying for more and more disasters, for bigger calamities, for grander failures. (19-20)

Though there is an element of masochistic violence in these wishes, they are, actually a protest in irony against human weakness/tendency to surrender to
disasters and fall to despair. The optimism, the ‘being at peace with oneself’, ‘the weird contentment’, and the state of being untouched by external disasters are essential characteristics of Henry’s anarchist self –

I experience once again the splendor of those miserable days when I first arrived in Paris, a bewildered, poverty stricken individual who haunted the streets like a ghost at the banquet. [. . .] Dancing the street on an empty belly and now and then calling on strange people [. . .]. A weird sort of contentment in those days. No appointments, no invitations for dinner, no program, no dough. The golden period when I had not a single friend. (22- 23)

His contentment is grounded entirely on the faith in nature’s order and beauty, and is not disturbed by even hunger or dereliction –

[. . .] wandering along the Seine at night, wandering and wandering, and going mad with the beauty of it, the trees leaning to, the broken images in the water, the rush of the current under the bloody lights of the bridges [. . .]. (23)

Henry’s optimism seems to be disgusting to others because of its lack of grounding in external realities. He himself divines on this extraordinary nature of his optimism. “Walking along the Champs-Elysees I keep thinking of my really superb health. When I say “health” I mean optimism, to be truthful. Incurably optimistic!”(56). He acknowledges that his optimism appears to be anachronistic and unreal to the onlooker.
Still have one foot in the nineteenth century. I am a bit retarded like most Americans. Carl finds it disgusting, this optimism. “I have only to talk about a meal,” he says, “and you are radiant!” It is a fact. (56)

To be happy he needs only the most minimum of needs, which is a meal. We can see here a criticism of the reckless consumerism and materialism of the world in general and America in particular, surreptitiously entering the confessional discourse of the protagonist. “The mere thought of a meal—a
t

another meal—rejuvenates me. [. . .] The only thing that stands between me and the future is a meal, another meal” (56).

For Henry in Cancer ‘order’ is the one that is ingrained in nature. It is not an order that is imposed by authority and power. Everything that is based on the conscious pruning of the individual is unnatural and hence disorderly. Henry considers self and nature as symbols of order. Only that person who realizes self and accepts it wholly experiences order and the peaceful existence that ensues. Miller employs several symbols to put this truth into relief. One such is Henry himself. Another one is a prostitute called Germaine whom Henry gets acquainted with in Paris. In Germaine order is in the fact that she ‘is’ a prostitute to the core of her being. It is natural for her to be a prostitute. She would become nothing else and prostitution becomes her. Though this position with regard to women could be called sexist and attacked as has been done by Kate Millet in her Sexual Politics, the instance verily highlights the anarchist perspective contained in it.
Miller presents Germaine against the backdrop of the rampant prostitution in Paris and all the business mentality that goes with it. In a sexually explicit passage, where Miller puts to use his characteristic style of obscenity, Henry sees Germaine as totally different from other prostitutes. She enjoys her profession. In being enjoyed it ceases to be a profession and drops the stigma associated with prostitution. It becomes a cult, a way of life. For Henry, passionate involvement with one's action is a criterion of naturality and ergo order –

Germaine [...] was a whore from the cradle; she was thoroughly satisfied with her role, enjoyed it in fact, except when her stomach pinched her or her shoes gave out, little surface things of no account, nothing that ate into her soul, nothing that created torment. Ennui! (52)

A little down the page Henry tries to penetrate Germaine's being to a deeper level, which is anarchical by virtue of its being free "without reference to any fixed point" that can be construed as being the authority governing human perceptions –

Germaine was a whore all the way through, even down to her good heart, her whore's heart which is not really a good heart but a lazy one, an indifferent, flaccid heart that can be touched for a moment, a heart without reference to any fixed point within, a big flaccid whore's heart that can detach itself for a moment from its true center. (52)
Henry goes on to say that Germaine’s virtue is that she puts her heart and soul into her work, and thus links her to the phenomenon of creativity and its higher order.

As a contrast to Germaine there is another prostitute, Claude, who is an epitome of disorder because she has a conscience and the sense of values it entails –

Claude had a soul and a conscience; she had refinement, too, which is bad – in a whore. Claude always imparted a feeling of sadness; she left the impression [...] that you were just one more added to the stream which fate had ordained to destroy her [...]. For her were meant those terrible words of Louis-Philippe, "and a night comes when all is over, when so many jaws have closed upon us that we no longer have the strength to stand, and our meat hangs upon our body, as though it had been masticated by every mouth." (51)

Again, Van Norden’s character, which is a stunning representation of alienation, despair, automatism, and disorder, provides a contrast to Henry who is a man grounded on the harmony of natural order. Van Norden is also an American living in Paris. His existence is concentrated on sex that is compulsive, mechanical, and devoid of passion. Widmer finds in the compulsive sexuality of Van Norden the symbolic expression of the mechanicality and alienation of self in modern society (33). Van Norden finds it impossible to relate himself to others.
He cannot think about anything other than himself. He calls himself an egotist and hates himself for being so –

I am an egotist, but I am not selfish. There is a difference. I am neurotic, I guess. I can't stop thinking of myself. It isn't that I think myself so important... I simply can't think about anything else.

That’s all. (112)

The character of Van Norden provides contrast to that of Henry whose willful espousal of disorder (which is a mark of anarchism because underneath it is the harmony with the natural order) is creative, and is different from the disorder that is the result of egotism and the following alienation. Instead of egotism, anarchists like Max Stirner propose egoism. The egoism advocated by Stirner is 'conscious egoism' and is founded on the idea of the absolute reality of self. He asks to be egoistic consciously and to base one's actions on momentary caprice because there is no human essence, which is not the product of human thought. Therefore consistency is false. (qtd. in David Miller 23). Hence a truly and consciously egoistic person would be free, and not fixated on any particular drive of his being. Thus in Henry, even when sex plays a prominent role his other essential drives are also in full swing. He can think and understand his motives. He is conscious of his ego and nature, and is in harmony with it. He is spontaneous. Gordon makes clear the difference between the characters of Henry and Van Norden along similar lines. He rightly says:

At first glance it might appear that there is little difference between Miller and Van Norden. They are both irresponsible, both in search
of a good time. Miller is as avid for woman as Van Norden, as eager for an
orgy. But, Miller takes it as it comes. He has a great sex drive, but
he is not obsessed. His sexual drives can be mobilized in an
instant, even his passion, his desire for love. But when he is not
actively engaged sexually, he is free to do other things [. . .]. Van
Norden is never free. Sex haunts him like another self. Yet
fundamentally he is passionless. (99)

Van Norden, however, in spite of his bohemian rebellion and indiscretion,
cannot be construed as being anarchist because he does not function as a
conscious whole. He is fragmented, and is subject to despair and disharmony of
being. We can see how different he is from the optimistic Henry when he says,
"What do you do with yourself all day? Don't you get bored? [. . .] I am lonely.
[. . .] if this keeps up another year I will go nuts. [. . .] don't you ever get
homesick? You're a funny guy . . . you seem to like it over here" (111). And in the
recollection of a surrealist dream Henry sums up Van Norden's automatic and
fragmented obsession with sex where his genital appears to be a detachable part
that is not organically connected to his body and shows how neurotically
disorganized he is:

He is about to walk away when suddenly he notices that his penis
is lying on the sidewalk. [. . .] he picks it up nonchalantly and slings
it under his arm. As he walks of I notice two huge bulbs like tulip
bulbs, dangling from the end [. . .] and I can hear him muttering to
himself "flowerpots . . . flowerpots". (131)
Max Stirner, one of the extremists among anarchist philosophers, has been adamant in the assertion of the freedom of the anarchist from everything fixed and permanent in society. This is because he believed that there is nothing permanent in reality and in the nature of things. As has been already mentioned, he stood for complete freedom, even from one's own yesterdays and the decisions taken in the past. He asks, "why should I be bound today by my decision of yesterday? The egoist cannot submit to anything beyond his present experience, not even to his past commitments" (qtd. in David Miller 24).

In Cancer Henry lives in an absolute present. This has grave implication because in such a situation a person does not seem to be bound by anything, because bondage to authority is rooted in the content of the self's consciousness that is rooted in its past. Being entirely in the present suggests a rejection of the past and the self's commitment to it. Henry does not conform to anything except his own innate impulses, because he has freed himself of the vestiges of the self's identity having its roots in the past. He lives a marginal existence in which time stands still. He has no hopes and plans. He does not have a definite course of action to undertake. He lives according to his instinct for survival. For Miller, Henry's being in the present also has its artistic implications of literary anarchism. Isadore Traschen believes that it is this quality of the protagonist that enables Miller to be revolutionary about the structure of his novel, which rejects the novelistic conventions of plot, character etc. He says:

[...] if neither character, plot, nor meaning were valid, if all rational constructions were suspect, so was the idea of past and future.
which assumed continuity and meaning. Miller [Henry] lived for the most part in an eternal present. Characterless, plotless, meaningless, without past or future, without a society of any shape or significance — that is the new novel. (352)

The natural order of things that is upheld by anarchism can be seen engraved in the consciousness of the present and its living out. To be entirely in the present is to be natural, pure, and a creative human being. Henry's creativity is based on a sense of neutrality, a state of freedom in which a person transcends his past, his national identity and socio political sympathies —

Everything that belongs to the past seems to have fallen into the sea; I have memories, but the images have lost their vividness, they seem dead and desultory, like time-bitten mummies stuck in a quagmire. If I try to recall my life in New York I get a few splintered fragments, nightmarish and covered with verdigris. It seems my own proper existence had come to an end somewhere, just where exactly I can't make out. I am not an American anymore, nor a New Yorker, and even less a European, or a Parisian. I haven't any allegiance, any responsibilities, any hatreds, any worries, any prejudices, any passion. I am neither for nor against. I'm a neutral. (157)

It was Heraclitus who said "Over those who step into the same river the waters that flow are constantly different" (qtd. in Woodcock, "Anarchism: A Historical Introduction" 16). One cannot step into the same river twice because
by the time the second step is made the water would have flowed, and the river in which one puts the second step would be another river because of the new water. The river is the natural symbol of Time, which also is in a flux and can be experienced and appropriated only in the conscious present. Impermanence and change are the rules of reality. This is the enlightening truth realized by Henry, and this is the realization that urges him to stick to nothing of the past, thereby making him anarchically destructive in his rejection of artistic norms. In his freedom from past Henry becomes a platform from where values are subjected to revaluation or destruction. To live absolutely in the present means to live free of regrets or nostalgia for things happened, or of hopes and anxieties connected to a future –

I've lived out my melancholy youth. I don't give a fuck anymore what's behind me, or what's ahead of me. I'm healthy. Incurably healthy. No sorrows, no regrets. No past, no future. The present is enough for me. Day by day. Today. (57)

Thus, free of tradition, Henry is in a position to question and destroy the age-old basement of values on which society has found its effigies, because for him "life is only an immediate and expedient process" and "so he is apocalyptically [...] detached from all abstract loyalties [...] (Widmer 38).

Henry asserts that the perception of future is always accompanied by the mixed feeling of hope and despair. To be in the timeless present is to be without future and its hope/despair. The symbol of self without hope/despair is a powerful anarchist tool with which Miller assaults America's materialism, because such a
self is the antithesis of America's culturally approved image of the successful man. In Paris, Henry's anarchist self is realized in its ambience which does not insist on the materialistic values of hope and success, and despair which is the other side of hope is seen transcended in his words that it is "just because there is so little hope, that life is sweet over here" (155). In Paris Henry finds a congenial atmosphere for the expression of his anarchic impulses, which have been kept stifled in the puritanical America. It is this freedom to be what he is that gives him a break as a writer. What makes Paris so palatable to Henry is its spirit of freedom from the restricting values of morality and materialism.

It is also a moot point whether the Paris of reality resembles what Miller makes of it through the perception of Henry, or if it is another instance of Miller's mythification. For instance, Alan Trachtenberg believes that

Miller's Paris, [. . .] is portrayed as the perfect medium of his hero's release. It is the Paris of declassed expatriates, emigres, failed artists. Tropic of Cancer conveys virtually no sense of Paris as a complex fact in the shared consciousness of people who live and work there. The book does not portray the way of life of Paris, but an idea of Paris where the raffish bohemian life seems the rule. In Miller's version rootlessness is the way of life. The setting thus offers no social historical sense. (248-249)

It is therefore to be understood that "Paris", like "Henry", is a mythification of Miller, done with the purpose of artistically creating a space whose anarchist ambience would serve as an "objective correlative" to the realization of the
protagonist's anarchist self. The historical Paris should certainly have aided Miller by virtue of its being an epitome of European culture which is substantially different from the American in terms of its older and richer intellectual/artistic traditions, and freer sexual morality. This existing cultural difference helped Miller in creating the Paris of his imagination where his fictional requirement of the “initiation of the American into the European and the transformation of the outcast into the artist” (Widmer, Henry Miller 41) could be realized.

Perhaps the most significant expression of anarchism in Cancer, and in the whole of Miller's oeuvre, is in the artistic rebellion that is spread throughout the course of the novel. It is a true poetry of destruction. Cancer destroys and revels in this destruction of the authoritarian norms of literary canon. John Parkin says that technically Cancer is a “challenge to the approved narrative canon in the tradition of literary unorthodoxy”(15). Miller, through the reflection of his protagonist, makes Cancer the scaffold from where he makes resounding statements of his cult of literary anarchy. Here the notions of art and literature themselves become expressions of anarchism.

The primary attack from an anarchist perspective made by Henry in Cancer is on the concept of Art/Literature itself. It is made at the very beginning of the book, and has been quoted by almost all who have written on Miller. This statement is also the clearest of the expressions of Miller's literary anarchism. Henry says:

This is not a book. This is libel, slander, defamation of character.

This is not a book, in the ordinary sense of the word. No, this is a
prolonged insult, a gob of spit in the face of Art, a kick in the pants to God, Man, Destiny, Time, Love, Beauty [. . .] what you will. I am going to sing for you, a little off key perhaps, but I will sing. I will sing while you croak, I will dance over your dirty corpse. (10)

It is plain that this is an almost complete statement of anarchist destructiveness since it contains most of the reference points of an anarchist concern viz. God, Time, Man, Art etc. Since anarchist points in Cancer on 'God' (religion), and ‘time’ (the glorification of the present) have been discussed, it is proposed now to take up Henry's anarchism in terms of Art/Literature.

It is typical of Henry's anarchism to rebel against the 'reader' himself by bringing him under the attack of his "prolonged insult". Here the writer-protagonist wages war against the very source of his sustenance – the reader – and declares that he would sing and dance over his "dirty corpse". Henry here becomes a symbol of the anarchist who is a 'conscious egoist' in the sense put forward by Max Stirner for whom, says David Miller, "nothing was sacred" (23). It is an extreme kind of individualism, for Stirner holds that an egoist rejects state and government as he has no interest in the welfare of the existing human society. Hence he would use society for his own selfish and egoist purpose. "The egoist is somebody who uses others to augment his own powers and possessions" (in David Miller 25). It is evident here that according to Stirner's anarchism the 'other' is an entity for whom the anarchist has no regard. But the 'other' may be used to achieve the egoist's ends. It is an anarchy, which rejects the society along with the state, with uncompromising individualism. To the
question why he speaks aloud his views if he spurns his listeners who constitute the society, Stirner's answer was akin to that of Henry's position in Cancer. Stirner said:

But not only not for your sake, not even for truth's sake either do I speak out what I think. No -
I sing as the bird sings;
That on the bough alights;
The song that from me springs
Is pay that well reputes.
I sing because I am a singer. But I 'use' you for it because I need ears.” (qtd. in David Miller 25)

This is the same kind of rejection of reverence to the recipients of one's expressions that we find in Henry's abuse of the reader/listener. But it should be recognized that the wrath at society is in reality directed only at those members who conform to authority, and submit their independence of thought and freedom to the sway of conventions, orthodoxy, norms, state, church etc.

Henry's literary anarchism strips his art of any need of artistic decorations or accompaniments (extending the 'artist as singer' metaphor.) Echoing Stirner's views quoted above, Henry says that his singing would be fully founded on his absolute will to sing, and that what he needs are only the basic things:

To sing you must first open your mouth. You must have a pair of lungs, and a little knowledge of music. It is not necessary to have
an accordion, or a guitar. The essential thing is to 'want' to sing. This then is
a song. I am singing. (10)

Henry's concept of writing is an expression of anarchism because it
asserts its freedom from the rules and norms of literary conventions. One of the
fundamental norms of creative writing is that it evolves through a process of trial
and error. Even if the Wordsworthian concept of spontaneity is accepted it goes
without saying that the final literary product is the result of long and painstaking
process of emendation. The conventional image of a writer is that of one who is
fastidious about words and syntax. It is this fastidiousness that, perhaps, lends
the romantic aura of seriousness to the art of writing. Emendation has become a
moral code of literary convention and critical authority. Henry, the writer
protagonist, defies this norm. It is a call in literature for the primitive beauty and
spontaneity of nature's order which underlies its apparent disorder.

In Cancer Henry glorifies the writers (and they are his idols) who disdain
stylistic decorum, and thus denounces the celebrated craft of literary finesse,
which appeals to him as a kind of dandyism/elitism. In the following
unambiguously anarchic words he highlights the creativity/order that underlies
disorderly writing:

Things, certain things about my old idols bring tears to my eyes: the
interruptions, the disorder, the violence, above all, the hatred they
aroused. When I think of their deformities, of the monstrous styles
they chose, of the flatulence and tediousness of their works, of all
the chaos and confusion they wallowed in, of the obstacles they
heaped about them, I feel an exaltation. They were all mired in their own dung. All men who over-elaborated. So true is that I am almost tempted to say: "Show me a man who over-elaborates and I will show you a great man!" What is called their "over-elaboration" is my meat: it is sign of struggle [...] the very aura and ambience of the discordant spirit. And when you show me a man who expresses himself perfectly I will not say that he is not great, but I will say that I am unattracted . . . I miss the cloying qualities. When I reflect that the task which the artist implicitly sets himself is to overthrow existing values, to make of the chaos about him an order which is his own, to sow strife and ferment so that by the emotional release those who are dead may be restored to life, then it is that I run with joy to the great and imperfect ones, their confusion nourishes me, their stuttering is like divine music to my ears. [...] and he who would create order, he who would sow strife and discord, because he is imbued with will, such a man must go again and again to the stake [...] (254-255)

It is a rebellion against critical standards, for freeing art from the strictures of aesthetic codes. The disorder envisioned by Henry’s art is an expression of anarchism as he makes clear in Cancer:

I am not interested in perfecting my thoughts, nor my actions.

Beside the perfection of Turganev I put the perfection of Dostoevski. (Is there anything more perfect than The Eternal
Husband?) Here, then, in one and the same medium, we have two kinds of perfection. But in Van Gogh’s letters there is a perfection beyond either of these. It is the triumph of the individual over art. (19)

Henry’s anti-American and anarchist attitudes are reflected in the choice of his literary models also. This is what is seen in his extolling of Continentals like Dostoevsky and Van Gogh. The anarchist artistic positions of Henry also corresponds with Miller’s critical positions on contemporary literary scene that was pronounced by the intellectualism of writers of the likes of T.S. Eliot and James Joyce. During his early years in Paris, Miller with his friend Alfred Perles used to voice his protest against the artistic artificiality of such writers, says Robert Ferguson in his biography of Miller:

[. . .] Miller and Perles put together a manifesto [not published] in which they promoted ‘New Instinctivism’. They introduced it as: ‘A proclamation of rebellion against the puerilities in the arts and literature, a manifesto of disgust, a gob of spit in the cuspidor of post-war conceits, a healthy crap in the cradle of still-born deities’. The new religion [. . .] was one of total subjectivity. It mixed nonsense, farce [. . .] and the promotion of complete personal anarchy. (187)

In the same vein Henry elaborates on his creed of literary anarchism which is founded on a proclivity for violence, revolution, and an inclusiveness that admits everything into his writing without the conventional aesthetic prejudices of the literary and non-literary. It is again a willful discarding of the subtlety and
finesse of art which are, probably for the anarchic position of Henry, features of squeamishness and conformism. To Henry, who has already proclaimed his rebellion against Art, the finer aspects of aesthetics are anathema. This is the feature that makes John Williams say, “he [Miller] is not engaged in the act of writing literature. His work is indeed at bottom anti-literary [. . .] in a profound way that the Dadaists [. . .] could never have understood” (262). It is a proclamation of the preference of life and nature over art. In his fervour for change and revolution Henry’s thoughts go wild:

There is only one thing which interests me vitally now, and that is the recording of all that which is omitted in books. Nobody, so far as I can see, is making use of those elements in the air which gives direction and motivation to our lives. Only the killers seem to be extracting from life some satisfactory measure of what they are putting into it. The age demands violence, but we are getting only abortive explosions. Revolutions are nipped in the bud, or else succeed too quickly. Passion is quickly exhausted. Men fall back on idea, comme d’habitude. Nothing is proposed that can last more than twenty four hours. We are living a million lives in the space of a generation. In the study of entomology, or of deep sea life, or cellular activity, we derive more [. . .]. (19)

Anarchists consider acts of violence as a way to destroy the myth of the system’s omnipresence and invulnerability (David Miller 18). The violence Henry invokes is for the overthrowing of literary myths. His obscenity and scatology are
expressions of anarchic violence that are aimed at destroying the myth of literary decency cherished by puritanical sensibility. (In the corresponding reality, the lifting of the ban on *Cancer* and other 'obscene' books by Miller by America testifies to the success of his literary violence in destroying the myth of the invulnerability of the value system that upholds prudish and puritanical norms in literature.) The violence in wrenching the 'word' out of the burden of cultural values associated to it becomes instrumental in rendering it a potent sign of the naked truth. Henry assumes the new role of the one who speaks his thoughts unrestrained by the forces of moral values and cries:

If there were a man who dared to say all that he thought of this world there would not be left him a square foot of ground to stand on. When a man appears the world bears down on him and breaks his back. There are always too many rotten pillars left standing, too much festering humanity for man to bloom. The superstructure is a lie and the foundation is a huge quaking fear. If at intervals of centuries there does appear a man with a desperate, hungry look in his eye, a man who would turn the world upside down in order to create a new race, the love that he brings to the world is turned to bile and he becomes a scourge. If now and then we encounter pages that explode, pages that wound and sear, that wring groans and tears and curses, know that they come from a man with his back up, a man whose only defenses left are his words and his words are always stronger than the lying, crushing weight of the
world, stronger than all the wracks and wheels which the cowardly invent to
 crush out the miracle of personality. If any man ever dared to
 translate all that is in his heart, to put down what is really his
 experience, what is truly his truth, I think then the world would go to
 smash, that it would be blown to smithereens and no god, no
 accident; no will could ever again assemble the pieces, the atoms,
 the indestructible elements that have gone to make up the world.
 (249-250)

 At certain points political anarchism with its primary emphasis on a vision
 of society with individuals free of state/government results as a natural corollary
 of Henry's statements of anarchism which are predominantly related to art and
 literature. It is a strong point of Henry's anarchism that he is able to effect a
 theoretical objectivity to his rebellion while stressing his prior concern for the
 revolution that he seeks to bring in his writing. Obscenity is the tool which
 connects his solitary/subjective rebellion to anarchism proper, which is based on
 freedom from all kinds of power/authority.

 Taboos consist of a repressive mechanism of society. They are words and
 ideas that are essentially expressions of basic human facts/experiences.
 Bourgeois moral authority suppresses them by degrading and binding them with
 shame and threat of expulsion from society. Murray Davis says that there are
 "Vulgar terms implying that sex is a lower-class activity (prick, fuck,
 suck) and Latin terms implying that sexual activity is confined to the
 educated upper class (penis, intercourse, fellatio). The lack of
middle-class nomenclature for sexual organs and behaviours suggest a middle-class belief that they do not exist in the respectable world. Yet it is interesting that only the lower-class words have been censored as obscene[ . . ]. Sexual censorship seems designed to suppress lower-class mores whenever they intrude on middle-class morals.” (xxiii-xxiv)

Obscenity is an act of rebellion by which taboos are broken. Miller in an interview with George Wickes says that obscenity is a forthright use of language. For him obscenity is a cleansing process because when “a taboo is broken something good happens, something vitalizing”( Wickes, "Henry Miller: The Art of Fiction" 58). In Cancer Henry builds up a vision of obscenity as destroyer of the hypocrisies and repression of civilization and its authoritarian structures. In an elaboration of the word “crack” (a synonym of ‘vagina’) Henry brings into the compass of his talk the vision of obscenity as an instrument of revolution and creativity:

Who that has a desperate, hungry eye can have the slightest regard for these existing governments, laws, codes, principles, ideals, ideas, totems, and taboos? If anyone knew what it meant to read the riddle of that thing which today is called a “crack” or a “hole”, if anyone had the least feeling of mystery about the phenomena which are labeled “obscene”, this world would crack asunder. It is the obscene horror [. . .] which makes this crazy civilization look like a crater. It is this great yawning gulf of
nothingness which the creative spirits and mothers of the race carry between their legs. When a hungry, desperate spirit appears and makes the guinea pigs squeal it is because he knows where to put the live wire of sex, because he knows that beneath the hard carapace of indifference there is concealed the ugly gash, the wound that never heals. And he puts the live wire right between the legs; he hits below the belt, scorches the very gizzards. It is no use putting on rubber gloves; all that can be coolly and intellectually handled belongs to the carapace and a man who is intent on creation always dives beneath to open the wound, to the festering obscene horror. He hitches his dynamo to the tenderest parts [. . .]. The dry [. . .] crater is obscene. More obscene than anything is inertia. More blasphemous than the bloodiest oath is paralysis. (250-251)

Cancer, thus, exemplifies the creative aspect or the poetry of destruction.

It has been the product of Miller’s anarchist spirit that sought expression in the medium of literature through the outbursts of Henry. What Miller’s anarchism tried to reconstruct through destruction was confined to the field of art/literature.

Miller said:

I was sick to death of the lack of substance in English literature, with its portrayal of the truncated partial man. I wanted a more substantial diet, the whole being, the round view you get in the paintings of Picasso, the works of Montaigne and Rabelais and
others. So I rebelled, and perhaps overgenerously made up for this lack and weakness in literature of my time. (in Bernard Wolfe 83)

It had no scope intended for the revolution of society. It tried to subvert the intellectual snobbery of the literature of his times, and to criticize the materialistic and puritanical mind-set of the American public by breathing into it a bohemian spirit of indiscipline and amorality, and the disruptive element of anarchism.