

OF EARTH

POEMS

by Leonard Cohen

celebrated in his native Canada not only by fellow poets but by the large audiences that attend his readings. His poems are direct, often conversational in tone, witty, macabre, sensual. He is also the author of a novel, *The Favorite Game*. \$3.60

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A SMALL PUBLIC NOTICE

An American Dream has received the best and worst reviews of any book I've written. Now it is rumored that Elizabeth Hardwick has written a bad review for PR. I hasten to shudder. She is such a good writer. I also hasten

"For a good many years now Norman Mailer has been making a determined effort to exploit all the resources of literary and social outrageousness in order to impress himself in a major way on the life and thought of his time. . . . The fight he has carried on, has made almost superhuman demands on his will power and his courage; it has caused deep erosion of his ego, even at those moments when his ego has been most insufferably in evidence; and inevitably it has provoked him to follies and excesses which have done him and his work serious harm. . . .

One could sense in both *Barbary Shore* and *The Deer Park* that the main current of his energy was trying to go elsewhere. . . . Deep within those books one felt the pressure of something big growing, a vision or prophecy or simply a hatred that was perhaps too radical and disturbing to find embodiment in the conventional forms of the novel, perhaps too radical and disturbing even for Mailer himself. . . .

For a long time Mailer was driven to seek easy and sensational short cuts. . . . The essays seemed to be the only writing he

was able to do, and this struck many people as an open admission that he had at last decided he could not make it in an important way as a novelist. . . .

But it was obvious to many others that those essays contained some of the best writing Mailer had ever done, and that in them he appeared to be coming into possession of his true style, a style that combined the mean talk of the hipster and the edgy rhetoric of psychiatry into a prose instrument as effective as a switchblade. And it is this style, perfected in that bleak period of foiled prospects and compensatory bluster and brag, which Mailer has now in *An American Dream* been able to use for the first time in a novel, and use with a kind of confidence and power he has never before displayed. . . .

There will of course be readers who will feel that *An American Dream* represents not a breakthrough but the final stage of breakdown. For by conventional standards it must seem an unparadoxically ugly book, and taken in terms of its story—basically about a man who murders his wife and almost gets away with it—a grotesquely implausible book, full of horrific occurrences and char-

AN AMERICAN DREAM

BY NORMAN MAILER

to furnish her for company a review by John Aldridge which appeared in Life. I cannot pretend I was displeased to see it there, but I'm nearly as satisfied to see it here, cut only to fit the space, even if I pay for the pleasure.

acters who appear to be uniformly insane. But the events and people it concerns have nothing to do with its literary quality except perhaps to remind us that fiction in our day has become more and more creation, not of the realities we think we know, but of our fantasy life, the far more compelling realities which we occasionally dare to imagine. Seen in this way, the book can be recognized as a novel of the most advanced kind, a devil's encyclopedia of our secret visions and desires, an American dream or nightmare. . . .

The novel explores, in what will surely be called morbid and salacious detail, the possibilities, not for damnation, but for salvation to be found in some of the most reprehensible acts known to our society—murder, suicide, incest, fornication and physical violence. It dramatizes the various ways a man may sin in order to be saved, consort with Satan in order to attain to God, become holy as well as whole by restoring the primitive psychic circuits that enable him to live in harmony with himself and find his courage, regardless of whether his courage seeks its test in the challenges of love or the temptation to murder, whether he ends by becoming saint or

psychopath. It is, in short, a radically moral book about radically immoral subjects, a religious book that transcends the conventional limits of blasphemy to expose the struggle toward psychic redemption which is the daily warfare of our hidden outlaw selves. . . .

It is the expression of a devastatingly alive and original creative mind at work in a language capable of responding with seismic sensitivity to an enormously wide range of impressions. . . . In fact, it is possible to say that Mailer has developed a prose idiom of richer sensitivity to the exact condition of contemporary consciousness than any we have had in fiction since the best work of Faulkner. And he has managed through that idiom to create an image of our time which will undoubtedly stand as authoritative for this generation.

D. H. Lawrence once said that "the world doesn't fear a new idea. It can pigeonhole any idea. But it can't pigeonhole a real new experience." *An American Dream* is such a new experience. In fact, it may well represent the first significant step the current American novel has taken into fresh territories of the imagination."

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