



I don't know
where to
start

You're not large enough
for a whale
and much too fat
to be a shark
said I to my love.

Porpoise
was her reply

Sleek pig
thought the mind
of my eye

Sleek pigs
are porpoises
said she
and began to cry.

DIAMONDS

They are
not
poetry
they
never
are
depressing

I think
they are
bad
for
the weak,
the spoiled,
the rich

They are
good
for rocks
who
are
waiting
for a
gleam
to open
their crack

LICENSES

We live in a world filled with all the wonderful things

which did not happen
all the passion ~~which~~ ^{that} was never born
because the sperm sailed into the sheet
and left a quiver of empty arrows

(did your little womb go pity pat pat
when midnight passed and I wasn't there?)

We walk about in cities filled with second choice
you and me planned by calculation of the budget

those neon signs cold compromise
to cheat the savage dream of fire
you do not control the flame say the mediocre
until you put it under glass

(all those lovely modern shacks
fifty stories steel and mass
second choice in a new idea)

It is better far, you hear, when prisons look like public schools
and airports shake their hips in plastic luxury
like hotels and housing projects rich and poor all alike

all of them clean in mind like hospitals
what a world of second choice besets the eye
no wonder I am going blind says the Lord
and oh that static in my ear

(must everyone speak in an accent
borrowed from another and all
food die a second death?—freeze my juices
seal my flesh—and all materials?)

Devil torture me no longer I confess
cries the molecule joining the giant
carbon chain where one does not choose
one's qualities but bows one's head to trend

that oscillation in the vacuum tube
second choice of the wind when
the spirits of the dead failed, you
hear, to make us feel their hurt

STATIC

Dah dit dit dah dit dit dah
dah dah dit dit dah dah
dah dit dit dah dit dit dah
dah dah dit dit dah dah

Mentally cool and bright
Arms fly is the war song
Father of strong in your nave
Bold slave of a fierce light

Dum ditty, dum ditty, dum
dah dah dit dah dit dit

Bold old gold is the grave
of those

who want to bleed
for United
Sexual
Appeal

against the oncoming night
which does not slay
but reduces
the best and worst
to mediocre

dit dit dah
dah dah dit

The Mediocre.

5 • THE ARGUMENT NOW MILDLY

ILLUMINED

As is evident by now, the only explanation I can find for the war in Vietnam is that we are sinking into the swamps of a plague and the massacre of strange people seems to relieve this plague. If one were to take the patients in a hospital, give them guns and let them shoot pedestrians down from hospital windows you may be sure you would get a few miraculous cures. So the national mood is bound to prosper the war in Vietnam. For a time. Let us go back to our hospital patients. Some of them we see stripped to the waist, crying with joy as they fire off their machine-gun blast. All the light of the Lord is in their eye again. But not all can fire at once, and some on the sidelines throw up in sheer excitement, others are forced to eat from nervousness, others lie in the slop, and zap! there went the first—the nice old man about whom we have just bit the jugular of the nice old lady, and some are beginning to slide in the blood. And some are beginning to slide like snakes. Sellah, is it better to be a foul old Cannibal or a Christian dying of nausea?

I wonder which is worse
the solitary East
or the West
chewing on
Momma's
lover's
lesbian
breast.

Do not
ask
for
whom
the
television
tolls

THE EXECUTIONER'S SONG

I think if I had three good years to give
in study at some occupation
which was fierce and new
and full of stimulation

I think I would become
an executioner
with time spent out in the field
digging graves for bodies I had made
the night before.

You see: I am bad at endings
My bowels move without honor
and flatulence is an affliction
my pride must welcome with gloom

It comes I know from preoccupation
much too much with sex

Those who end well do not spend their time
so badly on the throne

For this reason I expect the task
of gravedigger welcomes me
I would like to kill well and bury well
Perhaps then my seed would not shoot
so frantic a flare

If I could execute neatly
(with respect for whatever romantic
imagination

gave passion to my subject's crime)
and if I buried well
(with tenderness, dispatch, gravity
and joy that the job was not jangled—
giving a last just touch of the spade
to the coffin

in order to leave it
quivering
like a leaf—for forget not
coffins quiver as the breath goes out
and the earth comes down)

Yes if I could kill cleanly
and learn not to turn my back
on the face of each victim
as he chooses
what is last to be seen
in his eye,
well, then perhaps,
then might I rise so high upon occasion
as to smite a fist of the Lord's creation
into the womb of that muse
which gives us poems
Yes, then I might
For one ends best when death is clean
to the mind
and calm in its proportions
fire in the orchard and flame at the root

WITCHES AND WARLOCKS: *Poems and Short Hairs*

Hallelujah!

Children

who issue

from

a matrimony

of the usual misery

go forth

into lives

which are best spent

in sin

said the Lord

ODE TO A LADY

Cold and swinish are your crafts
Mean and nasty, foul your arts
The spirit of a lover you would never kill
'Tis tastier far to deaden him.

Yes, maggots are your pets
and garlic your bouquet

Cold and swinish are your crafts
a pestilence on me
For I have primed my iron
in your lore and now
your faults revealed
my eyes are blinded still
by the image of a woman
Child bitch of a dear Irish maid
who is virgin to my touch
and never smiles the lover's dirty grin
of sweets we shared
and share we will again

No, you are a work of art
pristine, inviolate,
shiver of midnight away
from the touch of my tip all
fingers stretched

You call to artists
in other lands
singing sweetly:

Create me
dear singing loir
of some manly harp
create me
for I stifle where I stand
and lady-like
must drown the moment
in the lake of much too many
who leave me lazy
like a snake

Create me,
dear man,
beyond my eye.

And I answer:

snake and foulest bitch
swine of a hundred feet
I am the artist across the seas
and love you, heart,
because you are purer far
than all your arts
and all your swilling crafts,
purer far because your heart
dared to call
when others—
cats, grandes dames,
fraises fatales,
and all the avaricious humps
could think of nothing
but flight from me.

Come back,
 says piggy
 in your voice
Can it be, poor harp
 Can it really be
that you are the voice
 across the sea?

Yes, come back, says swine-song in your voice
Come back, come back, come back
For names you've called me
 far and wide
Wine of a hundred feet
 Sweet lord you're kind
Yes come to me honey-bee
 and I will kill you.
Over here my lad,
 God, you're bad.

Coda

And they were married
and had a laugh to say goodbye
for he wrote a poem
and she liked it.
It went: Cha cha cha

MARRIAGE À LA MODE ~~REMODELÉE~~
~~poem in 5 parts~~

1.

Cook for him?
Of course not.
We eat out
all the time.
He's gotten fat
He's gotten
very
fat
longing
for good
cooking
said the Bitch
in a voice
of absolute
tenderness for Mr. Bitch
curious fellow
her husband.

2.

He makes love
like a little
pig's tail
thought she
all tight
kinky
curly cue
and full of squeal
why can't he
go
dark and deep?

Cheep!
beep beep a beep!
went the tail
of the pig
roar! went the
boar
and with a crash
and a snore
he went dark
and deep
into himself
and sleep.

3.

Ladies
teach
one
leçon
seul
one
that the
essence
of perfume
is duty

I'm fast
 becoming
 a goose
 said the witch
 blinking her eye
 to the beat
 of my
 intent
 light, deliberate and dry

I hate to have a ball
 which goes de trop said I

De trop, said the witch,
 or not de trop
 dare your
 deliberations
 go deeper
 ducks?
 for love
 which is light
 and dry
 makes me think of money
 and her dirty bucks
 so waltz me
 around again willie
 hard dark and deep
 the keys to the dungeon
 are buried
 in mummie's
 murderous
 keep.

Five children started in my land
Six across the sea.
None knew my hand upon
their head. Royal bastards all.
One swore my death was in
his vow. Loyal bastards royal.

But Carmen was a crueler siege
Than all my evil gathered
And tore the heart right out the ram
while all that's vain was shattered.
And now I am a saint. (O pity me.)
Now I am a saint. (O pity me.)

I stare into the eyes
of devils,
devils dark and foul
and look them down
and steal their ground
while in me tolls a hollow
by the heart
of Carmen's ear
near the heart of Carmen's ear
that scar on horror's breast
which fears no fire
for death to Carmen is Devil's dare
for Hell to Carmen is heaven's mare:

a trot away from this flat world
where saints and witches stale
and war's too whored for open fight
swears the heart of Carmen's ear
swings the hooves of Carmen's steed:
ride, ride, ride with me.

Come ride with me into my land
Down down along my crease
And we will live forever
 in the marrow of the beast
 and we will live forever
 in the sweetmeat of desire
Oh we will live forever
 In the sweetmeat of disease
 oh we will live forever
 by the steeps at Carmen's knees
 we will live forever
in the crease of Carmen's ear
in the crease
in the crease
in the crease of Carmen's ear.

The most
eligible
bachelor
in London
is a category
conceived
by presumptive
witches
weary
of doing
without
their widow's weeds—
whispered
the epigram
to the boutonniere.

Go fix the flowers fuck-face
was the King's reply

PUNCHING PAPA: A Review of

That Summer in Paris

There is an irony which usually defeats the memoir and makes it an inferior art. The man who can tell a good story in company about his friends is usually not able to find a prose which can capture the nuances of his voice. Invariably, the language is leached out—the account tends to have a droning episodic quality as if some movie queen were recounting the separate toils of her lovers to a tape recorder.

Now the worst to be said for *That Summer in Paris* is that Morley Callaghan has not altogether avoided this blight. Using himself as a character of reasonable dimensions, an honest sensible hard-nosed ego-bastard, a talented short-story writer, a good husband, a good Irish Catholic, a good college boxer, and a good expatriate, his memoir is built on the premise that catgut is good for stringing pearls. So one is taken by Callaghan for a three-to-five-page description of each of his separate meetings with Maxwell Perkins, Sherwood Anderson, Ford Madox Ford, Josephine Herbst, Sinclair Lewis, Robert McAlmon, Sylvia Beach, James Joyce, Pauline Hemingway, Michael Arlen, Ludwig Lewisohn, Allen Tate, Edward Titus, Joan Miró, and Zelda Fitzgerald. It is dim writing. One has only to compare the chapter he gives to Sinclair Lewis (one of the more elaborate cameos) against some equivalent number of pages Wolfe devoted to a similar portrait, and the result is no contest. A deadness comes back from Callaghan's echo. His short portraits are written at the level of a conversation with somebody who might tell you he met Truman Capote.

"Well," you might respond, "what is he like?"

"Well," says your friend, "he's small, you know, and he's kind of bright."

If one knows some of the people mentioned, or is obsessed with the period, then Morley Callaghan's memoir will satisfy. But it is not a good book. It is in fact a modest bad dull book which contains a superb short story about Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Callaghan. One can push so far as to say it is probably the most dramatic single story about Hemingway's relation to Fitzgerald in the literature. If Callaghan had been ready to stop at this, he could have had a long short story or a short memoir

I am brave by an act
of will, said the saint
my nature is to fear
O saint even you must fear
the crease of Carmen's ear.

2.

For Carmen is a cutthroat
Carmen is a queen
Carmen sings of passion
and blows her breath at me.

Carmen is a royal whore
Carmen is a slut
Carmen has a mustache
and smiles at flowing blood.

I knew Carmen when she was young
Before her mustache bleached
A colored flag around her neck
she kissed the pirate's fleet
and seduced herself to me
and stole from me a steed

Her head upon the pillow
she caught her flesh to mine
And went off at a gallop
some galley's keep to find
presenting me her ear
returning greed a fiend.

Oh, I was a young man
Cold, evil and strong
And few were the ladies
I couldn't dog, dog--
bitch, you're in my bed
and cue them out half-dead.

THE RIDE OF THE SAD SAINT

I.

The air was full of curses
looking for no fight.
The devils and the witches'
were all alone tonight
save for a saint
who was sad.

Mad, mad, you're mad,
cried a lad in the garb
of a girl
Saints are not sad
but sadistic

Cruelty is the kindest wound
for dung, replied the saint.
Go forth and sin
in such a way
you need not run
at break of day

Not one said yea.
Still the saint merely sighed
he knew a saint
must not aspire
to the courage of a God
nor try too long
to bear His pain.

Besides, the saint was vain.
It was the drop life left
in his humility
in the couloirs of his humility
in the catatonia of his senility
in the crease of Carmen's ear
in the crease of Carmen's ear.

5.

The Shortest Novel of Them All

At first she thought she could kill him in three days.

She did nearly. His heart proved nearly unequal to her compliments.

Then she thought it would take three weeks. But he survived.

So she revised her tables and calculated three months.

After three years, he was still alive. So they got married.

Now they've been married for thirty years. People speak warmly of them. They are known as the best marriage in town.

It's just that their children keep dying.

You bruise
my
catatonia
said
the saint
to the
white witch
after he had
fallen
so far
as to nod
assent
to a
shitty suggestion

Is that all
asked the witch
accoutumé ma foi
to eat the shit
of the
superior.

The saint forgave her
and kissed a sore
content with the
notion
it came from mort.

I'm such a turd
when she asked
me for the
abortion
I gave her
one thousand
and never said
a word
—why didn't I give
her
nine hundred and ninety-nine?

When you
have
fruition
you
have
frustration
said
the retired
Dick

I always say
what I think
crooks usually do
cops go through hoops
and hell
because
they do not believe
that is why
they tie ribbons
on crooks
they're particularly
fond of

Au fond,
cops are like ladies
Au fondest fond
cops are like
ladies
in a bad mood.

Every time
I stop
 smoking
I feel
as if
I can't find
 my teeth.

The alleviation of ague in the advertising age

Nothing tastes better than a good cold glass of Rheingold
Nothing is better for taste than a good glass
of cold Rheingold
Be bold, my love
Death is near
Kiss my bier.

Prose

That's what
it means
to be
in love
you can't tell
a dame
to go
fuck
herself.

Sorrow said:
nothing
but salt
in water
to soothe
my
sore

Epitaph of a Rail

I used to drink
until six
 in the morning
so I could make
 dames
and now I drink
until six
 in the morning
watching other
 guys
 make dames. .
 Eheu Fugaces.
Which means:
 Fuck aces!
 before the fleeting
 years go by

BOITES AND BRUISERS: *Poems and Short Hairs*

Commuter Pool

Each time I think of some little thing
I can do to get ahead,

I feel as if

a foul fierce art from the nightmares
of constipation, the flaming waste of
stagnation

(Chimel Chimel the Vowels!)

has forced its way

up up into my brain

and played the lyre from Hades' heart.

So I say to myself (I am growing deaf,
my dear) I say to myself: Boy,
you are getting ready to trade
the possibilities of the future,
otherwise known as soul,

for the ego,

the beans and the booze

Remember: that Guy died for us.

But oh those dreams and how they burn.
oh those dreams and how they burn.

Heaven cannot have a bitch
so royal as the root of my sweet itch.

Bar Twists

I await her
hot-breathed
cigaretted
garlicky
version
of all the lost days.

Cheer up
whispers she
(silently)
hugging
the other
mugger.

Hurts me
loathe chicks
second wife
did me in
I cannot
forswear
to gaze
said the rage.

Other drunks spit.
Creepy girls giggle.
Pigs niggle
at the root.

He
who
travels
alone
travels
least
said
the
police
pounding
the beat
in
pairs

DAIMON RUNS REVISITED

There was a meet for the boys
The moolahs, the mozzers, the Maf, the Coast and the Nose
even the bonze and the dunes.
They were in to get acquaints for a new soft commodtz
and general ~~collaboration~~ *affiliate.*

How, said the Coaster to the Nostrand
do you think soft sell began?
Well, I'll tell you, said the Maf, we said to the dunes
Whaderya trying to shove that shit
down people's troat for?
Slip it up their stroonz
you asshole
Strike a match!

Said the dunes to the Maf,
Whaderya want to give me a hardon for?
you have hurt my feels
how much can the heart of my feels take
before the heart of some other Guinea's feels
is forced to break?
Listen, said the dunes to the Maf—you're a dunze
Don't get hit!

So they had a ruining
They had the runs.
That was some thunder.
Those fartsaroons came close to eating all the prunes.

You
can
never
imitate
a creation
said
the
mimic.

BOITES

I love Bobby, Bobby's divine
The Windsors came to
see him
and the Duke
kept calling for
Bye Bye Blackbird
over and over again.
It was a glorious night.
I borrowed mascara
from the Duchess
before we were done
we were crying
so hard
even the Duke.

How were we to know
that in five years
give ten
the West
Old World
would shiver from blight
and I would turn
to a Prince
of the Congo
saying: embrace me
darkest delight
for in your firmament
are stars.

Oh blackbird
do not banish us
banish not
the lovers
of Bobby

when he sang
Blackbird
bye-bye
for can it be
we heard
the chord
of the cannibal
sharpening his knife
on a blooded stone
and wept for you
as well as us.

Young winners
make weak old losers
said Bobby
removing his mask
to show
he was now
King
of our
Congo.

It's amazing
how many
ladies
never crack
a book
it hurts
the spine.

I don't think
I can
accept
any more
compliments
cried the
maiden
determined
never to
let a
bugger
prosper.

Mr. Answer Man
what is
a weapon
worse
ten times
worse
than the
Hydrogen
Bomb?

Why a cunt
which is
ten times
larger
than the largest
cock
extant,
Sandy.

Dégoutante,
said Sandy,
kissing nuns
to hedge the bet.

ESPRIT DE SOMMELIER

Waiter!

Yes sir!

Are you
Diner's Club?

No sir,
we are not
Upper Mediocrity

Well fuck
you

Thank you sir
we are quite aristocracy

Which
aristocracy?

Quiet aristocracy, sir,

Oh, well thank you.

Say did you know
that cops are like
ladies in a
bad mood?

Ha, ha.
that is funny, sir
so, that is very
funny. You must
bitten please join
our Quit Aristocracy
credit club.

Mon dieu Feinspan,
it's you!

Yessir, will presumption
never cease?

Ian Fleming Revisited

**I had a spider once
and fed it neon tubes
until its web did gleam
like Las Vegas in the dawn
Roulette I used to call her
and the spider
drinking dew from grapefruit rind
to oil the knees
would smile and say:
every Roulette has her croupier.**

Forgive my passion for category
I must believe that God is a tidy man
besides I will go before you
there are machines to replace me

Univac and One-Hole-Trac
They will bring death to your nerve
deeper than I ever dreamed.
Upon one another we fell sobbing

Like men before the bitch of ice
on came her machine. Yes, it said,
the short hair used to be the
chromosome of the short shory

Now it is the fiber in fiberglass.
I gave one cry back clear back
to Coleridge on his lonely alp
for the horror of the albatross
was its malignant wings

Death we have betrayed your sting
and licked the long dry tongue of intellection
much too long

We will die from anemia of the soul
in some plenitude of electronics
and her suburb

There's
something
infantile
about
a
square
signed
the good
air
wearing
widow's
weeds

SEMINARS

A short hair is the chromosome of a short story
said the sadist, an assistant protestant professor
of creative composition. His words danced
like genes in the gism of a hate filled lair.

It was the air before his face
down from the burning glass
of his spectacle lens
to the razor of his mouth

Kill talent by teaching it procedure
said the sphincter of his nostril.
Doctor Category, said the hair
within his nose, you stifle me now

But I will grow in your grave
like ivy without a root
entwining myself in the orbital
locket of your skull

For I, royal hair of the rebellion
am the last of a lover's nerve
the poet lover who created you
old gray-haired sadistic dad
I am father of your categories

~~on the short hair~~
~~~~~

Said the assistant protestant professor:  
kill me, artist, curl your hair  
into the bone of my grave  
but I love your work

civilization died from an excess of ambition which throttled the Being of too many.

INTERVIEWER

And if there is no trace of scatology?

MAILER

If by the internal logic of the findings, the art, the fecal or non-fecal forms of the pottery, the wall painting, the architecture, there seems little scatology, one may assume there was not enough ambition, that the culture was calm, well-regulated, and was probably destroyed by a catastrophe which left it too passive to find the power to rise again.

INTERVIEWER

You're enjoying yourself much too much. Tomorrow you must speak more of form.

MAILER

I will not enjoy myself much tomorrow.

INTERVIEWER

You know you never came back to Picasso and why he is good for your eyes.

MAILER

Now I fear we will never get back.

INTERVIEWER

Of course we will. Why not?

MAILER

Beyond form is soul, spirit, madness, eternity, and the void.

INTERVIEWER

I will try to sleep on that.

## BREADLINES: *Poems and Short Hairs*

### PHOSPHORESCENCE AND NOURRITURES

Caviar is marvelous we agreed  
but if one eats too much of it  
(and I do love the taste of the soul  
in each little dead little egg)  
one does have to entertain the thought  
that perhaps knowing too much of the sea,  
perhaps,

oh dear God no,  
perhaps next life  
I will be a fish.

fizz  
fire  
flash  
foo  
flesh  
went the bubbly.

Como no, señor  
said the sommelier  
I know some fine  
accommodations  
in the sea.

The ocean voyage always spoils the wine we agreed  
it is the movement of the waves upon  
the memory of a grape

Water lapping water is too sensual to the touch  
wine delivers its love to the bottle  
before the trip is out.

Ohhhh. Unhappy continent  
livid America

the taste of wine, of foreign wine which crossed the sea  
is like the taste of love the second time.

Poor wine said Lady Grape shedding a tear.

If Camembert is the King of cheeses  
foul, corrupt, redolent of old uses, dirty royal feet  
and wealth beneath the ground  
then Brie is my Prince  
said, the young fresh air of morning to her appetite.  
Still, said Camembert, monarchies produce architecture,  
princes bastards  
and morning speaking to her appetite is mud  
to those who drink with Faust at night  
Yes, adventurers gargle the sour blood of dukes  
and eat me says Camembert  
Power is nothing without the smell  
of a royal crevice at your finger.  
Oh, says Brie, nothing is so lovely  
as the milk of morning on my mouth.  
Do not let the world sodden us with its liver,  
its poor colon and a smell of the hoarded past  
Good architecture comes from young men  
stealing the better half of form  
from the royal round rump of some majestic lady  
who smuggles jewels to the prince  
and embezzles deeds from the king.

If poetry is the food of the soul  
then some poems are like pot roast  
lots of meat, pannikins of gravy and  
a great deal of taste all very  
much the same.

Other poems are fishy  
tang, pepper, weed, and green like the  
sea. I know a few which stick to the  
fingers. Poetaster in patis-  
serie. But my poems—

I want my poems  
to be like bones. Bones make it possible  
to stay in good form.

And there are  
poems which taste of grass, air, earth,  
rock salt and old lady granite in the  
minerals (not to mention all  
the dairy products, milky poems,  
vegetables and gourds.)

But I want  
my poems to be like bones and shine  
silver in the sun.

For poems which  
are like bones crackle in my teeth.  
Look for the death within the death.



A Balance of Power

The prime minister said:  
everything  
which tastes good  
betrays me  
and everything  
which makes  
me warm  
tastes foul.

Fiddler's Fluck

FOR A SQUARE DANCE

On the meat of the rich  
And the urge of the poor  
The purge of the ore  
And the grease of the bitch  
A lady was burning  
A whore was a-scorch  
Gorge was the cheese  
And ass the itch  
Of Pussy and Pick-nose  
And swish out the twitch  
Deep hurted the liver  
Raw buried the sauce  
Hotshit the hurricane  
Herded the gourd  
Howligan, hooligan  
Hurry up all  
Tonight is the night  
Of the Hip Hole Ball

Perfume and fart  
Snatch squinch and squeeze  
Ear-wax and dingle  
Fuck tit and dong  
Fling a hole on your point  
And sweeten the joint  
Tonight is the night  
Of the Hip Howl Ball

The bright in mind are often flatulent  
They breathe the gas of the dead within them  
searching like harpies for a whiff of the treasure  
some dead departed failure chose to take away.

One cannot give a funeral service to the fart  
and yet there are broken winds which walk the plank in pride.

IN THE JARDIN EXOTIQUE OF EZE

In the Jardin Exotique of Eze  
the cactus come up from the sea  
like an anemone wooing a spider  
or a pygmy with a blowgun dart.  
Silently they smell the breeze,

invertebrate,

their memory as long as the tripe of the Méditerranée.  
Was it once or never? that a God from deep waters

dreaming of the moon

fell in love with a gleam from the midnight sky  
who, intoxicated with herself  
and the rapture of the depths,  
like a daughter most fortunate in family,  
beautiful, spoiled, innocent of alarm,  
wandered down an alley  
dark as the pitch of blackest frustration  
and there was trapped by the sound of need  
in the murmur of an ape.

So did that God of dark waters woo a moon beam  
and from their love leave a seed  
on the spume of the wrack  
which washes a desert shore.

Cactus,

mad psychotic bulb of light and dark  
spy of the deep sea  
intimate of the moon

your form inspires nausea  
for love which dares too much  
and has no soil but sand  
flowers spines of lunar hatred  
shapes tubers on the leaf  
and gives no wine but visions from peyote  
of ether and her gardens  
which burn in gloom  
of poison, bliss, the death of suns  
and phosphorescent nights.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Norman Mailer is the author of four novels: *THE NAKED AND THE DEAD* (1948), *BARBARY SHORE* (1951), *THE DEER PARK* (1955), and *AMERICAN DREAM* (1965). In addition, he has published three collections of shorter pieces, *ADVERTISEMENTS FOR MYSELF* (1959), *PRESIDENTIAL PAPERS* (1963), and *CANNIBALS AND CHRISTIANS* (1966), as well as *DEATHS FOR THE LADIES (AND OTHER DISASTERS)* (1962), a collection of poems and short prose.

Mafia  
ran all  
the joints  
until the people  
looked like spaghetti  
and only the witches  
could say  
pasta fazool

## EROSIONS

Money  
is a  
river  
flowing  
downhill  
over  
hills  
of  
character  
in the  
rich

DELL • 1058 • 95c

# norman mailer cannibals AND christians

"MAILER MAY GET A NOBEL PRIZE...Wild and fascinating...impressive interviews, political portraits...confidential asides on sex, Vietnam, books, dark urges, bureaucracy, democracy...annoying and absorbing...It is hard to name a writer who is more profoundly American."

—Eliot Fremont-Smith, The New York Times



You're not large enough  
for a whale  
and much too fat  
to be a shark  
said I to my love.  
Porpoise  
was her reply

Sleek pig  
thought the mind  
of my eye

Sleek pigs  
are porpoises  
said she  
and began to cry.

DIAMONDS

They are  
not  
poetry  
they  
never  
are  
depressing

I think  
they are  
bad  
for  
the weak,  
the spoiled,  
the rich

They are  
good  
for rocks  
who  
are  
waiting  
for a  
gleam  
to open  
their crack

all of them clean in mind like hospitals  
what a world of second choice besets the eye  
no wonder I am going blind says the Lord  
and oh that static in my ear

(must everyone speak in an accent  
borrowed from another and all  
food die a second death?—freeze my juices  
seal my flesh—and all materials?)

Devil torture me no longer I confess  
cries the molecule joining the giant  
carbon chain where one does not choose  
one's qualities but bows one's head to trend

that oscillation in the vacuum tube  
second choice of the wind when  
the spirits of the dead failed, you  
hear, to make us feel their hurt

LICENSES

We live in a world filled with all the wonderful things

which did not happen  
all the passion ~~which~~ was never born  
because the sperm sailed into the sheet  
and left a quiver of empty arrows

(did your little womb go pity pat pat  
when midnight passed and I wasn't there?)

We walk about in cities filled with second choice  
you and me planned by calculation of the budget

those neon signs cold compromise  
to cheat the savage dream of fire  
you do not control the flame say the mediocre  
until you put it under glass

(all those lovely modern shacks  
fifty stories steel and mass  
second choice in a new idea)

It is better far, you hear, when prisons look like public schools  
and airports shake their hips in plastic luxury  
like hotels and housing projects rich and poor all alike



STATIC

Dah dit dit dah dit dit dah  
dah dah dit dit dah dah  
dah dit dit dah dit dit dah  
dah dah dit dit dah dah

Mentally cool and bright  
Arms lly is the war song  
Father of strong in your nave  
Bold slave of a fierce light

Dum ditty, dum ditty, dum  
dah dah dit dah dit dit

Bold old gold is the grave

~~of those  
who want to bleed  
for United  
Sexual  
Appeal  
against the oncoming night  
which does not slay  
but reduces  
the best and worst  
to mediocre~~

dit dit dah  
dah dah dit

The Mediocre.

Do not  
ask  
for  
whom  
the  
television  
tolls

#### THE EXECUTIONER'S SONG

I think if I had three good years to give  
in study at some occupation  
which was fierce and new  
and full of stimulation

I think I would become  
an executioner  
with time spent out in the field  
digging graves for bodies I had made  
the night before.

You see: I am bad at endings  
My bowels move without honor  
and flatulence is an affliction  
my pride must welcome with gloom

It comes I know from preoccupation  
much too much with sex

Those who end well do not spend their time  
so badly on the throne

For this reason I expect the task  
of gravedigger welcomes me

I would like to kill well and bury well  
Perhaps then my seed would not shoot  
so frantic a flare

If I could execute neatly  
(with respect for whatever romantic  
imagination

gave passion to my subject's crime)  
and if I buried well  
(with tenderness, dispatch, gravity  
and joy that the job was not jangled—  
giving a last just touch of the spade  
to the coffin

in order to leave it  
quivering  
like a leaf—for forget not  
coffins quiver as the breath goes out  
and the earth comes down)

Yes if I could kill cleanly  
and learn not to turn my back  
on the face of each victim  
as he chooses  
what is last to be seen  
in his eye,  
well, then perhaps,  
then might I rise so high upon occasion  
as to smite a fist of the Lord's creation  
into the womb of that muse  
which gives us poems  
Yes, then I might  
For one ends best when death is clean  
to the mind

and calm in its proportions  
fire in the orchard and flame at the root



Create me  
dear singing loir  
of some manly harp  
create me  
for I stifle where I stand  
and lady-like  
must drown the moment  
in the lake of much too many  
who leave me lazy  
like a snake

Create me,  
dear man,  
beyond my eye.

And I answer:  
snake and foulest bitch  
swine of a hundred feet  
I am the artist across the seas  
and love you, heart,  
because you are purer far  
than all your arts  
and all your swilling crafts,  
purer far because your heart  
dared to call  
when others—  
cats, grandes dames,  
fraises fatales,  
and all the avaricious humps  
could think of nothing  
but flight from me.

Come back,  
says piggy  
in your voice  
Can it be, poor harp  
Can it really be  
that you are the voice  
across the sea?

Yes, come back, says swine-song in your voice  
Come back, come back, come back  
For names you've called me  
far and wide  
Wine of a hundred feet  
Sweet lord you're kind  
Yes come to me honey-bee  
and I will kill you.  
Over here my lad,  
God, you're bad.

ODE TO A LADY

Cold and swinish are your crafts  
Mean and nasty, foul your arts  
The spirit of a lover you would never kill  
'Tis tastier far to deaden him.  
Yes, maggots are your pets  
and garlic your bouquet

Cold and swinish are your crafts  
a pestilence on me  
For I have primed my iron  
in your lore and now  
your faults revealed  
my eyes are blinded still  
by the image of a woman  
Child bitch of a dear Irish maid  
who is virgin to my touch  
and never smiles the lover's dirty grin  
of sweets we shared  
and share we will again

No, you are a work of art  
pristine, inviolate,  
shiver of midnight away  
from the touch of my tip all  
fingers stretched

You call to artists  
in other hands  
singing sweetly:



WITCHES AND WARLOCKS: *Poems and Short Hairs*

Hallelujah!

Children  
who issue  
from  
a matrimony  
of the usual misery  
go forth  
into lives  
which are best spent  
in sin  
said the Lord

3.

Ladies  
teach  
one  
leçon  
scul  
one  
that the  
essence  
of perfume  
is duty

I'm fast  
 becoming  
 a goose  
 said the witch  
 blinking her eye  
 to the beat  
 of my  
 intent  
 light, deliberate and dry

I hate to have a ball  
 which goes de trop said I

De trop, said the witch,  
 or not de trop  
 dare your  
 deliberations  
 go deeper  
 ducks?  
 for love  
 which is light  
 and dry  
 makes me think of money  
 and her dirty bucks  
 so waltz me  
 around again willie  
 hard dark and deep  
 the keys to the dungeon  
 are buried  
 in mummie's  
 murderous  
 keep.

*Coda*

And they were married  
and had a laugh to say goodbye  
for he wrote a poem  
and she liked it.  
It went: Cha cha cha

~~MARRIAGE À LA MODE REMODELÉE~~  
~~poem in 5 parts~~

I.

Cook for him?  
Of course not.  
We eat out  
all the time.  
He's gotten fat  
He's gotten fat  
very  
fat  
longing  
for good  
cooking  
said the Bitch  
in a voice  
of absolute  
tenderness for Mr. Bitch  
curious fellow  
her husband.



2.

He makes love  
like a little  
pig's tail  
thought she  
all tight  
kinky  
curly cue  
and full of squeal  
why can't he  
go  
dark and deep?

Chcepl  
beep beep a beep!  
went the tail  
of the pig  
roarl went the  
boar  
and with a crash  
and a snore  
he went dark  
and deep  
into himself  
and sleep.



The most  
eligible  
bachelor  
in London  
is a category  
conceived  
by presumptive  
witches  
weary  
of doing  
without  
their widow's weeds—  
whispered  
the epigram  
to the boutonniere.

Go fix the flowers fuck-face  
was the King's reply

Five children started in my land  
Six across the sea.  
None knew my hand upon  
their head. Royal bastards all.  
One swore my death was in  
his vow. Loyal bastards royal.

But Carmen was a crueler siege  
Than all my evil gathered  
And tore the heart right out the ram  
while all that's vain was shattered.  
And now I am a saint. (O pity me.)  
Now I am a saint. (O pity me.)

I stare into the eyes  
of devils,  
devils dark and foul  
and look them down  
and steal their ground  
while in me tolls a hollow  
by the heart  
of Carmen's ear  
near the heart of Carmen's ear  
that scar on horror's breast  
which fears no fire  
for death to Carmen is Devil's dare  
for Hell to Carmen is heaven's mare:

a trot away from this flat world  
where saints and witches stale  
and war's too whored for open fight  
swears the heart of Carmen's ear  
swings the hooves of Carmen's steed:  
ride, ride, ride with me.

Come ride with me into my land  
Down down along my crease  
And we will live forever  
    in the marrow of the beast  
    and we will live forever  
    in the sweetmeat of desire  
Oh we will live forever  
    In the sweetmeat of disease  
    oh we will live forever  
    by the steep at Carmen's knees  
    we will live forever  
in the crease of Carmen's ear  
in the crease  
in the crease  
in the crease of Carmen's ear.

THE RIDE OF THE SAD SAINT

I.

The air was full of curses  
looking for no fight.  
The devils and the witches'  
were all alone tonight  
save for a saint  
who was sad.

Mad, mad, you're mad,  
cried a lad in the garb  
of a girl  
Saints are not sad  
but sadistic

Cruelty is the kindest wound  
for dung, replied the saint.  
Go forth and sin  
in such a way  
you need not run  
at break of day

Not one said yea.  
Still the saint merely sighed  
he knew a saint  
must not aspire  
to the courage of a God  
nor try too long  
to bear His pain.

Besides, the saint was vain.  
It was the drop life left  
in his humility  
in the couloirs of his humility  
in the catatonia of his senility  
in the crease of Carmen's ear  
in the crease of Carmen's ear.



I am brave by an act  
of will, said the saint  
my nature is to fear  
O saint even you must fear  
the crease of Carmen's ear.

2.

For Carmen is a cutthroat  
Carmen is a queen  
Carmen sings of passion  
and blows her breath at me.

Carmen is a royal whore  
Carmen is a slut  
Carmen has a mustache  
and smiles at flowing blood.

I knew Carmen when she was young  
Before her mustache bleached  
A colored flag around her neck  
she kissed the pirate's fleet  
and seduced herself to me  
and stole from me a steed

Her head upon the pillow  
she caught her flesh to mine  
And went off at a gallop  
some galley's keep to find  
presenting me her ear  
returning greed a fiend.

Oh, I was a young man  
Cold, evil and strong  
And few were the ladies  
I couldn't dog, dog—  
bitch, you're in my bed  
and cue them out half-dead.

The alleviation of ague in the advertising age

Nothing tastes better than a good cold glass of Rheingold  
Nothing is better for taste than a good glass  
of cold Rheingold  
Be bold, my love  
Death is near  
Kiss my bier.

Prose

That's what  
it means  
to be  
in love  
you can't tell  
a dame  
to go  
fuck  
herself.

Sorrow said:  
nothing  
but salt  
in water  
to soothe  
my  
sore



Epitaph of a Rail

I used to drink  
until six  
in the morning  
so I could make  
dames  
and now I drink  
until six  
in the morning  
watching other  
guys  
make dames. .  
Eheu Fugaces.  
Which means:  
Fuck aces!  
before the fleeting  
years go by

Bar Twists

I await her  
hot-breathed  
cigaretted  
garlicky  
version  
of all the lost days.

Cheer up  
whispers she  
(silently)  
hugging  
the other  
mugger.

Hurts me  
loathe chicks  
second wife  
did me in  
I cannot  
forswear  
to gaze  
said the rage.

Other drunks spit.  
Creepy girls giggle.  
Pigs niddle  
at the root.

You  
can  
never  
imitate  
a creation  
said  
the  
mimic.

BOTTES

I love Bobby, Bobby's divine  
The Windsors came to  
    see him  
    and the Duke  
        kept calling for  
Bye Bye Blackbird  
over and over again.  
It was a glorious night.  
I borrowed mascara  
    from the Duchess  
before we were done  
we were crying  
    so hard  
        even the Duke.

How were we to know  
    that in five years  
        give ten  
the West  
    Old World  
would shiver from blight  
and I would turn  
    to a Prince  
        of the Congo  
saying: embrace me  
    darkest delight  
for in your firmament  
are stars.

Oh blackbird  
do not banish us  
banish not  
    the lovers  
    of Bobby



when he sang  
Blackbird  
bye-bye  
for can it be  
we heard  
the chord  
of the cannibal  
sharpening his knife  
on a blooded stone  
and wept for you  
as well as us.

Young winners  
make weak old losers  
said Bobby  
removing his mask  
to show  
he was now  
King  
of our  
Congo.

when he sang  
Blackbird  
bye-bye  
for can it be  
we heard  
the chord  
of the cannibal  
sharpening his knife  
on a blooded stone  
and wept for you  
as well as us.

Young winners  
make weak old losers  
said Bobby  
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of our  
Congo.

It's amazing  
how many  
ladies  
never crack  
a book  
it hurts  
the spine.



It's amazing  
how many  
ladies  
never crack  
a book  
it hurts  
the spine.

I don't think  
I can  
accept  
any more  
compliments  
cried the  
maiden  
determined  
never to  
let a  
bugger  
prosper.

BREADLINES: *Poems and Short Hairs*

PHOSPHORESCENCE AND NOURRITURES

Caviar is marvelous we agreed  
but if one eats too much of it  
(and I do love the taste of the soul  
in each little dead little egg)  
one does have to entertain the thought  
that perhaps knowing too much of the sea,  
perhaps,

oh dear God no,  
perhaps next life  
I will be a fish.

fizz  
fire  
flash  
foo  
flesh  
went the bubbly.

Como no, señor  
said the sommelier  
I know some fine  
accommodations  
in the sea.



If Camembert is the King of cheeses  
foul, corrupt, redolent of old uses, dirty royal feet  
and wealth beneath the ground  
then Brie is my Prince  
said, the young fresh air of morning to her appetite.  
Still, said Camembert, monarchies produce architecture,  
princes bastards  
and morning speaking to her appetite is mud  
to those who drink with Faust at night  
Yes, adventurers gargle the sour blood of dukes  
and eat me says Camembert  
Power is nothing without the smell  
of a royal crevice at your finger.  
Oh, says Brie, nothing is so lovely  
as the milk of morning on my mouth.  
Do not let the world sodden us with its liver,  
its poor colon and a smell of the hoarded past  
Good architecture comes from young men  
stealing the better half of form  
from the royal round rump of some majestic lady  
who smuggles jewels to the prince  
and embezzles deeds from the king.

The ocean voyage always spoils the wine we agreed  
it is the movement of the waves upon  
the memory of a grape  
Water lapping water is too sensual to the touch  
wine delivers its love to the bottle  
before the trip is out.  
Ohhhh. Unhappy continent  
Ivied America  
the taste of wine, of foreign wine which crossed the sea  
is like the taste of love the second time.  
Poor wine said Lady Grape shedding a tear.

A Balance of Power

The prime minister said:  
everything  
    which tastes good  
betrays me  
and everything  
    which makes  
        me warm  
tastes foul.



If poetry is the food of the soul  
then some poems are like pot roast  
lots of meat, pannikins of gravy and  
a great deal of taste all very  
much the same.

Other poems are fishy  
tang, pepper, weed, and green like the  
sea. I know a few which stick to the  
fingers. Poetaster in patis-  
serie. But my poems—

I want my poems  
to be like bones. Bones make it possible  
to stay in good form.

And there are  
poems which taste of grass, air, earth,  
rock salt and old lady granite in the  
minerals (not to mention all  
the dairy products, milky poems,  
vegetables and gourds.)

But I want  
my poems to be like bones and shine  
silver in the sun.

For poems which  
are like bones crackle in my teeth.  
Look for the death within the death.

Fiddler's Fluck  
FOR A SQUARE DANCE

On the meat of the rich  
And the urge of the poor  
The purge of the ore  
And the grease of the bitch  
A lady was burning  
A whore was a-scorch  
Gorge was the cheese  
And ass the itch  
Of Pussy and Pick-nose  
And swish out the twitch  
Deep hurted the liver  
Raw buried the sauce  
Hotshit the hurricane  
Herded the gourd  
Howligan, hooligan  
Hurry up all  
Tonight is the night  
Of the Hip Hole Ball

Perfume and fart  
Snatch squinch and squeeze  
Ear-wax and dingle  
Fuck tit and dong  
Fling a hole on your point  
And sweeten the joint  
Tonight is the night  
Of the Hip Howl Ball.

The bright in mind are often flatulent  
They breathe the gas of the dead within them  
searching like harpies for a whiff of the treasure  
some dead departed failure chose to take away.

One cannot give a funeral service to the fart  
and yet there are broken winds which walk the plank in pride.



IN THE JARDIN EXOTIQUE OF EZE

In the Jardin Exotique of Eze  
the cactus come up from the sea  
like an anemone wooing a spider  
or a pygmy with a blowgun dart.  
Silently they smell the breeze,  
    invertebrate,  
their memory as long as the tripe of the Méditerranée.  
Was it once or never? that a God from deep waters  
    dreaming of the moon  
fell in love with a gleam from the midnight sky  
who, intoxicated with herself  
and the rapture of the depths,  
like a daughter most fortunate in family,  
beautiful, spoiled, innocent of alarm,  
wandered down an alley  
dark as the pitch of blackest frustration  
and there was trapped by the sound of need  
in the murmur of an ape.  
So did that God of dark waters woo a moon beam  
and from their love leave a seed  
on the spume of the wrack  
which washes a desert shore.  
Cactus,  
mad psychotic bulb of light and dark  
    spy of the deep sea  
    intimate of the moon  
your form inspires nausea  
for love which dares too much  
and has no soil but sand  
flowers spines of lunar hatred  
shapes tubers on the leaf  
and gives no wine but visions from peyote  
of ether and her gardens  
which burn in gloom  
of poison, bliss, the death of suns  
and phosphorescent nights.

## PART TWO: LIONS

### 6 · THE ARGUMENT REINVIGORATED

*Reader, a telegram:* SHIFT MCNAMARA LAMBS FROM WARS OF  
JELLIED FIRE TO LIONS IN BURNING BUSH.

*Everything in this book is attached to everything else. Trust me for a time. Indulge me:*

*Assume I am a lecturer in the fields of Fellowship surrounding Literature (American) and am trying to draw some grand design in twenty minutes on a talk devoted to "The Dynamic of American Letters." Knowing attention is iron for the blood of a Fellow, I will not be so foolish as to perish without a look at the topical and the interesting. No, I will use "The Dynamic of American Letters" as preparation for a lightning discussion of Herzog and Terry Southern, with a coda on the art of the absurd. Let me then have my first sentence as lecturer: "There has been a war at the center of American*

*letters for a long time." That is not so poor. The look of absolute comprehension on the face of the audience encourages the lecturer to go on.*

*The war began as a class war; an upper-middle class looked for a development of its taste, a definition of its manners, a refinement of itself to prepare a shift to the aristocratic; that was its private demand upon culture. That demand is still being made by a magazine called The New Yorker. This upper-class development of literature was invaded a long time ago, however, back at the cusp of the century, by a counter-literature whose roots were found in poverty, industrial society, and the emergence of new class. It was a literature which grappled with a peculiarly American phenomenon—a tendency of American society to alter more rapidly than the ability of its artists to record that change. Now, of course, one might go back two*



*thousand years into China to find a society which did not alter more rapidly than its culture, but the American phenomenon had to do with the very rate of acceleration. The order of magnitude in this rate had shifted. It was as if everything changed ten times as fast in America, and this made for extraordinary difficulty in creating a literature. The sound, sensible, morally stout delineation of society which one found in Tolstoy and Balzac and Zola, in Thackeray and in Trollope, had become impossible. The American novelist of manners had to content himself with manners—he could not put a convincing servant into his work, and certainly not a workingman, because they were moving themselves in one generation out from the pantry into the morning dress of the lady in the parlor and up from the foundry to the master of the factory. The novelist of manners could not go near these matters—they promised to take over all of his book. So the job was left to Howells, Stephen Crane, to Dreiser, and in lesser degree to such writers as Norris, Jack London, Upton Sinclair—let us say it was left to Dreiser. A fundamental irony of American letters had now presented itself. For in opposition to Dreiser was the imperfectly developed countertradition of the genteel. The class which wielded the power which ran America, and the class which most admired that class, banded instinctively together to approve a genteel*

*literature which had little to do with power or the secrets of power. They encouraged a literature about courtship and marriage and love and play and devotion and piety and style, a literature which had to do finally with the excellence of belonging to their own genteel tradition. Thus it was a literature which borrowed the forms of its conduct from European models. The people who were most American by birth, and who had the most to do with managing America, gave themselves a literature which had the least to say about the real phenomena of American life, most particularly the accelerated rate, the awful rate, of growth and anomaly through all of society. That sort of literature and that kind of attempt to explain America was left to the sons of immigrants who, if they were vigorous enough, and fortunate enough to be educated, now had the opportunity to see that America was a phenomenon never before described, indeed never before visible in the record of history. There was something going on in American life which was either grand or horrible or both, but it was going on—at a dizzy rate—and the future glory or doom of the world was not necessarily divorced from it. Dreiser labored like a titan to capture the phenomenon; he became a titan; Thomas Wolfe, his only peer as giant (as the novelist-as-giant), labored also like a titan, but for half as long and died in terror of the gargantuan proportions of the task. Yet each failed in one part of*

*the job. They were able to describe society—Wolfe like the greatest five-year-old who ever lived,\* an invaluable achievement, and Dreiser like some heroic tragic entrepreneur who has reasoned out through his own fatigue and travail very much how everything works in the iron mills of life, but is damned because he cannot pass on the knowledge to his children. Dreiser and Wolfe were up from the people, and Dreiser particularly came closer to understanding the social machine than any American writer who ever lived, but he paid an unendurable price—he was forced to alienate himself from manner in order to learn the vast amount he learned. Manner insists one learn at a modest rate, that one learn each step with grace before going on to the next. Dreiser was in a huge hurry, he had to learn everything—that was the way he must have felt his mission, so there is nothing of manner in his work; which is to say, nothing of tactics.*

*If the upper-class quite naturally likes a literature which is good for them, a literature at the surface perhaps trivial, but underneath amusing, elucidative, fortifying, it is because this kind of literature elaborates and clarifies the details of their life, and thus adjusts their sense of power, their upper-class sense of power, which is invariably lubricated by a sense of detail. So too does that other class of readers in American literature, that huge, loose, all but unassociated congregation of readers—immigrant,*



*proletarian, entrepreneur—wish in turn for a literature which is equally good for them. That is where Dreiser had to fail. He was only half-good for such readers. He taught them strategy as Americans had never gotten it before in a novel. If they were adventurers, he was almost as useful to them as Stendhal was exceptionally useful to a century of French intellectuals who had come to Paris from the provinces. But not quite. Dreiser, finally, is not quite as useful, and the difference is crucial. Because a young adventurer reads a great novel in the unvoiced hope it is a grindstone which sharpens his axe sufficiently to smash down doors now locked to him. Dreiser merely located the doors and gave warnings about the secret padlocks and the traps. But he had no grindstone, no manner, no eye for the deadly important manners of the rich, he was obliged to call a rich girl "charming"; he could not make her charming when she spoke, as Fitzgerald could, and so he did not really prepare the army of his readers for what was ahead. His task was doubly difficult—it was required of him to*

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<sup>o</sup> This Argument was delivered, originally, as a talk to The American Studies Association and the M.L.A. This remark brought laughter from the audience. Since I did not wish to insult the memory of Wolfe, it would have been happier and perhaps more accurate to have said: like the greatest fifteen-year-old alive.

*give every upstart fresh strategy and tactics. No less than the secret sociology of society is what is needed by the upstart and that strategy Dreiser gave him. But tactics—the manners of the drawing room, the deaths and lifes of the drawing room, the cocktail party, the glorious tactics of the individual kill—that was all beyond him. Dreiser went blind climbing the mountains of society, so he could not help anyone to see what was directly before him—only what had happened and what was likely to come next.*

*That was the initial shape of the war, Naturalism versus the Genteel Tradition it has been called, and one might pose Henry James against Dreiser, but James is sufficiently great a writer to violate the generalizations one must make about the novel of manners which must always—precisely because it deals with manners—eschew the overambitious, plus extremes of plot—which James of course did not. So let us say the war was between Dreiser and Edith Wharton, Dreiser all strategy, no tactics; and Wharton all tactics. Marvelous tactics they were—a jewel of a writer and stingy as a parson—she needed no strategy. The upper-class writer had all strategy provided him by the logic of his class. Maybe that is why the war never came to decision, or even to conclusion. No upper-class writer went down*

*into the pits to bring back the manner alive of the change going on down there, certainly not Edith Wharton, not James Branch Cabell, of course not, nor Hergesheimer nor even Cather or Glasgow, not Elinor Wylie, no, nor Carl Van Vechten, and no diamond in the rough was ever reshaped by the cutters of Newport. The gap in American letters continued. Upper-class writers like John Dos Passos made brave efforts to go down and get the stuff and never quite got it, mainly in Dos Passos's case because they lacked strategy for the depths—manners may be sufficient to delineate the rich but one needs a vision of society to comprehend the poor, and Dos Passos had only revulsion at injustice, which is ultimately a manner. Some upper-class writers like Fitzgerald turned delicately upon the suppositions of their class, lost all borrowed strategy and were rudderless, were forced therefore to become superb in tactics, but for this reason perhaps a kind of hysteria lived at the center of their work; lower-class writers like Farrell and Steinbeck described whole seas of the uncharted ocean but their characters did not push from one milieu into another, and so the results were more taxonomic than apocalyptic.*

*Since then the war has shifted. No writer succeeded in doing the single great work which would clarify a nation's vision of itself as Tolstoy had done perhaps with War and Peace or Anna Karenina, and Stendhal with The Red*



and the Black, no one novel came along which was grand and daring and comprehensive and detailed, able to give sustenance to the adventurer and merriment to the rich, leave compassion in the icechambers of the upper class and energy as alms for the poor. (Not unless it was *Tropic of Cancer*.) Dreiser came as close as any, and never got close at all, for he could not capture the moment, and no country in history has lived perhaps so much for the moment as America. After his heroic failure, American literature was isolated—it was necessary to give courses in American literature to Americans, either because they would not otherwise read it, or because reading it, they could not understand it. It was not quite vital to them. It did not save their lives, make them more ambitious, more moral, more tormented, more audacious, more ready for love, more ready for war, for charity and for invention. No, it tended to puzzle them. The realistic literature had never caught up with the rate of change in American life, indeed it had fallen further and further behind, and the novel gave up any desire to be a creation equal to the phenomenon of the country itself; it settled for being a metaphor. Which is to say that each separate author made a separate peace. He would no longer try to capture America, he would merely try to give life to some microcosm in American life, some metaphor

—in the sense that a drop of water is a metaphor of the seas, or a hair of the beast is for some a metaphor of the beast—and in that metaphor he might—if he were very lucky—have it all, rich and poor, strategy and tactics, insight and manner, detail, authority, the works. He would have it all for a particular few. It was just that he was no longer writing about the beast but, as in the case of Hemingway (if we are to take the best of this), about the paw of the beast, or in Faulkner about the dreams of the beast. What a paw and what dreams! Perhaps they are the two greatest writers America ever had, but they had given up on trying to do it all. Their vision was partial, determinedly so, they saw that as the first condition for trying to be great—that one must not try to save. Not souls, and not the nation. The desire for majesty was the bitch which licked at the literary loins of Hemingway and Faulkner: the country could be damned. Let it take care of itself.

And of course the country did. Just that. It grew by itself. Like a weed and a monster and a beauty and a pig. And the task of explaining America was taken over by Luce magazines. Those few aristocratic novelistic sensibilities which had never seen the task of defining the country as one for them—it was finally most unamusing as a task—grew smaller and smaller and more and more superb. Edith Wharton reappeared as Truman

*Capote, even more of a jewel, even stingier. Of writers up from the bottom there were numbers: Dreiser's nephews were as far apart as Saul Bellow and James Jones. But the difference between the two kinds of writers had shifted. It had begun to shift somewhere after the Second World War, and the shift had gone a distance. One could not speak at all now of aristocratic writers and novelists whose work was itself the protagonist to carry the writer and his readers through the locks of society; no, the work had long since retreated, the great ambition was gone, and then it was worse, even the metaphor was gone, the paw of the beast and the dreams of the beast, no, literature was down to the earnest novel and the perfect novel, to moral seriousness and Camp. Herzog and Candy had become the protagonists.*

*Frank Cowperwood once amassed an empire. Herzog, his bastard great-nephew, diddled in the ruins of an intellectual warehouse. Where once the realistic novel cut a swath across the face of society, now its reality was concentrated into moral seriousness. Where the original heroes of naturalism had been active, bold, self-centered, close to tragic, and up to their nostrils in their exertions to advance their own life and force the webs of society, so the hero of moral earnestness, the hero Herzog and the hero Levin in Malamud's *A New Life*, are men who represent*



*the contrary—passive, timid, other-directed, pathetic, up to the nostrils in anguish: the world is stronger than they are; suicide calls.*

*Malamud's hero is more active than Herzog, he is also more likeable, but these positive qualities keep the case from being so pure. There is a mystery about the reception of Herzog. For beneath its richness of texture and its wealth of detail, the fact remains: never has a novel been so successful when its hero was so dim. Not one of the critics who adored the book would ever have permitted Herzog to remain an hour in his house. For Herzog was defeated, Herzog was an unoriginal man, Herzog was a fool—not an attractive God-anointed fool like Gimpel the Fool, his direct progenitor, but a sodden fool, over-educated and inept, unable to fight, able to love only when love presented itself as a gift. Herzog was intellectual but not bright, his ideas not original, his style as it appeared in his letters unendurable—it had exactly the leaden-footed sense of phrase which men laden with anxiety and near to going mad put into their communications. Herzog was hopeless. We learned nothing about society from him, not even anything about his life. And he is the only figure in the book. His wives, his mistress, his family, his children, his friends, even the man who cuckolds him are seen on the periphery of a dimming vision. Like*

*all men near to being mad, his attention is within, but the inner attention is without genius. Herzog is dull, he is unendurably dull—he is like all those bright pedagogical types who have a cavity at the center of their brain.*

*Yet the novel succeeds. There is its mystery. One reads it with compassion. With rare compassion. Bored by Herzog, still there is a secret burning of the heart. One's heart turns over and produces a sorrow. Hardly any books are left to do that.*

*Of course, Herzog is alive on sufferance. He is a beggar, an extraordinary beggar who fixes you with his eye, his breath, his clothing, his dank near-corrupt presence; he haunts. Something goes on in Herzog's eye. It says: I am debased, I am failed, I am near to rotten, and yet something just as good and loving resides in me as the tenderest part of your childhood. If the prophet Elijah sent me, it is not to make you feel guilt but to weep. Suddenly, Herzog inspires sorrow—touch of alchemy to the book—Herzog is at the center of the modern dilemma. If we do not feel compassion for him, a forceful compassion which sends blood to warm the limbs and the heart, then we are going to be forced to shoot him. Because if Herzog does not arouse your compassion there is no other choice—he is too intolerable a luxury to keep alive in his mediocrity unless he arouses your love. The literary world chose to love him. We*



were not ready to shoot Herzog. It all seemed too final if we did. Because then there would be nothing left but Camp, and Camp is the art of the cannibal, Camp is the art which evolved out of the bankruptcy of the novel of manners. It is the partial thesis of these twenty minutes that the pure novel of manners had watered down from *The House of Mirth* to the maudlin middle reaches of *The Rector of Justin*; had in fact gone all the way down the pike from *The Ambassadors* to *By Love Possessed*. So, one does not speak of the novel of manners any longer—one is obliged to look at the documentary, *In Cold Blood*—or one is obliged to look at satire. The aristocratic impulse turned upon itself produced one classic—Terry Southern's *The Magic Christian*. Never had distaste for the habits of a mass mob reached such precision, never did wit falter in its natural assumption that the idiocies of the mass were attached breath and kiss to the hypocrisies, the weltering grandeurs, and the low stupidities of the rich, the American rich. The aristocratic impulse to define society by evocations of manner now survived only in the grace of any cannibal sufficiently aristocratic to sup upon his own family. *The Magic Christian* was a classic of Camp.

Note then: The two impulses in American letters had failed, the realistic impulse never delivered the novel which would ignite a nation's conscious-

ness of itself, and the aristocratic impulse clawed at the remaining fabric of a wealthy society it despised and no longer wished to sustain. Like a Tinguely machine which destroys itself, Camp amused by the very act of its destruction. Since it was also sentimental, the artifacts were necrophiliac.

Literature then had failed. The work was done by the movies, by television. The consciousness of the masses and the culture of the land trudged through endless mud.

The American consciousness in the absence of a great tradition in the novel ended by being developed by the bootlicking pieties of small-town newspaper editors and small-town educators, by the worst of organized religion, a formless force filled with the terrors of all the Christians left to fill the spaces left by the initial bravery of the frontiersman, and these latterday Christians were simply not as brave. That was one component of the mud. The other was the sons of the immigrants. Many of them hated America, hated it for what it offered and did not provide, what it revealed of opportunity and what it excluded from real opportunity. The sons of these immigrants and the sons' sons took over the cities and began to run them, high up in the air and right down into the ground, they plucked and

*they plundered and there was not an American city which did not grow more hideous in the last fifty years. Then they spread out—they put suburbs like blight on the land—and piped mass communications into every home. They were cannibals selling Christianity to Christians, and because they despised the message and mocked at it in their own heart, they succeeded in selling something else, a virus perhaps, an electronic nihilism went through the mass media of America and entered the Christians and they were like to being cannibals, they were a tense and livid people, swallowing their own hate with the tranquilizers and the sex in the commercials, whereas all the early cannibals at the knobs of the mass-media made the mistake of passing on their bleak disease and were left now too gentle, too liberal, too programmatic, filled with plans for social welfare, and they looked and talked in Show Biz styles which possessed no style and were generally as unhealthy as Christians who lived in cellars and caves.*

*Yes, the cannibal sons of the immigrants had become Christians, and the formless form they had evolved for their mass-media, the hypocritical empty and tasteless taste of the television arts they beamed across the land encountered the formless form and the all but tasteless taste of the small-town tit-eating cannibal mind at its worst, and the collision produced*



*schizophrenia in the land. Half of America went insane with head colds and medicaments and asthmas and allergies, hospitals and famous surgeons with knives to cut into the plague, welfares and plans and committees and cooperations and boredom, boredom plague deep upon the land; and the other part of America went ape, and the motorcycles began to roar like lions across the land and all the beasts of all the buried history of America turned in their circuit and prepared to slink toward the market place, there to burn the mother's hair and bite the baby to the heart. One thought of America and one thought of aspirin, kitchen-commercials, and blood. One thought of Vietnam. And the important art in America became the art of the absurd.*

*There will be talk before this book is done of the nature of the art of the absurd, there will be perhaps even an attempt to explain it, but for now we have come to another explanation. For a good deal follows about the writing of contemporaries; there is criticism, some of it very critical. But then, good writing is not an act to excite tolerance because it is good, but anguish because it is not better. Who can swear there has not been something catastrophic to America in the failure of her novelists? Maybe we are the last liberators in the land, and if we continue to thrive on much less than our best, then the being of all of us may be deadened before we are done.*

*That is a statement which sups on the essence of extravagance, and yet it is the distance of the bridge to be built. It may be necessary that a communication of human experience, of the deepest and most unrecoverable human experience, must yet take place if we are to survive. Such at least is the covert opinion beneath the criticism which now follows.*



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A hook went into my nose, battered through the gate at the roof of the nostril, and plunged into my brain. Pieces, gobbets, and whole parts of the dead flesh of my mind were now brought out through one aperture of my nose, then the other.

Yet for all it hurt, I could have been made of small rocks and roots. I ached no more than the earth when a weed is pulled and comes up with its hairs tearing away from the clods of the soil. Pain is present, but as the small cry of the uprooted plant. So did the hooks, narrow in their curve, go up the nose, enter the head, and poke like blind fingers in a burrow to catch stuffs of the brain and pull them away. Now I felt like a rock wall at the base of which rakes are ripping, and was warm curiously as though sunlight were baking, but it was only the breath of the first embalmer, hot with wine and figs—how clear was the sense of smell!

Still, an enigma remained. How could my mind continue to think while they pulled my brain apart? They were certainly scooping chunks of material as lively as dry sponge through the dry tunnels of my nose, and I realized—for there was a flash in my cranium when the hook first entered—that one of my lights in the Land of the Dead had certainly stirred. Was it the Ba, the Khaibit or the Ka that was now helping me to think? And I gagged as a particularly caustic drug, some wretched mixture of lime and ash, was poured in by the embalmers to dissolve whatever might still be stuck to the inside of my skull.