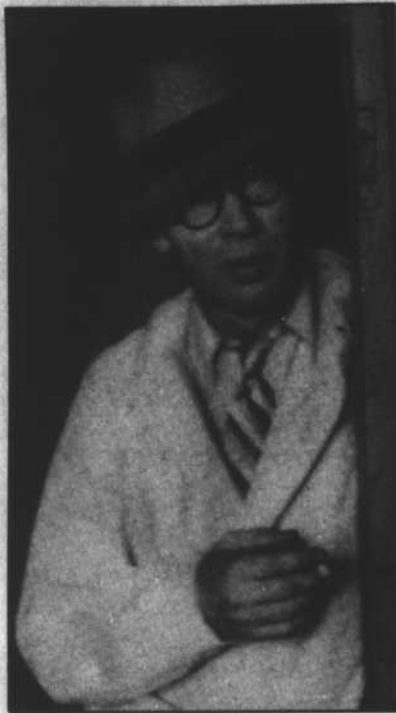


Inspirational book details author's life, why universities don't teach his works



Courtesy of Turtle Bay Books

"The Devil at Large" Erica Jong Turtle Bay Books

In "The Devil at Large," Erica Jong turns both critical and celebratory eyes to Henry Miller and the individual, sexual, and spiritual freedom he and his writings embodied. This book is a heady brew, almost as intoxicatingly inspirational as Miller himself.

And for those unfamiliar with Miller's work beyond a fleeting acquaintance with "Tropic of Cancer,"

a chapter or two here gives the essential bio and essence of Miller without boring the initiated.

Jong charts Miller's life from his boyhood in Brooklyn to his first marriage and employment at Western Union (a place Miller would call the "Cosmodemonic Telegraphic Company"), and from his exile in Paris to his death a decade ago.

The Jazz Age, however, is where this book primarily dwells. From Henry's time in Paris came his first great work, "The Tropic of Cancer," his explosive marriage to June, and his passionate love affair with Anais Nin.

This was "the age of bobbed hair and bobbed skirts, discarded corsets and the introduction of Trojans," when "modern women were learning to drink, smoke, and make love."

Writing about Henry Miller entails more for Jong than plodding out a literary biography. This memoir traces Henry and Erica's exchange of letters beginning with his praise of her novel, "The Fear of Flying."

Miller recommended and gave copies of her book to everyone he knew. He wrote an open letter to the New York Times defending "The Fear of Flying" from prudish critics, touting the book as the "feminine counterpart" to his own "Tropic of Cancer."

In writing about Miller, Jong writes about the writer's life: what it means to "remake oneself spiritually," and how, for Miller, the line between truth and fiction was inherently blurred.

Jong dives into questions surrounding Miller's indulgent depictions of sex and comes up with brilliant an-

swers. Miller viewed "sex as the gyre of birth, sex as the DNA of existence, the matrix of all creativity," writes Jong. "Miller used the word 'sex' in a cosmic, not a genital sense. And he was surprised to discover that the world did not agree with him."

"The Devil at Large" also delves into Henry's side of his frenetic sexual and romantic intertwining with Anais Nin. Miller had always remained faithful to his promise never to write anything that would jeopardize the career of Nin's banker husband.

Nin wrote of Miller, "I want to kiss the man whose passion rushes like lava through a chill intellectual world."

From here Jong explores the reasons why Miller is not taught in universities.

Academics seem to have a fear of his brand of freedom, a fear of flying with the most base and honest expressions of human existence and the male psyche. (Come to think of it, I've never seen Jong's counterpart novel on lit. class reading lists either.) Or possibly there is a simple fear of "bad" words.

When asked to justify his use of obscenity, Miller declared that it needed no justification. "Life is obscene and miraculous," he said, "and neither is there any justification of life."

"The Devil at Large" concludes with letters, annotated bibliography, and a worthwhile list of background reading. The title comes from the subtitle of Miller's "Insomnia," a book of midnight scrawls, watercolors, and photographs.

— Calvin Clinchard



Courtesy of Cineville

Fairuza Balk and Ione Skye in "Gas Food Lodging."

'Gas Food Lodging' is fun film

"Gas Food Lodging," Allison Anders' thrillingly fun debut film, tells the story of a single mother and her two adolescent daughters in the quirky tumbleweed town of Laramie, New Mexico.

Nora (Brooke Adams), a waitress at the Pull-Off Plaza Truck Stop, struggles to keep control of her rebellious daughter Trudi (Ione Skye) while her younger daughter Shade (Fairuza Balk) longs to establish a "regular" family who does "normal" things by finding a man for her mom to marry. Shade, a matinee addict, constantly goes to see Elvia Rivera movies, wherein families are always nuclear, solid and secure. This sparks her desire to set up her mom, which she attempts with humorous results.

At the same time, Shade feels herself beginning to come of age. She awkwardly falls for a boy whose dream girl is Olivia Newton-John and whose shyness strikes Shade like rejection.

Shade recovers by falling into a friendship with a Mexican-American boy named Javier (Jacob Vargas) in

spite of her friends' racist attitudes.

Trudi plays the dating game on entirely sexual terms until she meets Dank (Robert Knepper), a British geologist, who shows her that her seemingly dead surroundings are alive with beauty and meaning. Choosing to be with Dank awakens Trudi's spirit.

Fairuza Balk (Shade), who has previously starred in "Valmont" and "Return to Oz," and plays Caril Fugate in the upcoming mini-series "Starkweather: Murder in the Heartland," will appear at the 7 p.m. screening of "Gas Food Lodging" this Saturday for a discussion with the audience.

"Gas Food Lodging" is showing at the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater on Thursday, April 1 through Saturday, April 3, and Thursday, April 8 through Sunday, April 11. Show times are 7 & 9:15 p.m. daily, with matinees Saturdays at 12:45 & 3 p.m. and Sunday at 2:30 & 4:45 p.m.

— Calvin Clinchard

Written

Continued from Page 9

Avon paperback cover model Fabio has been instrumental in bringing more attention to the genre, she said.

"We should be very grateful the public loves Fabio," she said. "Between Fabio and Forbes magazine, everybody suddenly woke up. . . . It's been a good year for romance."

She discovered Fabio, she said, after spotting the Italian Tarzan standing in a theater — only who she saw wasn't Tarzan. Instead, she envisioned him as a pirate waiting to sail on the cover of a romance book with a silicon babe in his arms.

"He really is a beefcake," she said.

And thanks to her maneuvering, Fabio's career took off.

"The media adore him, but nobody knows why," she said.

Because of readers' response, Fabio will have a book with a poster insert out in October. The book, she said, will be ghostwritten.

But ghostwriting is nothing new in the publishing industry, she said.

"A lot of this stuff about romance writers getting credit is bullshit — a lot of them don't even write their own books," Falk said.

Regardless, she said, readers wanted a book by Fabio, and according to a survey she conducted, readers didn't seem to mind whether he wrote it or not.

Falk's latest idea is to develop a line of ethnic romances. In the May issue of "Romantic Times," Falk is soliciting ideas and manuscripts for ethnic plots.

"It takes five books to make an author," she said at the conference.

"If a writer sells less than 50

66
A lot of this stuff about romance writers getting credit is bullshit — a lot of them don't even write their own books

—Falk
Publisher

percent of the number of books ordered by their publisher, new authors will have a harder time getting a second book printed."

Her auburn eyes lit up as she talked about how to become a star writer.

"You have to be able to touch the pulse of women and make them cry," she said.

"You also have to be a trend watcher," she said, adding that time

travel is a big trend now. "Westerns are going to be huge after the year 2000."

She suggested emulating the big-time authors like Barbara Cartland, Mary Higgins Clark, Judith McNaught and Danielle Steel.

"If you like contemporary books, shoot for the Danielle Steele market. . . . Who cares if you don't like reading her stuff — she sells 2.8 million books. Figure out how she does it!"

Something funny is brewing at Elstunre Castle...

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