

~~ontifications~~

P.T. file

~~LECTURE MATERIAL~~

PONTIFICATIONS

(use for Castle in Forest)

~~plus~~

~~lecture material~~

Pontifications

Original notes in black.

Second range of comments in red.

The ^{majority} ~~subset~~ of these notes belong to the
last part (the end-game (eg)) and to
the young Jensen Vienna. (YJ-V)

Third set are in green.

To be used
in the last
part of the book.

The majority of this
material will
reach for Vienna in
the late 20's and
Geli + the YJ photographs.

Dieter
on R.E.

PONTIFICATIONS

Green ink
2. indicate use for
pointing out

all they touch, trivial or major. Now I can't believe that Hip allows for such overriding notions and passions. For the hipster, the cool one, detail is illumined, livid, but for its own sake, unequalled by the sort of organization which novels demand. I wonder if such material can be put into fiction.

MAILER: I think it can; and not only that, but I think Hip is particularly illumined by one notion so central and so shattering that its religious resonances and reverberations are going to dominate this coming century. And I think there is one single burning pinpoint of the vision in Hip: it's that God is in danger of dying. In my very limited knowledge of theology, this never really has been expressed before. I believe Hip conceives of Man's fate being tied up with God's fate. God is no longer all-powerful.

STERN: Now that's a fantastic assertion. That really makes me sit up. What is the notion of God behind all this? Do you mean that some kind of personal god is dying with us?

D-essay

MAILER: Now I only talk about my own vision of it, really. I think that the particular God we can conceive of is a god whose relationship to the universe we cannot divine; that is, how enormous He is in the scheme of the universe we can't begin to say. But almost certainly, He is not all-powerful; He exists as a warring element in a divided universe, and we are a part of — perhaps the most important part of — His great expression, His enormous destiny; perhaps He is trying to impose upon the universe His conception of being against other conceptions of being very much opposed to His. Maybe we are in a sense the seed, the seed-carriers, the voyagers, the explorers, the embodiment of that embattled vision; maybe we are engaged in a heroic activity, and not a mean one.

STERN: This is really something.

MAILER: Well, I would say it is far more noble in its conception, far more arduous as a religious conception than the notion of the all-powerful God who takes care of us.

STERN: And do you take to this conception for its perilous nobility, or do you take to it because you believe in it?

MAILER: I believe in it.

STERN: You believe in it.

MAILER: It's the only thing that makes any sense to me. It's the only thing that explains to me the problem of evil. You see, the answer may well be — how to put it? — that God Himself is engaged in a destiny so extraordinary, so demanding, that He too can suffer

from a moral corruption, that He can make demands upon us which are unfair, that He can abuse our beings in order to achieve His means, even as we abuse the very cells of our own body.

STERN: Is it a person's duty to find out whether he's of God's party, whether he's working with God-beneficent or God-maleficent?

MAILER: Well, look, let's go back; let's go back to something much more modest for the moment which I think may tie this up, to a small extent, anyway. You asked me before why Hip is interesting for the novel. Well, up to now, when a novelist treats someone like a drug addict, the Square way is to treat the addict as a poor sociological cripple who is doomed and damned and goes down to his inevitable defeat. In Hip, which has after all to a certain extent come out of drug-taking (it's one of the elements in the growth of Hip) the attitude would be more that if taking drugs gives one extraordinary sensations, then the drug-taker is probably receiving something from God. Love perhaps. And perhaps he is. Let's just entertain the notion as a rational hypothesis which may or may not be true and let's see how far we go with it. If the hipster is receiving love from God he may well be draining some of the substance of God by calling upon this love, you see, which the drug releases. And in draining the substance of God he's exhausting Him, so that the drug-taker may be indulging an extraordinarily evil act at the instant he is filled with the feeling that he is full of God and good and a beautiful mystic. ~~This involves new moral complexities which I feel are far more interesting than anything the novel has gotten into yet.~~ It opens the possibility that the novel, along with many other art forms, may be growing into something larger rather than something smaller, and the sickness of our times for me has been just this damn thing that everything has been getting smaller and smaller and less and less important, that the romantic spirit has dried up, that there is almost no shame today like the terror before the romantic. We're all getting so mean and small and petty and ridiculous, and we all live under the threat of extermination. In contrast, the notions of Hip enlarge us, they make our small actions not necessarily large, but more meaningful. If we pick up a bottle while listening to some jazz and we feel each of our five fingertips in relation to the bottle, the bottle begins to have a kind of form for us and we begin to feel each of our fingertips is receiving a different thing from the shape and the structure of the glass, and we then begin to think that maybe the very structure of this glass could conceivably contain some kind of hell within its constitution, some inorganic frozen

Drug
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state of imprisoned being less being than us. I think it's a more interesting notion that just picking up a bottle and pouring out some whisky.

STERN: It's a very pretty notion.

MAILER: Hip is pretty.

STERN: But it's all action, it's all erectile, isn't it? It's all feeling and taste and touch and smell. Isn't that the trouble with it?

MAILER: The trouble is that it's enormously difficult to return to the senses. We're all civilized, and to return to the senses and keep the best parts of our civilized being, to keep our capacity for mental organization, for mental construction, for logic, is doubly difficult, and there's a great danger that the nihilism of Hip will destroy civilization. But it seems to me that the danger which is even more paramount—the danger which has brought on Hip—is that civilization is so strong itself, so divorced from the senses, that we have come to the point where we can liquidate millions of people in concentration camps by orderly process.

STERN: Every powerful and refining force involves danger and waste. Does this divorce from the senses you talk about justify cashing in two or three thousand years of continuous culture?

MAILER: Well, your argument is moot. It's too vast for this—for me. But let me try to put it this way. If the divorce from the senses I talk about is becoming a human condition, then by all means, yes, civilization must be cashed in or we will destroy ourselves in the cold insensate expressions of due process of law and atomic radiation.

STERN: All right, let's concentrate on what all this has to do with you as a practicing novelist. How are these notions going to work for you? The idea of art seems to me to be to generate emotion from the treated material, not to point out some material and some feeling and say, "Put them together, reader."

MAILER: Well, let me avoid answering you directly. I feel that the final purpose of art is to intensify, even, if necessary, to exacerbate, the moral consciousness of people. In particular, I think the novel is at its best the most moral of the art forms because it's the most immediate, the most overbearing, if you will. It is the most inescapable. Ideally, what I would hope to do with my work is intensify a consciousness that the core of life cannot be cheated. Every moment of one's existence one is growing into more or retreating into less. One is always living a little more or dying a little bit. That the choice is not to live a little more or to not live a

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the Syndicate, it has nothing to do with trustbusting, it has nothing to do with interstate commerce, it has nothing to do with anything but serving as a church for the mediocre. A high church for the true mediocre.

KRASSNER: In terms of the mass media being a force to which one subjects oneself more voluntarily than to the FBI, isn't it possible that the mass media which you call totalitarian are a reflection rather than a cause of this condition in society?

MAILER: A reflection of what people want? No, I don't think so. That's like saying that the United States Army was a reflection of what the soldiers wanted.

KRASSNER: But they were drafted —

MAILER: And you're not drafted — your eye is not *drafted* when you turn on that TV set? To assume that people are getting what they want through the mass media also assumes that the men and women who direct the mass media know something about the people. But they don't know anything about the people. That's why I gave you the example of the Army. The private exists in a world which is hermetically alienated from the larger aims of the generals who are planning the higher strategy of the war.

The mass media is made up of a group of people who are looking for power. The reason is not because they have any moral sense, any inner sense of a goal, of an ideal that's worth fighting for, dying for, if one is brave enough. No, the reason they want power is because power is the only thing that will relieve the profound illness which has seized them. Which has seized all of us. The illness of the twentieth century. There isn't psychic room for all of us. Malthus's law has moved from the excessive procreation of bodies to the excessive mediocrization of psyches. The deaths don't occur on the battlefield any longer, or through malnutrition: they occur within the brain, within the psyche itself.

KRASSNER: To change the subject: Several months ago I mentioned, in order to make a very definite point, a Cuban prostitute — this was the first prostitute I'd ever gone to, and I had been asking her all these questions about the Revolution — and she stopped later in the middle of fellatio to ask me if I was a Communist.

MAILER: You were in Cuba at the time?

KRASSNER: Yes. And she was anti-Castro.

MAILER: Because he was cleaning them out of the whorehouses?

KRASSNER: Well, there were no more tourists coming to Cuba, and

1966
D.T. on
The
media
(Elaine)

Power
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KRASSNER: No, not in my case. It didn't change me one way or the other, writing it. I just wanted to put it into the consciousness of the reader. That's not therapy for me.

MAILER: Well, then you should've said, "She was sucking my cock." I mean that's my professional opinion.

KRASSNER: If you were a future historian of sex, how would you look upon the Kennedy administration?

MAILER: I'd say there's more acceptance of sexuality in America today than there was before he came in. Whether that's good or bad, I don't know. It may be a promiscuous acceptance of sexuality.

KRASSNER: Are you saying it's because of...?

MAILER: Because of Kennedy — *absolutely*. I mean, just think of going to a party given by Eisenhower as opposed to a party thrown by Kennedy. Do you have to wonder at which party you'd have a better time?

The average man daydreams about his leader. He thinks of being invited to his leader's home. If he thinks of being invited to Eisenhower's home, he thinks of how proper he's going to be. If he thinks of going to the Kennedys for a party, he thinks of having a dance with Jackie. Things liven up.

Why do you think people loved Hitler in Germany? Because they all secretly wished to get hysterical and *stomp* on things and scream and shout and rip things up and *kill* — tear people apart. Hitler pretended to offer them that. In some subtle way, he communicated it. That's why they wanted him. That's why he was good for Germany — they wanted such horror. Of course, by the end he didn't tear people apart, he gassed them.

If America gets as sick as Germany was before Hitler came in, we'll have our Hitler. One way or another, we'll have our Hitler. After all, one can have Fascism come in any form at all, through the Church, through sex, through social welfare, through state conservatism, through organized medicine, the FBI, the Pentagon. Fascism is not a philosophy but a murderous mode of deadening reality by smothering it with lies.

Every time one sees a bad television show, one is watching the nation get ready for the day when a Hitler will come. Not because the ideology of the show is Fascistic; on the contrary its manifest ideology is invariably liberal, but the show still prepares Fascism because it is meretricious art and so sickens people a little further. Whenever people get collectively sick,

*Hitler
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the remedy becomes progressively more violent and hideous. An insidious, insipid sickness demands a violent far-reaching purgative.

KRASSNER: Then you're saying it's bad times which result in bad leaders.

MAILER: Well, if a time is bad enough, a good man can't possibly succeed. In a bad time, the desires of the multitude are bad, they're low, they're ugly, they're greedy, they're cowardly, they're piggish, shitty.

KRASSNER: In *The Naked and the Dead*, there was a theme about the futility of violence on a grand scale; and yet, in "The White Negro," there's almost a justification of violence, at least on a personal level. How do you reconcile this apparent inconsistency?

MAILER: What I still disapprove of is *inhuman* violence — violence which is on a large scale and abstract. I disapprove of bombing a city. I disapprove of the kind of man who will derive aesthetic satisfaction from the fact that an Ethiopian village looks like a red rose at the moment the bombs are exploding. I won't disapprove of the act of perception which witnesses that; I think that act of perception is — I'm going to use the word again — noble.

What I'm getting at is: a native village is bombed, and the bombs happen to be beautiful when they land; in fact it would be odd if all that sudden destruction did not liberate some beauty. The form a bomb takes in its explosion may be in part a picture of the potentialities it destroyed. So let us accept the idea that the bomb is beautiful.

If so, any liberal who decries the act of bombing is totalitarian if he doesn't admit as well that the bombs were indeed beautiful.

Because the moment we tell something that's untrue, it does not matter how pure our motives may be — the moment we start mothering mankind and decide that one truth is good for them to hear and another is not so good, because while *we* can understand, those poor ignorant unfortunates cannot — then what are we doing, we're depriving the minds of others of knowledge which may be essential.

Think of a young pilot who comes along later, some young pilot who goes out on a mission and isn't prepared for the fact that a bombing might be beautiful; he could conceivably be an idealist, there were some in the war against Fascism. If the pilot is totally unprepared he might never get over the fact that he was particularly thrilled by the beauty of that bomb.

But if our culture had been large enough to say that Ciano's son-in-law not only found that bomb beautiful, but that indeed

this act of perception think that this beauty who were wiped out destruction, there's

KRASSNER: Do you comes to masturbate?

MAILER: I think ma-

KRASSNER: In relation

MAILER: In relation style, to stance, to bation cripples perception turns them askew. mean has anyone smoking and mas- cence masturbating sense of being a n- s-er is — sex for really don't know.

KRASSNER: Is it possible masturbation?

MAILER: I wouldn't bly I would even masturbate. But I

KRASSNER: Well, we solutes. You know of beauty —

MAILER: To what end it?

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MAILER: All right, lo- you or bad in you, ally. I'm not interestism of it, nor in forth, and what ps-

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this act of perception was *not* what was wrong; the evil was to think that this beauty was worth the lot of living helpless people who were wiped out broadside. Obviously, whenever there's destruction, there's going to be beauty implicit in it.

KRASSNER: Do you think you're something of a puritan when it comes to masturbation?

MAILER: I think masturbation is bad.

KRASSNER: In relation to heterosexual fulfillment?

MAILER: In relation to everything — orgasm, heterosexuality, to style, to stance, to be able to fight the good fight. I think masturbation cripples people. It doesn't cripple them altogether, but it turns them askew, it sets up a bad and often enduring tension. I mean has anyone ever studied the correlation between cigarette smoking and masturbation? Anybody who spends his adolescence masturbating, generally enters his young manhood with no sense of being a man. The answer — I don't know what the answer is — sex for adolescents may be the answer, it may not. I really don't know.

KRASSNER: Is it possible that you have a totalitarian attitude against masturbation?

MAILER: I wouldn't say all people who masturbate are evil, probably I would even say that some of the best people in the world masturbate. But I am saying it's a miserable activity.

KRASSNER: Well, we're getting right back now to this notion of absolutes. You know — to somebody, masturbation can be a thing of beauty —

MAILER: To what end? To what end? Who is going to benefit from it?

KRASSNER: It's a better end than the beauty of a bombing.

MAILER: Masturbation is bombing. It's bombing oneself.

KRASSNER: I think there's a basic flaw in your argument. Why are you assuming that masturbation is violence unto oneself? Why is it not pleasure unto oneself? And I'm not defending masturbation — well, I'm defending masturbation, yes, as a substitute if and when —

MAILER: All right, look. When you make love, ~~whatever is good in you or bad in you, goes out into someone else.~~ I mean this literally. I'm not interested in the biochemistry of it, the electromagnetism of it, ~~nor in how the psychic waves are passed back and forth, and what psychic waves are.~~ All I know is that when one

makes love, one changes a woman slightly and a woman changes you slightly.

KRASSNER: Certain circumstances can change one for the worse.

MAILER: But at least you have gone through a process which is part of life. One can be better for the experience, or worse. But one has experience to absorb, to think about, one has literally to digest the new spirit which has entered the flesh. The body has been galvanized for an experience of flesh, a declaration of the flesh.

If one has the courage to think about every aspect of the act — I don't mean think mechanically about it, but if one is able to brood over the act, to dwell on it — then one is *changed* by the act. Even if one has been *jangled* by the act. Because in the act of restoring one's harmony, one has to encounter all the reasons one was jangled.

So finally one has had an experience which is nourishing. Nourishing because one's able to *feel* one's way into more difficult or more precious insights as a result of it. One's able to live a tougher, more heroic life if one can digest and absorb the experience.

But, if one masturbates, all that happens is, everything that's beautiful and good in one, goes up the hand, goes into the air, is *lost*. Now what the hell is there to *absorb*? One hasn't tested himself. You see, in a way, the heterosexual act lays questions to rest, and makes one able to build upon a few answers. Whereas if one masturbates, the ability to contemplate one's experience is disturbed. Instead, fantasies of power take over and disturb all sleep.

If one has, for example, the image of a beautiful sexy babe in masturbation, one still doesn't know whether one can make love to her in the flesh. All you know is that you can violate her in your *brain*. Well, a lot of good that is.

But if one has fought the good fight or the evil fight and ended with the beautiful sexy dame, then if the experience is good, your life is changed by it, in a less happy way. But at least one knows something of what happened. One has something real to build on.

The ultimate direction of masturbation always has to be insanity.

KRASSNER: But you're not man enough to take the other position, which is sex for the young. Except for petting, what else is there between those two alternatives?

MAILER: I'd say, between masturbation and sex for the young, I prefer sex for the young. Of course. But I think there may be still a

third alternative for every not a value. It with the bathrobe, giggly.

The thought young my parents ever discussed single most important what one does when I was young.

The possibility of homosexual sex, fourth alternative, absurd. It's pro-chastity today.

But the fact you're young, with that marvelous down the drain a baby; the most shot into a diaper one's future.

The point is and rational approach is the most common.

KRASSNER: Well, or-less rational: my individual becomes, the most common.

MAILER: You know from a group that.

KRASSNER: I've never.

MAILER: No, I know centers — they one's vocabulary.

KRASSNER: But I, that means what.

MAILER: Selective the selecting? I myself, but surely you won't pick.

masturbation

KRASSNER: Exactly. It's arrogant, but —

MAILER: Yeah, yeah, yeah — but the fact that one girl wants you and the other girl *doesn't* — I mean, that has nothing to do with it?

KRASSNER: Well, they have a right to be selective, too.

MAILER: Then it's mutually selective.

KRASSNER: Well, what I'm saying is you make a choice. A human choice. It has nothing to do with a machine . . . I'll tell you what's bugging me — it's your mystical approach. You'll use an expression like "You may be sending the best baby that's in you out into your hand" — but even when you're having intercourse, how many unused spermatozoa will there be in one ejaculation of semen?

MAILER: Look, America is dominated by a bunch of half-maniacal scientists, men who don't know anything about the act of creation. If science comes along and says there are one million spermatozoa in a discharge, you reason on that basis. That may not be a real basis.

We just don't know what the *real* is. We just don't know. Of the million spermatozoa, there may be only two or three with any real chance of reaching the ovum; the others are there like a supporting army, or if we're talking of planned parenthood, as a body of the electorate. These sperm go out with no sense at all of being real spermatozoa. They may appear to be real spermatozoa under the microscope, but after all, a man from Mars who's looking at us through a telescope might think that Communist bureaucrats and FBI men look exactly the same.

KRASSNER: Well, they are.

MAILER: Krassner's jab piles up more points. The point is that the scientists don't know what's going on. That meeting of the ovum and the sperm is too mysterious for the laboratory. Even the electron microscope can't measure the striations of passion in a spermatozoon. Or the force of its will.

But we can trust our emotion. Our emotions are a better guide to what goes on in these matters than scientists.

Sooner or later, every man comes close to his being and realizes that even though he's using the act, the act is using him too. He becomes, as you say, more selective. The reason he becomes more selective is that you can get killed, you literally *can* fuck your head off, you can lose your brains, you can wreck your body, you can use yourself up badly, eternally — I know a little bit of what I'm talking about.

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D.T. on
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KRASSNER: In his book *Nobody Knows My Name*, James Baldwin — referring to your essay "The White Negro" — complained about "the myth of the sexuality of Negroes which Norman Mailer, like so many others, refuses to give up." Are you still denying it's a myth?

MAILER: I don't believe it's a myth at all, for any numbers of reasons. I think that *any* submerged class is going to be more accustomed to sexuality than a leisure class. A leisure class may be more *preoccupied* with sexuality; but a submerged class is going to be more drenched in it.

You see, the upper classes are obsessed with sex, but they contain very little of it themselves. They use up much too much sex in their manipulations of power. In effect, they exchange sex for power. They restrict themselves in their sexuality — whereas the submerged classes have to take their desires for power and plow them back into sex.

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So, to begin with, there's just that much more sexual vitality at the bottom than there is at the top. Second of all, the Negroes come from Africa, which is more or less a tropical land. It's easier to cohabit, it's easier to stay alive. If there's more time, more leisure, more warmth, more — we'll use one of those machine words — more support-from-the-environment than there is in a Northern country, then sex will tend to be more luxuriant.

Northern countries try to build civilizations and tropical countries seek to proliferate *being*.

Besides, the Negro has been all but forbidden any sort of intellectual occupation here for a couple of centuries. So he has had to learn other ways of comprehending modern life. There are two ways one can get along in the world. One can get along by studying books, or one can get along by knowing a great deal about one's fellow man, and one's fellow man's woman.

Sexuality is the armature of Negro life. Without sexuality they would've perished. The Jews stayed alive by having a culture to which they could refer, in which, more or less, they could believe. The Negroes stayed alive by having sexuality which could nourish them, keep them warm.

KRASSNER: Would you say that your conception of life is mystical as opposed to rationalistic?

MAILER: I don't like to call myself a mystic. On the other hand, I certainly wouldn't classify myself as a rationalist. I'm not altogether unhappy living in some no-man's-land between the two.

Talking of Violence

An Interview with W. J. Weatherby



W. J. WEATHERBY: People use "violence" — like "love" — in so many, often conflicting ways. Would you like to start by giving your own definition?

NORMAN MAILER: Well, it seems to me there are two kinds of violence and they are altogether different. One is personal violence — an act of violence by man or woman against other men or women. The second kind is social violence — concentration camps, nuclear warfare. If one wants to carry the notion far enough, there are subtler forms such as censorship, or excessively organized piety, or charity drives. Social violence creates personal violence as its antithesis. A juvenile delinquent is violent not because his parents were necessarily violent to him nor even because society is directly violent to him — he's not, let's say, beaten in school — but because his spontaneous expressions are cut off by institutional deadenings of his nature. The boy who lives in a housing project is more likely to be violent than the same boy living in a slum tenement because the housing project puts him in direct contact with a deadening environment. The housing project is not a neighborhood but a massive barracks.

The end game
Violence is directly proportional to the power to deaden one's mood which is possessed by the environment. Threatened with the extinction of our possibilities, we react with chronic rage. Violence begins, you see, as the desire to fight one's way out of a trap. Moral questions over the nature of one's violence come only

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WEATHERBY: Is ence?

MAILER: It's not course he is — perience, which you don't know whether you're or rejected, the periences which

as a secondary matter. The first reaction, the heart of the violence, is the protection of the self. The second question, the moral question, is whether the self deserves to be protected, that is to say — was it honorable to fight? was the danger true? For example, if a boy beats up an old woman, he may be protecting himself by discharging a rage which would destroy his body if it were left to work on the cells, so he takes it out on the old woman. The boy may be anything from a brute to Raskolnikov. It requires an exquisite sense of context and a subtle gift as a moralist to decide these matters at times. Mexicans have a saying that when you commit murder, you carry the dead man's soul on your back, and you have to work not only for one soul then, but for two.

It does seem more or less self-evident that men who have lived a great deal with violence are usually gentler and more tolerant than men who abhor it. Boxers, bullfighters, a lot of combat soldiers, Hemingway heroes, in short, are almost always gentle men. It is not because they have read Hemingway. They were gentle long before Hemingway was born. It is just that Hemingway was the first writer who observed the repetition of this fact and paid his profound respects to it.

I think the reason is that men who are otherwise serious but ready for personal violence, are almost always religious. They have a deep sense of dread, responsibility, of woe, of reluctance to make an error in violence and a grim, almost tragic sense of how far violence can carry them. If I think of the athletes, criminals, prizefighters I have known, and the Negroes living in Harlem (their lives have much in common with precisely athletes, criminals, and prizefighters), they all have an understanding of life which is comprehensive and often tragic. It is of course deadeningly void of any kind of culture that could sustain them in their more boring times, but they do have a specific gravity and a depth of compassion which one doesn't find in their social opposite, the university-trained intellectual.

WEATHERBY: Is he protected too much from this kind of experience?

MAILER: It's not that he is protected from violence — although of course he is — so much as he is not in contact with existential experience, which is to say experience sufficiently unusual so that you don't know how it is going to turn out. You don't know whether you're going to be dead or alive at the end of it, wanted or rejected, cheered or derided. Now obviously there are few experiences which can by these rigorous terms be called existential.

*D.T. pondering
the motives
of the Source.*

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*Good-
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But the hoodlum is more likely to encounter existential experience than the university man.

Something happens in an act of violence which is beyond one's measure. If a bully is beating up a friend who is smaller than himself and knows precisely the point at which he is going to quit, that's not really an act of violence. That's simply excretion. That's why we despise the bully. But when violence is larger than one's ability to dominate, it is existential and one is living in an instantaneous world of revelations. The saint and the psychopath share the same kind of experience. It is just that the saint has the mysterious virtue of being able to transcend this experience and the psychopath is broken or made murderous.

WEATHERBY: How does this view of violence relate to our own time?

MAILER: I wouldn't call the twentieth century a violent period so far as personal violence goes. It is a time of plague. When people sense pestilence is upon them, however, they tend to be violent. The powerful impulse of the twentieth century has been to defeat this tendency by elaborate social institutions which destroy the possibility of personal violence before it can have a free expression. If individual feelings are discouraged at every turn and social irritations are blanketed by benefits and welfare programs, then the desire to reach towards one's own individual feelings as a solution becomes stupefied.

End game

The impulse of the twentieth century seems to be a desire to make society run on rails. Anything may be tolerated, even Communism, provided that the dialectic is squeezed out of our nature.

D.T.

The very materials of our world suffocate us everywhere. A perfect material example — the technological signature of the twentieth century — is plastics: materials without any grain, any organic substance, any natural color or predictability. Yet reasonable predictability, after all, is the armature on which great societies in the past have been built. Plastic, however, cracks in two for no reason whatsoever. It bears up under killing punishments and then suddenly explodes in the night. A fiberglass hull can go through storms which would spring a leak in a wooden hull. Then, one day, in a modest squall, the fiberglass splits completely. Or abruptly capsizes. That is because it is a material which is not even divorced from nature but indeed has not ever been a part of nature. Plastic is the perfect metaphor for twentieth-century man and for the curious stupefying bewildering nature of much modern violence.

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Violence relate to our own

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is squeezed out of our nature. A psychological signature of the twentieth century without any grain, any texture or predictability. Yet reason is the armature on which great society is built. Plastic, however, cracks in two under killing punishments at night. A fiberglass hull can go on for a leak in a wooden hull. In all, the fiberglass splits completely because it is a material nature but indeed has not ever been the perfect metaphor for twentieth century stupefying bewildering na-

Our obsession with violence comes, I think, not because its daily incidence is so high but because we are suffocated and so think constantly of violence. Can one argue seriously that our streets are less safe to walk on than the streets of Paris in 1300? Or Naples in 1644? But the twentieth century, in destroying a romantic view of existence, has created an awareness of violence as electric as paranoia.

WEATHERBY: Does this apply in the arts, too?

MAILER: There was a time when an artist could feel respectable about being a naturalist. Zola, Ibsen, Shaw were heroes. So were De Maupassant, Dreiser, Farrell. The natural work of a good artist is to try to write or discover what it is all about. Realism was a way of moving into this mystery just as manners was a way. Now, violence appeals to the artist because it is the least tangible, the least explored frontier. It's exceptionally difficult to write about.

WEATHERBY: Because it so easily becomes melodrama?

MAILER: It is difficult to write about violence because — like love — while you are experiencing it, you can't observe it. You lose your professional consciousness. Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty is in the wings: If you observe an action, the action is affected by the observation. Now, perhaps such emotions as love can be recorded truly — one's memory returns the truth. One can remember in entirety meeting a woman whom one was once in love with, and so be able to write about it. A number of sentimental memories can be recorded truly. An act of violence, however, cannot be recorded truly because the action did not create a mood but shattered a series of moods. So to write about violence is always an act of creation. One must make up an act of violence in order to write about it.

The marvelous thing Hemingway did at his best was to show that the only way to begin to write about half the important matters on earth was to create the mood or the destruction of mood in which they occurred rather than try to establish the truth of the event. It is possible that his years as a reporter inspired him with a passion for such emotional accuracy since he knew that the onerous duty of a journalist is to replace the mood by the fact and so create one kind of history, a fictional history, in opposition to the violent — that is, palpable — actuality of the event.

Vices

An Interview with Paul Carroll, from Playboy

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PLAYBOY: We're reminded of your sentence in *The Deer Park* about growth: "There was that law of life, so cruel and so just, that one must grow or else pay more for remaining the same." Yet you've been charged by many critics with dissipating the potential growth of a major talent in American fiction by wearing so many hats. They point out that there's Mailer the politician; there's Mailer the journalist, who writes about the maladies in American life and about the political brutalities; there's Mailer the celebrity, who grabs headlines by booze brawls and other acts of public violence. How do you answer that criticism?

NORMAN MAILER: Moving from one activity to another makes sense if you do it with a hint of wit or a touch of grace — which I don't say I've always done; far from it — but I think moving from one activity to another can give momentum. If you do it well, you can increase the energy you bring to the next piece of work.

I've been accused of having frittered many talents away, of having taken on too many activities, of having worked too self-consciously at being a celebrity, of having performed at the edges and, indeed, at the center of my own public legend. And, of course, like any criminal. I'm my own best lawyer; the day I'm not will be a sad day. The defense I'll enter today depends on my favorite notion: that an expert, by definition, is opposed to growth. Why? Because an expert is a man who works forward in one direction until he reaches that point where he has to use all

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his energy to maintain his advance; he cannot allow himself to look in other directions. In other words, he's become nearsighted. Now, I, as a man who's been nearsighted almost all of his life, know that anyone who's born nearsighted or becomes nearsighted early is a man become an expert prematurely. That's why kids with glasses are usually disliked by kids who don't wear glasses. The kids with good eyesight sense that the boy with glasses is an expert who's going to run the world. The first chronic personal shame I suppose I ever felt was having to wear glasses. And I don't wear them today, even though I'm so nearsighted I don't recognize old friends from ten feet away. Having been a premature expert myself, I think I may have reacted against it with a sense that expertise was the trap for me, that to get particularly good at any one thing would leave me top-heavy.

PLAYBOY: One of your celebrated experiments with growth was your experience with drugs. You were on marijuana, Benzedrine, and sleeping pills for a few years and were addicted to Seconal. Later, you said that a man on drugs will pay for it by "a gutted and burned-out nervous system." How do you feel about that topic today?

MAILER: Drugs are a spiritual form of gambling. This is a poetic equation that can be carried right down to the end of its metaphor, because on drugs you're even bucking the house percentage — which for a drug like marijuana is probably something like 30 or 40 percent.

PLAYBOY: Would you expand this?

MAILER: Marijuana does something with the sense of time: it accelerates you; it opens you to your unconscious. But it's as if you're calling on the reserves of the next three days. All the sweets, all the crystals, all the little decisions, all the unconscious work of the next three days — or, if the experience is deep, part of the next thirty days, or the next thirty years — is called forward. For a half hour or two hours — whatever is the high of the pot — you're better than you are normally and you get into situations you wouldn't get into normally, and generally more happens to you. You make love better, you talk better, you think better, you dig people better. The point is, you've got to get in pretty far, because you're using up three days in an hour — or whatever the particular ratio is for any particular person. So unless you come back with — let us say — seventy-two hours in one hour, you lose. Because you have to spend the next three or four days recovering. You might ask: What happens to the guy who smokes all the

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time? I don't know. But I do know something is being mortgaged; something is being drawn out of the future. If his own future has already been used up in one or another mysterious or sinister sense, then maybe the pot is drawing it out of the very substance of what I may as well confess I call God. I suspect God feeds drug addicts the way a healthy body feeds parasites.

PLAYBOY: How do you mean?

MAILER: Well, if God has great compassion, He may not be willing to cut the drug addict off from Him. During the time the addict has some of his most intense and divine experiences, it is because he is literally imbibing the very marrow and nutrient of existence. But since I do not believe that God is necessarily inexhaustible, the drug addict may end up by bleeding Him.

PLAYBOY: Do you think this happens on LSD?

MAILER: I don't think you have a mystical experience on chemicals without taking the risk of exploiting something in the creation. If you haven't paid the real wages of love or courage or abstention or discipline or sacrifice or wit in the eye of danger, then taking a psychedelic drug is living the life of a parasite; it's drawing on sweets you have not earned.

PLAYBOY: What is the danger of this parasitical self-exploitation on LSD?

MAILER: I'm not going to say that LSD is bad in every way for everyone, but I'm convinced it's bad if you keep taking it. Any drug is bad finally in the same way that being a confirmed gambler is bad. A confirmed gambler ends up losing all his friends because he blows their money and blows their trust. A gambler will tell any lie to get back into the action. By the same token, if you stay on any drug for too long, then you have a habit; you're a victim; to anticipate something, you're a totalitarian.

Let me put it this way: LSD is marvelous for experts to take when they get too frozen in their expertise. Let's suppose they've driven deep into something impenetrable, some obstacle that was bound to trap them because of the shortsighted nature of their expertise. Although they work and work manfully as experts, at this point they're similar to soldiers who have pushed far into enemy territory but are now up against a resistance they cannot get through. Their only action is to retreat, but they don't know how to, because they have no habits of retreat. They're experts; they know only how to move forward to amass more knowledge and put more concentration upon a point. When this concentration does not succeed in poking through the resistance of the

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problem, the expert is psychically in great trouble. He begins to live in increasing depression; he has to retreat and doesn't know how: he wasn't built to retreat.

My guess is: On LSD, you begin to die a little. That's why you get this extraordinary, even divine sense of revelation. Perhaps you taste the essence of your own death in the trip; in excess, it's a deadly poison, after all. Therefore, what's given to the expert is a broader vision: dying a little, he begins to retreat from his expertise and begins to rejoin his backward brothers. So that LSD taken a few times could be very good, I would imagine. But before very long, if the expert keeps taking LSD, he can become nothing but an expert on LSD.

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PLAYBOY: What do you think of Timothy Leary?

MAILER: Well, I wonder who we were just talking about.

PLAYBOY: More of an answer, please.

MAILER: I never met him. Perhaps I'd like him if I did. Many of my friends like him. But I have heard him speak, and he is then naught but simple shit.

PLAYBOY: Alcohol seems to be another way by which you've tried to grow or "move forward." One of the characters in your stage version of *The Deer Park* declares: "A man must drink until he locates the truth." How does alcohol help a man do that?

MAILER: A man who drinks is attempting to dissolve an obsession.

PLAYBOY: What's the obsession?

MAILER: Talk first about what *an* obsession is. I've thought about obsession a great deal, but I'm not sure I know the answer. Everybody speaks of obsessions; nobody's ever really explained them. We can define them, but we don't really know what we're talking about. An obsession, I'd like to suggest, is not unlike a pole of magnetism, a psychic field of force. An obsession is created, I think, in the wake of some event that has altered our life profoundly, or perhaps we have passed through some relation with someone else that has altered our life drastically, yet we don't know whether we were changed for good or for bad; it's the most fundamental sort of event or relation. It has marked us, yet it's morally ambiguous.

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PLAYBOY: What kind of event?

MAILER: Suppose a marriage breaks up. You don't know if it was finally your fault or your wife's fault. People move forward into the future out of the way they comprehend the past. When we don't understand our past, we are therefore crippled. Use the metaphor

of the Army here: If you move forward to attack a town and the center of this attack depends upon a road that will feed your attack, and this road passes through a town, yet you don't know if your people hold it or someone else does, then obviously, if you were a general, you'd be pretty obsessive about that town. You'd keep asking, "Will you please find out who is there?" You'd send out reconnaissance parties to locate the town, enter it, patrol it. If all sorts of mysterious things occurred — if, for example, your reconnaissance platoon didn't return — you'd feel so uncertain you might not move forward to attack. The obsession is a search for a useful reality. What finally did occur? What is real? ✓

PLAYBOY: You haven't told us yet how drink helps dissolve an obsession.

MAILER: Well, if a man's drink takes him back to an earlier, younger state of sensitivity, it is then taking him to a place back of the place where he originally got into the impasse that created the obsession. If you can return to a state just preceding the one you were in when these various ambiguous events occurred, you can say to yourself, "Now, I'm approaching the event again. What really did happen? Who was right? Who was wrong? Let me not miss it this time." A man must drink until he locates the truth. I think that's why it's so hard for people to give up booze. There's an artwork going on with most serious drinkers. Usually, it's a failed artwork. Once again, one's playing against the house percentage: one drinks, one wrecks one's liver, dims one's vision, burns out one's memory. Drinking is a serious activity — a serious moral and spiritual activity. We consume ourselves in order to search for a truth.

PLAYBOY: Do you feel that you've experienced moments of truth through drink?

MAILER: Extraordinary moments.

PLAYBOY: What sort of thing did you discover?

MAILER: Whatever the truth was. The kind of truths you find in moments like that. Discovering that somebody you thought loved you, hated you, or vice versa. All I'm underlining is that sense of certainty we all know when past moments of ambiguity are resolved. A relationship alters in one's memory from a morass to a crystal of recollection.

PLAYBOY: You've made in *An American Dream* and other writings a brilliant, dazzling, and rather puzzling remark concerning the possibility that God Himself may be involved in a process of

growth. You've said "He exists," and you've said "God whose final nature is himself. Could you co-

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growth. You've said that you have an "obsession with how God exists," and you've argued for the possibility that He may be a God whose final nature is not yet comprehended, even by Himself. Could you comment on this?

MAILER: I think I decided some time ago that if there is a God and He's all-powerful, then His relation to us is absurd. All we can see in our human condition are thundering, monumental disproportions, injustices of such dimension that even the conservative notion of existence — which might postulate that man is here on earth not to complain but to receive his just deserts and that the man who acts piggishly on earth will be repaid in hell, regardless of whether he was rich or poor — yes, even this conservative vision depends on a God who is able to run a world of reasonable proportions. If the only world we have is one of abysmal, idiotic disproportions, then it becomes too difficult to conceive of an all-powerful God who is all good. It is far easier to conceive of a God who died, or who is dying, or who is an imperfect God. But once I begin to think of an imperfect God, I can imagine a Being greater than ourselves, who nonetheless shares His instinctive logic with us. We as men seek to grow, so He seeks to grow. Even as we each have a conception of being — my idea of how we should live may triumph over yours, or yours over mine — so, in parallel, this God may be engaged in a similar war in the universe with other gods. We may even be the embodiment, the expression of His vision. If we fail, He fails, too. He is imperfect in the way we are imperfect. He is not always as brave or extraordinary or as graceful as He might care to be. This is my notion of God and growth. What gives me sustenance is that it enables me to love God, if you will bear these words, rather than hate Him, because I can see Him as someone who is like other men and myself, except more noble, more tortured, more desirous of a good that He wishes to receive and give to others — a torturous ethical activity at which He may fail. Man's condition is, then, by this logic, epic or tragic — for the outcome is unknown. It is not written.

PLAYBOY: Could you talk a bit more about the relationship between a man and this God who is still involved in discovering His own nature?

MAILER: In capsule: There are times when He has to exploit us; there are times when we have to exploit Him; there are times when He has to drive us beyond our own natural depth because He needs us — those of us, at least, who are working for Him: We have yet to talk of the Devil.

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PLAYBOY: You said recently that maybe the Devil is God in exile. What did you mean?

MAILER: I don't know if the Devil is finally an evil principle of God — a fallen angel, a prince of darkness, Lucifer — a creature of the first dimension engaged in a tragic, monumental war with God, or whether the Devil is a species of nonexistence, like plastic. By which I mean every single pervasive substance in the technological world that comes from artificial synthesis rather than from nature. Plastic surfaces have no resonance — no echo of nature. I don't know if plastic is a second principle of evil just as much opposed to the Devil as it is opposed to God — a visitor from a small planet, if you will. So when I talk about the Devil these days, I don't really know whether I'm talking about a corrupter of the soul or a deadening influence. I don't know who or where the enemy is. In fact, I don't have the remotest notion of who or what I'm working for. That's despair.

PLAYBOY: Existential is a term that crops up frequently in your writing: existential God, existential politician. In what way was Kennedy an existential politician?

MAILER: Kennedy was a man who could define himself — or, in other words, comprehend himself — only by his actions. He had such extraordinary ambition that if he had not succeeded in being President, he might have ended up a bad piece of work. There is such a thing as a man starting as a bad piece of work because he has a nature that is extraordinarily disharmonious; he lives with unendurable ambitions. If he succeeds in what the psychoanalysts call "acting it out" — with some scorn they say "acting out" — the fact remains that he also has to have huge courage, high wit, and vast imagination. Kennedy succeeded in getting to play the one role that could allow him to realize himself: the President of the United States. When I call him an existential politician, I mean that Kennedy had no nature other than the particular nature he discovered in himself by the act of living. If he had tried to live a more conventional life, he would have sealed his psyche in a vault and probably have died young and schizophrenic.

PLAYBOY: How do you feel about Johnson's Great Society?

MAILER: It's a comedy. The Great Society is not only not going to come into being but it shouldn't. It's artificial. Any time you find a great society developed from the top, what you've got, in effect, is a test-tube baby — artificial insemination of the worst sort. Let's say the Great Society is drug addiction on a huge political scale. It's similar to shooting B₁₂ complex into your butt. The pa-

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tient may feel healthier for a while, but the fact of the matter is that his ass has been violated. The flesh has been visited abruptly by a tubular needle that punctures skin, rips delicate strands of muscle, and cuts holes in a vein wall. To what end? The body doesn't understand. If you're in a fight and get hit, your body can usually understand that: it was probably mobilized for action. But what action are you mobilized for when a needle goes into your flesh? The same thing happens, I think, with economic growth.

Take housing projects. I see no reason to come in with these tremendous urban-renewal jobs that are unspeakably ugly and tear up neighborhoods; they are like metal plates put in your head or plastic tubes stuck in your gut. These projects disrupt a neighborhood. Instead, some of these tenements could be saved. You might have a scheme where a man could start by being given one hundred dollars' worth of materials — I use the figure arbitrarily — and a little professional labor, and he could set out to improve his apartment: plaster a wall, this or that; say his wife will be in on it. He's working for his own apartment. If he goes out and drinks up the money, all right, he drank it up and presumably he won't get anymore. His neighbors might lean on him. Not lean on him hard, probably, because if he's the guy who drank it up he's possibly the meanest guy in the house. Still, what you get this way is a house interested in itself; whereas the other way, housing projects, poverty programs, Great Society — any Negro who doesn't set out to exploit the white man who is giving him money is nothing but a fool. With such handouts, honor for the Negro becomes his ability to lie, cheat, and exploit the white man. Whereas a few thousand dollars given bit by bit to a man working very hard on his own apartment over a few years would obviously do much more for that apartment than twenty thousand dollars spent to renovate it by outside methods.

PLAYBOY: Prior to the riots in Newark and Detroit, you said that civil war would erupt soon in this country. Did you see it as happening between Negroes and whites?

MAILER: I think there's a tendency toward civil war — not a war in the sense of people shooting it out over the hills and on battle lines; but certain kinds of functions might cease to exist in this society — technological functions. It may be that people will lose the habit of depending on the subway to get to work, or people might lose the real possibility of driving into certain cities at certain hours of the day or night. What might happen would be

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scattered outbreaks of violence: people, for example, overturning cars in traffic jams. All sorts of things — products getting worse and worse, shoddiness at the center of production, breakdowns, fissures. *On the real cost going up*

PLAYBOY: How much of this will be the result of what you've often and passionately condemned as our technological society?

MAILER: Oh, much of it. Most of it, perhaps. Another great part of the tendency toward violence might derive from our guilt of the past: we've never paid for the crimes of the past, now we're trying to bury them. *eg* That's one reason the technological society advances at such a great rate: it frees people from having to look back into the horrors of the past. Western man has never faced up to the slave trade, the colonization of the world, the imperialization of the world, the concentration camps — the list could go on as long as one's knowledge of history.

PLAYBOY: In *Cannibals and Christians*, you described the cold war as useless, brutal, and enervating. You said we should stop it and get on with the destiny of Western man. What is that destiny?

MAILER: A huge phrase — I suppose I meant that the West is built ultimately on one final assumption — that life is heroic. It's a Faustian notion. Of course, the West is also Christian, but there's always been a contradiction at the heart. Christianity, the gentlest of religious professions, is the most militant and warlike of religions, the most successful and Faustian of religions. Indeed, it conquered the world. In that limited sense, Christianity is the most heroic. The alternative to this heroic notion of man is the passive acceptance of the universe that characterizes Hindu or Oriental philosophy and religion.

One of the ironies of our century is that the technological society creates an atmosphere of such passivity in people that they are now prepared to entertain Oriental notions precisely because they have lost much of the real power to shape their own lives. *D. T.* The citizens of a technological society are as powerless as an Oriental peasant. Their living standard may be vastly superior, but their social impotence is similar: they command less and less; they are manipulated more and more. They may think they are picking their channel, but TV channels them.

The more we wage a religious war against Communism, the more we create the real social equivalent of Communism in America — which will be the total technological society. You can look forward into a future where Communism's technological society grows nearly identical with ours; the differences will be of

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the mildest local color. For the natural tendency of the technological society is to try to clean up all sorts of social excesses and to root out random oppression because these activities are illogical. They interfere with the smooth working of the machine. You never want a piston to drive with more force than is necessary to direct the action of the machine; you never put a part in the machine that is heavier than it needs to be. So the natural desire of the technological society is to create a smooth totalitarian society free from the ranker forms of injustice. Its long-term tendency in Russia is to make a totalitarian environment that is relatively civilized and pleasant. Both countries may well end by serving up a life to their citizens about as anonymous and vitiated and pill-ridden and dull as some of our new office buildings.

PLAYBOY: Then why does America fight Communism?

MAILER: Because we're Faustian. We believe we have to grapple with the universe; we have the secret faith that we are inspired by a national genius that enables us to take on anything and do anything. The tragic irony is that in fighting Communism, we are creating the absolute equivalent of Communism in this country. And we will destroy our own Faustian dream in the act of fighting Communism, for the technological society looks to destroy any idea of the heroic. Such ideas seem irrational and unscientific to the technician.

On the other hand, each time Communism has captured some small part of the West, it has been shaken by Western complexities that open huge rents in the Russian Communist ideology. A backward country like Yugoslavia did more to halt Stalinism than fifty military adventures dreamed up by John Foster Dulles. Yugoslavia introduced a complex notion into the center of Communism: the idea that there could be two kinds of Communism, each equally devout and heroic in itself, each more or less oppressive. This made the Communist bureaucrat begin to contemplate the nature of his own system and therefore to doubt his faith and so look for ways to ameliorate the oppressiveness of it.

Communism is cannibalistic, as I said earlier. Any ideology that attempts to dominate all of existence has to split into sects and segments, because the moment disagreement exists between members, it cannot be adjudicated or compromised without losing the primitive force of the ideology. Compromise impossible, splits occur. What you get then is two ideologies equally monotonous, equally total, soon equally at war with each other.

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PLAYBOY: Opposed to this, then, is what you call the heroic destiny of the West?

MAILER: Let's say, an *exploration* into the heroic.

PLAYBOY: Is existential politics an exploration into the heroic?

MAILER: To a degree. Existential politics can be understood only by talking practically, specifically, about what you are going to do here in this particular place and time. After you talk about, say, twenty such situations, you get some notion of existential politics. Existential politics depends on a certain intimacy between the law and the people upon whom the law is enacted. For example, not that there should be no capital punishment, but that if someone is going to get killed by the state, then make a spectacle of the event. Let people watch while a professional executioner and the condemned man fight hand to hand in an arena. Since the executioner is professional, he wins practically every time; but he doesn't win to a certainty; that gives the prisoner some last chance to fight for his own existence. It gives him the right of any man to fight for existence under extraordinary circumstances. Such a spectacle also opens the public to the real nature of execution. Let them see that blood on the sand. They may then decide if they still want capital punishment. If they do, more power to them. They like blood. But at least one profound hypocrisy — our quarantine of the execution from the eyes of the public that decrees the act — won't be able to exist anymore.

PLAYBOY: You have any prognostications about the American political and social scene in general?

MAILER: I'm gloomy. The technological society sits upon us like an incubus. It's impossible, for instance, to have any contact with anything in your existence that is not encapsulated by this technological society. I can't take a pat of butter at breakfast that doesn't have some chemical additive to deaden the taste of the butter just a bit, and therefore my taste buds, and therefore deaden me, as well as line my stomach cells with a new if minuscule addition of the chemical. If you could eat a fresh piece of butter for breakfast, certain sensory messages might be able to reach down deep into the secret needs of your nerves — enough to enrich you. You might live a hint better. The technological society gets between us and existence in everything we do, the air we breathe, the buildings we live in with their abstract monotonous forms, the synthetic fibers we wear; ever notice how a rash from a synthetic fiber is more disagreeable than one from cotton or wool? The list is endless. I've written about little else for years.

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PLAYBOY: What can be done about it?

MAILER: I don't know. My feeling is that there is going to be some extraordinary holocaust. Who knows? We may all die off in mysterious fashion. For instance, about the time we discover some cure for cancer, a new disease even worse will probably be spawned by the cure — just as new viruses were spawned in relation to penicillin. Modern disease and modern technology are inseparably connected.

PLAYBOY: You've often connected this, which you call "the plague," with the modern technological society. How did the plague begin?

MAILER: Jacques Ellul, in his book *The Technological Society*, suggests that the beginning of all scientific technique came from a perversion of primitive magic.

PLAYBOY: You've written that one aspect of totalitarianism is fear of orgasm, particularly by the liberal mentality, because the orgasm, you claim, is "the existential moment. Every lie we have told, every fear we have indulged, every aggression we have tamed," you say, "arises again at that instant to constrict the turns and possibilities of our becoming." Could you tell us more about that?

MAILER: Orgasm is the moment when you can't cheat life. If the orgasm was no good, something in you — or in your mate — was no good.

PLAYBOY: Do you still believe, as you wrote several years ago, that birth control is evil — that it's a kind of murder of what may have been a man's best son?

MAILER: Yes. In fact, not too long ago, I was reading a very generous review of *Cannibals and Christians* in a Catholic magazine called *The Critic*; and at one point the writer said, Of course, Mailer's ideas are almost absurdly sentimental about birth control. I am now to the right of the Catholic Church.

PLAYBOY: Indeed, the Catholic Church is presently struggling with its birth control position, in order to square it with the problems of the world population explosion and the individual moral problems raised by families that are too large.

MAILER: Regardless of what the Church finally decides, the problem of birth control is the same as all of the other problems in our technological society. They're all part of the same damn problem; something is insulating us away from our existence. My guess is that in primitive times it was more difficult to conceive and — as a result — more natural. In a just existence, the best things are al-

Perhaps there could be a young fuck-buddy along with who is writing these kinds of things + D.T. is assigned to him.

ways the most difficult. We notice that many animals don't conceive unless they really want it to take.

In our modern life, on the other hand, the body is so deadened at its sexual center by contraceptives and pills that we no longer can afford to be as selective as we used to be. This adds desperation. People now conceive too easily because they're afraid if they don't, they won't conceive at all.

PLAYBOY: What would happen if there were no birth control?

MAILER: It's possible that it might then become much more difficult to conceive, because there would be more real terror of conceiving for too little.

PLAYBOY: Isn't it also possible that the social consequences would be calamitous — if your theory didn't work?

MAILER: Perhaps — but one thing you can be sure of: People would start making love a lot less; they'd make it only when they really wanted to make it; they'd have to be carried away more. One thing I've learned in all these years is not to make love when you really don't feel it; there's probably nothing worse you can do to yourself than that.

PLAYBOY: The "technological society" more directly affects — and you would say, oppresses — the middle and upper classes. Is that the reason you've written that the lower classes enjoy a more satisfactory sex life?

MAILER: I think the lower classes probably have more sexual vitality than the upper classes. They tend to work more with their bodies than with their minds.

PLAYBOY: But according to Kinsey, the lower economic groups suffer from more sexual rigidity and engage in less sexual experimentation than the upper and middle classes.

MAILER: All such statistics show is the attitude to which people are ready to confess. I don't know how valid such findings are. What we're talking about here is old-fashioned sexual perversion. Members of the upper classes and the more prosperous middle classes tend to be fond of their own pet perversion; they look upon it as an entertainment, an adornment, an enrichment; the lower class, on the other hand, looks upon sexual perversion as weakness; they see it in its other aspect. Perversion has two aspects: it is an adornment; it is also a need, and so they see it as a weakness and they despise it. To the lower classes, need is weakness.

PLAYBOY: What do you mean by "perversion"?

MAILER: Whatever it might be — fellatio, cunnilingus, name it.

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Lower-class people see it as a weakness in themselves if they desire it. Envision a strong guy who wants to go down on his girl. He thinks he's weak. Of course he's weak. Giving head to your woman is weakness; it's also a good way to get rid of some of your weakness. It's also dangerous because it gives the Devil introduction into the vagina.

PLAYBOY: The Devil? How so?

MAILER: Oh, the mind's a devil. Didn't you know? And connected to the tongue.

PLAYBOY: You've said that D. H. Lawrence was the first novelist who gave you the idea "that sex could have beauty." Do you continue to admire Lawrence?

MAILER: Lawrence is sentimental about sex. Sex is not only a divine and beautiful activity; it's also a murderous activity. People kill each other in bed. Some of the greatest crimes ever committed have been committed in bed. And no weapons were used.

PLAYBOY: About the art of fiction in general, do you agree with critics such as Norman Podhoretz who claim that the novel as an imaginative art is dead because of the recent incorporation of reportage techniques into fiction?

MAILER: Obviously, I don't. The novel has its own particular resource, which is magical. You can establish a communion between yourself and the reader that can be found in no other art. And this communion can continue for hours, weeks, years. When the novel is dead, then the technological society will be totally upon us. You'll need a score card to tell the Communists from the Texans.

PLAYBOY: Do you think you'll continue to write political and cultural essays?

MAILER: In a way, I've been working on one book most of my writing life. Certainly since *The Deer Park*, I've been working on one book.

PLAYBOY: What's the book about?

MAILER: Existentialism. That is to say, the feel of our human condition, which, by the logic of existentialism, is the truth of the human condition.

PLAYBOY: At the beginning of our talk, you said interviews sometimes serve as a psychic housecleaning for your current ideas. Do you feel you've accomplished that here?

MAILER: I hope we haven't had a curettage.

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YOUNG: That was when men dealing with the heavens split into separate camps of astrology and astronomy.

MAILER: Maybe the essential intent which separates the artist from the physicist is in their relation to theology. But I'd rather not use the word theology. Let's say, brutally speaking, it is in their relation to God.

YOUNG: You mean to their own notion of God?

MAILER: Obviously, they all have their own notion. If many of them can easily — physicists and artists alike — think of themselves as atheists, and I come along and say it hardly matters how they think of themselves, I still say the difference is in their relation to God; it is obviously a way of saying I believe in God. Obviously. Then, everything I try to comprehend in others is going to come out of this fundamental belief in me. That is, of course, an arrogance. But the only way I ever begin to comprehend anything is by indulging such a stance. I don't believe it's possible to approach a tricky or mysterious question without assuming that you're right, or at least have an hypothesis to carry you every step of the way — at least until you find out you're not right. Then you can begin to search for the error in your intuition. Other kinds of inquiry can only lead to the computer. There you put in your collected experience plus the reported experience of others and wait for a statistic.

YOUNG: No room for the intuitive leap.

MAILER: I would assume that while the physicist is titillated, even thrilled, by the experience of magic in his work, and while the artist is often drenched in statistical detail (since he has to deal with a world that grows more and more technical and difficult to comprehend), at bottom their interests are opposed and they're enemies. Because the physicist is finally trying to destroy the fundament of magic, and the artist is trying to blow up the base of technology. The artist believes (and this is the greatest generalization I can make) that all cosmic achievement is attainable within the human frame, that is, if we lead lives witty enough and skillful enough, bold enough and, finally, illumined enough, we can accomplish every communication, and make every vault within the cosmos that technology would attempt to make. In fact, we're not coming face to face with the fact that technology has probably come to the end of one of its limits. As we go off into space, we're up against the knowledge that even if technology keeps expanding at the same extraordinary rate, nothing seems to offer any possibility of getting out of the solar system for thou-

sands of years. Somewhere the wrong road of magic which the cosmos. In fact, about might dealing with

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MAILER: Well, savage sensibility to exist. You closer to the fears are intense knows it's something to zation came condition. T late us from ing now of that time of ply. I'm talk and the mess the trees were. The storm is going to make hamlet in the saying that from that kind

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sands of years. Which means we may have taken the wrong road. Somewhere five, ten, and twenty thousand years ago, man took the wrong road. He separated himself from those dire disciplines of magic which might have enabled him to communicate with the cosmos. In fact, this language of the Lamas that you were talking about might have been precisely that same language. They were dealing with matter and anti-matter; they were communicating.

YOUNG: I have a feeling that an artist pursuing that notion now may be what will save us.

MAILER: Well, I don't know if we can pursue it. I'm talking about savage sensibility. The sensibility of the primitive who requires it to exist. You see, the primitive obviously had senses which were closer to the animal. He also had fears closer to the animal. Those fears are intense. Anyone who has ever felt dread in any real way knows it's so unendurable an experience that one'll do almost anything to avoid it. So I would come near to arguing that civilization came out of man's terror at having to face dread as a daily condition. Therefore we created a civilization which would insulate us from the exorbitant demands of existence. I'm not speaking now of those smaller or unbelievably pressing demands in that time of growing or killing enough food to be able to live simply. I'm talking of that greater terror when the trees spoke to one, and the message of the trees was not agreeable, and worst of all the trees were right. The message one got from the trees was true. The storm they told you about — that terrible storm which was going to make the river wash over its banks and destroy your hamlet in three weeks was true. What a terror. What a terror. I'm saying that man did everything he could, you see, to get away from that kind of intimacy with nature, that foresight, that dread.

YOUNG: Do you think that the invention of the devil might have come about from that phenomenon?

MAILER: Well, I'm not so convinced the devil is an invention.

YOUNG: Which brings me to one of my favorite quotes of Carl Jung: "The moment you remove the devil from society, you only allow him to re-appear in an infinite variety of anonymous forms."

MAILER: I would make an obeisance to that remark. A doctor inoculated my two-month-old daughter for diphtheria yesterday. He caught me at a weak moment. I argued with him feebly. They've found through experience that it's easier to inoculate kids at the age of two months than it is to inoculate them when they're four years old or five years old because the kids pass through the discomfort of the inoculation in a few hours when they're infants,

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and they're sick for a day or two later on. The larger argument that maybe people who get diphtheria should die of diphtheria can't begin to be ventured into. The doctor would have looked at my daughter and me through slant eyes. But what ate at me was that I had slipped my daughter into the technological chain of being. Chemicals stuck into her body at the age of two months. She was now going to be part of the chemical balance, imbalance, balance, imbalance, that all modern medicine consists of. She had gotten into that synthetic chain where chemicals which never grew out of the earth are installed into our bodies and we react to that in ways nobody understands. I think they keep giving us more chemicals to keep finding that balance that they've lost. As I was talking about it, I suddenly said, you know, they do to human beings what they wouldn't do to machines. And it's absolutely true that technology has more regard for the machine and fucks with it less than modern medicine plays with the human body. That's what I expect is the ubiquity of the devil. At the least, looking at it phenomenologically, there are powerful forces working to separate man's mind from his body. The intent of technology is to allow man to be a mind independent of all needs which keep the body within physical limitations. The fundamental notion of technology probably is that there is no wisdom of the body which the brain cannot relocate within itself. In other words, the disembodied brain is a superior piece of intelligence to the corporeal flesh-enclosed brain. As an expression of that, a lot of the functions of the brain having to do with habit are being taken over by the computer, with the terrible danger that about the time we lose the mental ability to do the intellectual tasks we are passing into the computer, we will be unable to spot errors in the computer. That is, we will be able to spot the errors but we won't be able to locate where they are and how they got there. Nobody will have the will, or the simple stamina, to trace out the circuits to see where the error got in. It'll be too boring, since we will have lost the habit of undertaking drudgery in mental work. Boredom will be as insupportable to the mind in such a future time as fire now is to the flesh.

YOUNG: I'd like to give you a quote. A friend of mine says, "Art is inarticulately certain, and science is articulately uncertain."

MAILER: I think that's true. But it doesn't help much, because next you have to get into fundamental philosophical questions like the relation of the articulate to existence. An existentialist could argue

* D.T. To the degree I dared to assume what was in the O.D.'s mind, I did assume that this would be our hour.

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that because something is articulate, it does not by itself offer proof that it has any relation to being true. It may have a relationship to being — we usually assume it has a relation to being — but it may not. For example: The yellow matrix of the pyramidal doughnut probably has no relation to being.

YOUNG: Are you speaking of articulate in the sense of the word?

MAILER: The word as opposed to the feeling, to the unvoiced apprehension of things. Language may bear the same relation to man that technology bears to husbandry, or at least to any of the activities by which primitive man hewed out his existence. For instance, if I am a primitive, and alone in a forest, and live with all the terrors and agreeable forces of that forest, and walk with the principalities of the gods of that forest, terribly aware of the huge and ominous sense of pride in that giant oak which I believe is the center of the forest, well, then as I pass by its periphery I may have an exceptional sense of over how far a distance extends the hegemony of the oak. Think of that as equivalent to talking about the aura which surrounds a human. When we speak of charisma, we suggest that as you approach someone who possesses it, you can't get too near before you feel that you're entering some envelope of their presence. You can be three feet away from them, but something has changed in your own psyche. It's what people speak of usually as vibrations. At least one form of vibrations. Like entering a field of resonance which surrounds certain people who are highly charged.

YOUNG: Like an induction coil?

MAILER: Like a magnetic field. I think the primitive lived in a world in which all natural objects around him had these fields. Whenever one powerful psychic field met another, there was a mood. Where the presence of the oak met the presence of the field of tall grass, so there was a mood, and in that mood the savage walking through was aware that he was a third presence who was picking up some sense of events to come. Or picked up some sense of the past. One of the characteristics of most primitive languages, I suspect, is that their sense of past and future is different from ours. For instance, in classic Hebrew, there is no firm difference between past and future. In fact, there are merely two tenses, the present, and another tense which has to do with actions which occurred *either* in the past or in the future. Only a very simple shift is made in that verb form. If you want to talk about the past, you remark, "I left." If you wish to indicate "I will leave," you

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simply say, "And I left." My God, I spent years thinking about this. What a different sense of existence! Since primitive man keeps no records, the ability to distinguish between his memory of the past, and a dream, becomes next to impossible. Of course, primitive people also employ last night's dream as something which will give them intimations of the future. And, of course, it's possible the dream, far from being a wish fulfillment, is actually that instrument which enables us to anticipate those psychic problems we can or cannot afford to take on in the future. In other words, the anxiety system of the dream gives us clues as to how much intensity our nervous system can bear in different directions. That is why we re-play the experiences of the day before through the complications of the dream. We dramatize them in our imagination. We put ourselves in tense situations to see how much dread we can bear. Therefore the dream deals with the future as it is based on the experience of the past. Which means both past and future are part of the same psychic river. So it's as if the primitive Hebrew saw his experiences forming into two halves: two tenses, two modes of being — the sensuous-at-hand which was the present tense, and the sense of that other time which was not at hand.

YOUNG: That would tend to make the present of less importance, I would think. . . .

MAILER: I don't know. Particularly since primitive man was not abstracted in the way we are. His present, whatever it was, had to have an extraordinary difference from ours. He had to be immersed in it much more as he walked through the forest. Of course, I'm going along now on the not necessarily mystical notion that nature is an exquisite receiving and transmitting set. It's possible that one of the ways God would communicate with the earth and the earth communicated back with God, if you will, is that every tree and blade of grass is capable of sending transmissions. Because parenthetically we know nothing about radio. If you scratch a crystal, and lead the vibration out to any wire of a certain length, called an antenna, why then another wire of an appropriate length attached only to a crystal somewhere else can pick up your signal. That is the basic transaction of radio. We've put it through a million improvements. Amplified it unbelievably. Yet what more do we know about the inner nature of such communication? The assumption may not be unreasonable that other ways of communicating are equally good. One petal of a flower

communicating to begin to perceive through these feelings would have intimated he knew in storm was coming be beneficent on

YOUNG: Yes. And

MAILER: Well, let language began. He then man has felt the way he once felt as he was communicating had only to come something in his just assume that know. Primitive man the clearing or into his message. Since whether he was trying to ate mood, must a self against mood. it is a different manner

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YOUNG: Which brings inarticulately certain

MAILER: . . . is an attention to those intimate experience of every piece of work, I get moment with which you can't keep that the reason it usually good artist who's those years to learn and recover it, and

communicating to a bee, literally. Some of the messages we don't begin to perceive. And so, as I say, primitive man, moving through these fields, still able to communicate with these oaks, would have intimations beneath the level of language. At a certain point he knew in the way a plant knows or a tree knows that a storm was coming, or disaster was on the way, or the sun would be beneficent on the morrow.

YOUNG: Yes. And we've lost that. Almost completely.

MAILER: Well, let me say, we may have lost it at the moment language began. Here is the point: Once there is verbal language, then man has feedback. He no longer communicates to other men the way he once had a dialogue with the tree and the field. So long as he was communicating beneath the level of formal language, he had only to come back from the field and other men would see something in his presence which communicated his message. We just assume that primitives grunted at one another. We don't know. Primitive man may have had to do no more than move into the clearing or into the caves where others lived, and others knew his message. Since he was transmitting mood, others could decide whether he was true or false. But language, while it will often create mood, must as its first function interrupt mood, interpose itself against mood. Mood may be able to survive this insertion, but it is a different mood. The moment primitive man began to speak words to other primitive men — in other words, the moment the articulate was commenced — so the nature of man's reception of an experience larger than himself began to be altered profoundly. And something was lost. For in the grunt had been sounds from every corner of existence, while now, in the words, were oncoming abstractions of existence.

YOUNG: Which brings me, if I may interject, to the idea of art being inarticulately certain. I think what you've just said . . .

MAILER: . . . is an expansion of that remark. Yes. Art bears a relation to those intimations of the primitive. I know it's similar to the experience of every artist if I say that when I get an idea for a piece of work, I get it. There's an illumination in my head at that moment with which I don't have to argue. Trouble starts because you can't keep that incandescence, that illumination. And in fact, the reason it usually requires twenty or thirty years to make a good artist who's dependable as well as good is that it takes all those years to learn how to lose the moment and recover it, lose it and recover it, and learn how finally to be able to get it back each

* This could pick up on the
early essay concerning
the sounds of language.

day in some tremendously diluted and warped and tortured form, but nonetheless, get it back. Enough so you can continue with your work. If you will, it's a function of the artist's relation to magic. It's his ceremony. For instance, you said a while ago that the artist now tries to return to magic. But I think the horror of it is that there's no one alive who can return us to anything. Our senses are so destroyed that we may be a light-year away from that primitive man. There may be no road back to him. None ever. We may not be able to begin to do — to comprehend where we lost the way, or where or how we can restore it. The artist may finally be merely some sort of extraordinary recorder of the failure.

YOUNG: I think the big problem for art today is to try to get back to the sense of creating a spell.

MAILER: Maybe you have brought us to the real separation between the artist and the physicist. Because the artist always seeks to create a spell. Today, of course, the artist is no primitive man, he's all but completely insulated from the senses primitive man had; and he usually acts as a mediator between magic and technology, between the world as instinct and scientific fact. But no matter how technologized the artist is in society, his central impulse is to create a spell equivalent to the spell the primitive felt when he passed the great oak and knew a message deeper than his comprehension of things was reaching him. It's possible the primitive felt something analogous to what we feel when we encounter a great work of art which tunes us in to some comprehension of something we can't even quite call any longer our knowledge. It's larger and less definable; to employ the word again, it's more resonant. It's as if art seeks to restore men and women by reproducing in them that sense of a lost spell, as if the artist is some sort of magician or midwife between the lost life of the primitive and the modern world of technology. And, if you will, the ultimate intent of the technologist, or any physicist who is drowned in technology one way and another, is to try to find ways of coping with existence which are independent of the spell. For the spell cannot be measured.

Relating to the D.K.

YOUNG: Do you think that art has much chance to flourish in this regard?

MAILER: Well, I think we've begun to come around some extraordinary corner. There is a recognition among technicians themselves that something desperately bad is happening in the very foundations of technology. That the whole machine of technology may

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finally have been bolted to a base which will not remain permanent, which is in fact rotting beneath. Sometimes, it's only when man enters a series of failures which destroy belief in a huge endeavor that a huge endeavor in an opposite direction can begin. The failure of the Crusades opened the Renaissance. I think this is happening now. I think one note of hope we can feel in these times is that faith in technology is beginning to waver, and in fact, it's possible technology is going to go through a period as destructive to its ambitions as was technology to theology. We could advance the argument that theology was a species of spiritual technology designed to insulate man from existential existence, from the lost senses of the primitive. Failing to work, theology was replaced by technology, but technology, in turn, if it fails to work — well, at that point, it seems to me there is nothing left but a return — if there's *anything* left — to the old notions of magic which orbit around the fundamental notion that we are capable of extraordinary psychic communication, not only with each other, but with elements of the universe we haven't begun to conceive. That may be the great turn of the wheel of history — that is, if we can clear the ecological system of the world. We may not be able to. We may be in the position of an invalid who's going to linger, even for centuries, in some sort of half existence. That could also happen. There's no reason to assume man was not capable of permanently injuring the world he inhabited. We may live on as some sort of crippled social existence.

YOUNG: Waiting for the freeze bags.

MAILER: I wouldn't doubt it. It's the apathetic people, I'd guess, who generate huge passions on the idea of a freeze bag. Technology sells people the notion they're going to give them something for nothing. Which is the essence of the message of the Devil. The reason the Devil is associated with magic in people's minds is that magic implies it will give something for nothing. But the word *magic* rather might suggest that there are subterranean relations between things which are deeper than we recognize. But never will you get something for nothing. Precisely, it's technology which promises that something for nothing by sidestepping all the disciplines of magic.

YOUNG: Perhaps it's this awareness of subterranean relations between things that does constitute a good part of what an artist is today.

MAILER: Well, I expect an artist secretly assumes he has some fine and subtle and possibly quite private relation to magic. In some

*D.T.'s argument is to
fight against this.*

way, some little part of magic is his. He often pays for it by finding himself ineffectual and even tortured by the world. So it isn't as if he's getting something for nothing with his magic. But it's as if, if you will, that people who opt for magic are deciding that they want a life which will have huge advantages and tremendous disadvantages. They're stepping out of the sort of ordinary expectations other people have. Stepping into more and into less.

YOUNG: Choosing perhaps to be more alive.

MAILER: More alive and more bugged. More reduced. I mean, think of people you've known who lived in depression for ten years at a time — you think quickly of artists . . . Because of their sensitivity, their paranoia, because of their relation to magic . . . their exquisite sensitivity to the possibilities of magic, to that communication between subterranean events which everything paranoid in one (for paranoia has to be a disturbed function of the magical sense) would believe is having a powerful effect upon superficial everyday events. So when things are not breaking well, such an artist will never get free of anxiety. His sense of magic will keep producing more exotic conclusions. I mean, there's a reason why man deserted magic and went into technology. Men led lives of exacerbated uneasiness when they lived in the time of primitive man and his magic. They sought, after all, to escape primitive existence and existential life, in order to gain technological life. For precisely the reason that they thought it would be easier. Now we've found that it isn't easier. It may even be deadly. So now we've got to go back.

YOUNG: Would you see any relation to such going back in the way hippies will wear their grandmother's clothes out of the attic or just any kind of thing they feel like putting on? Is that sort of stepping outside of fashion and in a sense stepping outside of time?

MAILER: Oh, I think that's no mean nor small phenomenon. Maybe it isn't so much stepping outside of time, as some profound desire to reverse time. You see, hippies taking all those exceptional LSD trips saw futures in man's continuation that were so terrifying that they recoiled. That recoil has projected them back to the nineteenth century. It's interesting that most of them do go for nineteenth-century styles. You could say it's for practical reasons. Nineteenth-century styles are easier to find, to copy, imitate and wear, than eighteenth-century styles — But it's possible if this continues that we will see all the centuries repeated, possible that

people in one earth. Yes, sup we tried to es ago. Suppose

second recognition that people can be brave and still be no fucking good. That some brave people can be worse than cowards, and you can rue the day they discovered the grace of their own bravery, because finally they destroy even more than cowards do. Then you're face to face with the complexity of things and the difficulty of finding your way to any coherent ethics.

Manson is one of the most perfect examples of this. Because whatever else he is, you can't take away from him the fact that he's a brave man. Now, he wasn't altogether a brave man. And he wasn't a warrior. I mean, finally he was a general who sent his troops out to wreak the carnage, and he stayed behind.

STRATTON: But there were apparently certain aspects of his own personality which were very brave.

MAILER: Well, as an intellectual he was brave.

STRATTON: Yes. Then there was his method of dealing with men who tried to give him trouble. He was known to offer the weapon to the person he was fighting with and say, "Go ahead and kill me." And if that person didn't have the nerve to kill him, which ... they didn't ...

MAILER: Who ever has the nerve then? It's very hard to kill someone who stands before you, looks into your eyes and says, kill me.

STRATTON: That's bravery, and an instinctual sense of your opponent's strength, because no one ever took him up on the challenge.

MAILER: Well, that's not bravery, I'd say. That's a knowledge of the con, which is something else. Manson did grow up in prisons. He certainly understood that when you get into trouble you can't handle, then you still have the option to stand there and let the other person get their executioner's desire up to the point where they're going to kill you. It's not automatic.

It's reputed that Jimmy Hoffa once said: Flee a knife, and charge a gun. I have no idea if he ever said it, but I think, if he didn't, somebody who knew an awful lot about the subject had to be the author. Because there is something intimate about a knife, whereas there's something closer to moral decision about a gun. If you charge the gun, the man who holds it finally has to say to himself (since it's not a physical act, but a mental act), has to say to himself that he has the right to shoot you. At that point his moral sense of himself has to be invoked. He may not feel the sanction to shoot. Whereas if you charge a man who has a knife, his physical sense of himself is invoked, it's competitive. Am I going to hold this knife while he gets it away from me and humili-

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ates me? But if you take your own knife and hand it over to the other man, that's different from charging a man with a knife.

We go back to the original advice: Flee a knife, charge a gun. If you hand it over and say, "Stab me," you make the knife a gun. And Manson may have had a particularly shrewd sense that the guy he was handing the knife to was a gun man. Weapons are metaphors which fit or do not fit our lifestyle. We do not mix metaphors when it comes to execution. So what we know about Manson is that he wasn't necessarily so brave about these matters as extraordinarily intelligent.

STRATTON: And he had an uncanny sense of where each personality he came in contact with was coming from.

MAILER: Oh, by every report he had an incredible sense of the people he was among. Obviously he had one of the more incandescent sensibilities of our time. The horror of it — not the horror so much as the pathetic aspect of it — is that once again we have a prisoner who's filled with talent, you know, the criminal who leads a prison life from beginning to end. Like Genet. Extraordinary talents. If Manson had become an intellectual, he would have been most interesting. He had bold ideas, and he carried them out — he worked for his ideas. The thing that characterizes Manson's life, whenever you look at it, is how hard that man worked for his ideas.

I like his sense of all these junior debutantes that would get into his gang. He'd have them out there, rolling in what? — not human shit, not cow shit — horse shit. Because if there's any single point of focus of social life in the upper middle class of America, it's that a young lady learns to ride a horse well and live comfortably with horse shit. Which of course is, you know, vastly more compatible than human shit or cow shit or dog shit or, perish the mark, wipe us out, cat shit. So, you know, there he has them rolling in horse shit. He knows how to get an orgy going.

STRATTON: Remember the day you and I went out to see the Spahn Ranch and found it had been bulldozed into nonexistence, which seems to me strikingly American. Like our attitude toward death, cover it up, make believe it doesn't really exist.

MAILER: Well, it's the American way. You know, we must destroy the past. When I was down in Dallas many years ago, a couple of years after Jack Kennedy was assassinated, naturally what's the first thing I do, I went over to see the plaza — the second thing: I went to see what happened to Jack Ruby's burlesque club. And

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you know, it had become a police gymnasium. They know how to do things in Dallas.

STRATTON: They know how to cut a connection or two.

MAILER: Right on.

STRATTON: To what degree do you think Manson was psychopathic? He had that other side to his personality, that hustler/pimp workingman's aspect. All the time he was doing his supposedly messianic trip with these young people, he was also hustling.

MAILER: Well, let's start playing with these words, set them up against each other. Not every psychopath is a hustler, not every hustler is a psychopath. Still, it's very hard to be a hustler without having some psychopath in you. It's hard to stay alive as a psychopath if you can't hustle a little. But we have to consider that at bottom the two are qualities opposed. Being a psychopath is existential. You don't know how a situation is going to turn out because you can't control it. Something inside you will not let you cut off the experience. You may be getting every warning that this experience is taking you into more and more bad places, and you can even get killed before the night's out.

STRATTON: Whereas the hustler tries to control the flow of the experience.

MAILER: The hustler's dignity is that he controls the flow of the experience. He considers it obscene if he doesn't.

Of course there's no such thing as a true or pure psychopath. Nor a total hustler. The hustler has elements in himself which are unmanageable, the psychopath has veins of shrewdness, calm judgment and a great ability to hustle. Part of the comedy in criminal affairs is to see how practical, sane, genteel, reasonable, clever and full of the final trick the hustler is. I mean, a good hustler always has a smooth hustle. Smooth's a word that fits with hustle. A player hates it if his cool is pricked. Manson is an intense mixture of the two. He's more psychopathic than just about any psychopath and more of a hustler than any average hustler that's come along. The vulgarity is to seize a personality as Dostoyevskian as Manson's and assume immediately that he has to be uniquely a hustler and everything he did was as a hustler, so don't take him seriously. Or else see him as an example of pure evil, unrestrained psychopathy.

STRATTON: That's always seemed to me the problem with Truman Capote's work. I mean, even in *In Cold Blood*, where he looks for

LENNON: Many of your characters over the years have carried on negotiations with evil — Marion Faye, D. J., Rojack — I take it that you would not agree with Hannah Arendt on the essential banality of evil?

MAILER: I wouldn't agree with Hannah Arendt at all, not at all. Of course, she can make a case. There are any number of prodigiously evil people who have, from the novelist's point of view, disappointing exteriors. Eichmann, superficially speaking, was a little man, an ordinary man in appearance and vulgar and dull, but to assume therefore that evil itself is banal, strikes me as an exhibition of a prodigious poverty of imagination. You know, one of the paradoxes I always found in the liberal temperament is that they are immensely worshipful of Freud — even though most of his ideas are antipathetic to the notion of liberalism itself. But they go to Freud. The reason is that he is so reductive. Liberals don't like to believe in the vast power of the unconscious, in evil of true murderousness, residing in the most ordinary people. To mistake the surface for the reality, is to perform the fundamental liberal reflex. In effect, liberals are always saying, "I don't see God, so why do you assume God exists?" Out of that has come I think their present bankruptcy. Liberalism has no exciting ideas to offer. I think this enervation comes because it has not been able to deal with the most haunting question of the twentieth century, which is not communism, but nazism. It can't come near to understanding this incredible phenomenon that took over a country of the most decent, hardworking, and *clean* people in the world, this incredible phenomenon of a fascism that went far beyond the normal bounds of totalitarianism into the most extraordinary and despicable extermination of vast numbers of peoples. And this, coming out of a nation which had always been tremendously law-abiding, suggested that the unconscious was truly a hideous place. Liberals, unable to weave that thought into their philosophy, were happy to welcome Hannah Arendt's phrase. But I think to speak of the banality of evil is precisely to point us further in the wrong direction.

LENNON: Didn't Gary Gilmore's story have characteristics that are relevant to this?

MAILER: Probably. I was captured by how complex he was. It seemed to me that it's not the banality or the brutality of evil with which we have to contend, but its complexity, that is, the similarity of evil in others to ourselves. As I got to know Gilmore, and I came to know him better than I know almost anyone in my life,

I began to see that usually, I've always. Somewhere, in the final factor, and I've learned to see Gil as a murderer is significant personality while only one sixteen fundamentally human. I wanted to write a history of detail.

LENNON: You did

MAILER: I started
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MAILER: No. A writer enters someone's mind without retain a certain intimacy about them. He enters with the same intimacy as a room. Part of that intimacy is of an intimate nature. Sometimes characters enter their minds instinctively — they have something more than the reader's

those easy, quick psychological containers he can pour his characters into. I don't think he got any real insight into those two characters, the murderers in *In Cold Blood*.

MAILER: Well, Truman's abilities, I think, lie in another direction. Truman's always had an exquisite sense of his readership. Which I must say has changed greatly during his career. He started with a special readership. And moved out to an enormously large one. But he's always had this exceptional sense of how much they can bear. And he has always had the accompanying sense of how to vibrate their prejudices without shaking them apart.

STRATTON: And he knows how to end a book just beautifully, the way he ended *In Cold Blood* with that young lady visiting the grave of her murdered friend.

MAILER: Truman's never without his tone. And it would be part of his virtuosity that the elegiac tone would belong naturally to him. Yes. It would be hard to think of Truman ending a book badly. The first time Truman does, I will have to sit down and read that book all over again because it's possible that Truman will have just written far and away his most adventurous book.

STRATTON: Because he's on to something?

MAILER: The only reason Truman couldn't end a book fantastically well is because he would be on to something large. So, I agree with you about *In Cold Blood* in the sense that I don't think he got near his characters. I think that what he did do, which makes it an important book to me, is end up telling us more about the prejudices and the limited ability of the middle-class reader to encounter criminality than any book I ever read. It tells you almost nothing about the criminals, but how much it does say about that sense of everything-in-its-place that *The New Yorker* has stood for for over forty embattled years.

STRATTON: Perhaps Manson and people who can live with these extremities in their personalities may in fact be the survivors. And all the highly civilized people may be ending up in the worst kind of deaths to themselves. And technological destruction. If it's only in extremes that the society will save itself, then the secret fear of most people is that they're dead . . . moribund . . . and these Manson people are more alive than they are.

MAILER: Yes, I think that's what they do fear. And I think the reason is we have all grown up in a society that's relatively new in its fundamental premise, a society that claims to believe in life. To coin a piece of jargon, of the worst sort, we could say that we exist in a keep-everybody-alive society. Ironically, most of the cultures

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to exhibit great energy in history, the societies which produced our society, were, on the contrary, built on killing.

The idea common to all animals, and prehistoric and primitive man, even among civilized societies like the Greeks, the Romans, during the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, the idea was still that if you didn't have enough right to live — in other words, if you were a drag upon the mood and the energy and the sustenance of other people — you were better off — Christ to the contrary — dead. These societies were kill societies. They got their neatness, their elegance, they got their style — out of killing.

But we are a society which says in effect, "Be sure you live. Life is our only gift. We're not going to get anything after this." The kill societies, to the contrary, were religious. They believed in the immanence of God, or a devil, or in demons. Primitive man spent his time placating demons in every tree. If a wind blew a sudden leaf past his face, he began to propitiate some spirit. They believed nothing was accidental. They were, in fact, more scientific than we are, for they believed that anything you can't explain is tremendously disturbing, whereas we prefer to ignore whatever we cannot dominate with our minds. We wipe out the artifacts of the past as if they have no curse.

Well, this notion, this keep-everybody-alive society — is a vulgar notion. There's nothing more livid, more cancer-provoking, than the face of a distorted liberal who shrieks at you, "You're talking about a human being!" They always italicize — *hu-min*. You're talking about a *life* that can be *lost*, they say. They're the same people who will turn around and absolutely insist upon destroying life, the same people who will soon leap with glee to forbid people to procreate, that is, about the time we decide there are definitely too many people on earth and we have to cut down the population or we won't survive, they will end by insisting that people be electrocuted for daring to conceive without a license.

Of course, today, they're still on the side of keep-everybody-alive. So the thought that someone might be so profoundly repulsive that everybody in their immediate neighborhood wants to let them die, is something they cannot tolerate. Nor can we for that matter. We're not as tough as we sound. We too live in this enormous supermarket of suburban guilt. Because we know we are all destroying the landscape with our homes and our highways. There's such a gassy, dead dull air over everything. Which we create. When you traveled, it used to be the only bad air you ever

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mean, he had been seventeen years out of thirty-five in prison. So
he was a natural to take the orgy all the way to murder.

MAILER: Well, I don't think it was that automatic. He also had
something inside him he couldn't control at all. His paranoid side,
where he saw the blacks taking over the country. At a certain mo-
ment he was going to rise as some sort of gray eminence for the
blacks and yet at the same time do his best to wipe them out. He
had those huge plans to flee to the desert when the war was com-
ing.

In the crudest psychoanalytical terms, his real connection was
to his own timetable toward disaster. It was approaching very
quickly. Because he was a man of Napoleonic ambition, he took
this interior sense his body and his mind were providing him —
the psyche secretly saying him, "Man, the climax is coming. You
will not be able to keep your murderous impulses in hand more
than another ten months, another ten days." That's why we
shrink before any fanatic who comes up to us and says, "The end
of the world is near."

STRATTON: Let's talk a bit more about the women's movement. I
admit many of the women I find most exciting, most impressive,
have tendencies toward women's liberation. But I don't think
they understand what they call male chauvinism. I love women
who have great character and spunk and are not content with
being put in any simple category. But I fear the real thrust of this
movement is to demean love and attraction between the sexes. A
man who loves women is a pig. It's an antiromantic notion. It's
sexual technology.

MAILER: Hey, Stratton, this isn't the way you were talking a year
ago! I mean, the women are getting to you. They're getting to me
and getting to you. Let's face it, they're winning their war.

STRATTON: You think so. They're winning their battle, perhaps.
Meanwhile we're all losing our war. What women's liberation
does is diminish sexuality.

MAILER: Well — I agree that the tendency is to diminish sexuality.
I'm not pretending to know whether it's going to diminish sexual-
ity for *all* time. But I think the immediate effect has been to take
something out of it all. That's right in the need of the century. It's
still a technological century and too much instinctive sex mucks
up the machine.

There are two ways a technological society can weaken sex,
through huge puritanism like the Russians, or you can do it
through huge license — pornography, a sexual revolution, an-

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you, motherfucker. It's not saying, I'm here to call upon Satan. It pretends to. Some of his music I find, you know, marvelously promising. But it's irritating as hell to listen to for two hours because you keep waiting for the great payoff, and it never comes.

But again there's a kind of bullying that I've always distrusted in rock. Which is, it doesn't take big balls to have a big electric guitar and a huge amplifying system and fifty thousand American corporations that they're all sneering at, working overtime to amplify them. You know, it's a little bit like some politician that you despise saying, I represent the people. He only represents his power in his microphone and his media, his vested electronic office.

STRATTON: But let's look at the Stones in context. The Stones have stayed at the top, they're still the most interesting group playing together. They're all good musicians. Even the Beatles, as musicians, with the possible exception of George Harrison, weren't very exciting. Ringo Starr could never compare with Charlie Watts for drumming ability.

MAILER: Their drummer's incredibly good. In fact, I think their drummer's half of them. Because you've got all that caterwauling, you've got all those half-heard threats, that sense of sullen curses always riding in the background, you've got that sense of disarray, sense of mama with her nerves broken looking for her fix. You got all that. But what keeps it all together is you got this great big driving beat. That you can make anything you want. You can dream up a Third World coming through, Africa rising. There's a — the tension of the music is that one world's dissolving into a kind of marvelous — I mean, their comic gifts are superb. You really get this feeling of androgynous family, and androgynous family relations, like maybe it's never been done. All that's first-rate. I'm criticizing them at, you know, what I consider the highest level. But finally at the highest level, they are fucking disappointing. They depend on noise. You know, we listened to them not at top high. At middle high. And they don't make it.

STRATTON: Take a song like "Sympathy for the Devil." You have to go a long way — Bob Dylan's probably the only other one, plus some songs from the Beatles — you have to go a long way before you get lines as interesting in rock music as, "Just as every cop is a criminal and all the sinners saints."*

MAILER: What's splendid, what's new about that? Dostoyevsky used to go into an epileptic fit he grew so bored with that notion.

* © 1968 Abkco Music Inc.

STRATTON: Well, the most rock lyrics, the

MAILER: I don't think they even try to — I'd say that Jagger's allow for that capti voice and the whine. want too good a lyri nasal to the point w little boring about a Minneapolis soundi

You know, Dylan it a little boring. Dy lyrics, his lyrics are this, but I think Dy this period. Like r read his own lyrics. the poetry that carr

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STRATTON: Well, there's nothing new about it, but compared to most rock lyrics, the Stones have at least considered Dostoyevsky.

MAILER: I don't think these lyrics compare to Dylan's. I don't think they even try to — I think, in fact, I'd almost go the other way. I'd say that Jagger's lyric is interminably repetitive in order to allow for that captivating tension between the guttiness in his voice and the whine. To play that back and forth, you don't really want too good a lyric. Dylan's voice is thinner. At times I find it nasal to the point where I can do without it. There's something a little boring about a man who comes from a fine Jewish family in Minneapolis sounding like an Oklahoma Okie.

You know, Dylan is . . . not Johnny Cash. So I find that part of it a little boring. Dylan's voice is much less exciting to me than his lyrics, his lyrics are superb. Selden Rodman was the first to say this, but I think Dylan may prove to be our greatest lyric poet of this period. Like many another lyric poet, he can't necessarily read his own lyrics. With Dylan, what I think you feel is that it's the poetry that carries the song, not the singer.

With Jagger, it's the reverse. Jagger has got this marvelous sense of the day in which a family breaks up. The son throws acid in the mother's face, the mother stomps the son's nuts in, and then the fat cousin comes and says, What is everybody fighting for, let's have dinner. And they sit down, the son has no nuts left, the mother's face is scarred, but they go on and, you know, British family life continues. Jagger's got that like no one else's ever had it. If he'd been a writer he would have been one of the best. But that marvelous quality isn't caught in the lyrics so much as in the ensemble of everything, sound, instruments, everything.

STRATTON: And his voice.

MAILER: His voice first.

STRATTON: I don't know if you can find another rock group capable of coming up with a song like "Sympathy for the Devil."

MAILER: "Sympathy for the Devil," I felt, was arch, and much too self-conscious. I couldn't quite catch the words and that's one of the things about Jagger that's always suspect to me. When you play on the edge of the articulation of words it's because you're trying to do two things at once. I did hear him at one point wailing about the Russian Revolution — that the Devil was there at the planning of the Russian Revolution and, you know, that's news. No good Christian ever thought of that before. That, I thought, was finally on the edge of the revolting. You don't, you know, you don't infuse a bunch of dumb, spaced-out, highly

sexed working-class kids with a little historical culture while you're singing. Come on! I decided Jagger must have picked up a magazine article about the Russian Revolution the day before he wrote the words. But, you know, there's more profundity in "Eleanor Rigby" than there is in "Sympathy for the Devil."

I mean, there are a lot of vulgar plays in "Sympathy for the Devil," gay-aim for game. A lot of dull choices were made. I expected to be knocked down by "Sympathy for the Devil," and I wasn't. I think maybe it's historically significant. It may be the first song that invokes the Devil in I don't know when. You might have to go back to black masses in the Middle Ages to find a lyric that invokes the Devil. But that doesn't mean it's good any more than *The Exorcist* is. Which is to say, it's phenomenal as an index of the time. What impresses us is not how good the artist is, but that he's right at the place where people are going to react. So Jagger anticipated, just as Blatty did, that there's subterranean belief in the Devil about ready to emerge. Given any kind of encouragement, it comes charging through.

Which brings us to Satanism. The Satanism of shit at the highest level, the standard of Satan. It's his escutcheon. It's his flag. He says, You've been rejected, you've been wasted by the system, passed over, yet you are more redolent, more interesting, more sexy, more incredible, more funky, more filled with undeliverables that should have been delivered than anything they got going out there. And, for years, the Devil has fought a desperate uphill battle.

But by now, when we got those superhighways, with that gas, and the whole world's getting to look more and more like the Jersey flats, given modern life up front, the suburbs, the smell of the gas, smell of plastic in every home, carpets smell of the plastic and the kids grow up licking plastic, play with Play-Doh which has that smell between cheap perfume and deodorant; when you think of the prevalence not of death in every one of our phenomena but of the void — of the presence of void — in every aspect of successful life today, you travel first class on a plane which is an envelope presenting its concept of the void, get off that airplane into an airport which in turn presents its concept of the void or you go through a smog-filled superhighway to that city which looks like every other city — Moscow, I hear, looks like Washington entering its terminal cancer . . . you then go out for your pleasures which are not as brilliant as they were in the depths of the boredom of the Victorian period; there's no such thing as a thrill

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for anyone alive any longer. You take all this, all this degradation of the void; because we all move around with a profound sense of degradation these days and under it there's the Devil calling, saying I'm shit, I'm everything that you've wasted, I'm all that rich, crazy passionate fuck guck funky possibility, I'm that other culture. And of course there's a profound desire to move over to that.

Now, in this twentieth century where our senses, our souls, are being leached out, where we're all entering a void, the horror of modern life is that there is no horror. So we begin to wonder whether selling the soul to the Devil may not be a life-giving transaction. That's the underlying terror of modern life.

STRATTON: The Devil has always been associated with materialism. There was always, you know, the idea of the temptation of Christ with riches and the wealth of the world.

MAILER: That doesn't deny what I was saying.

STRATTON: So isn't it conceivable that what we might have done is, collectively, sold our souls to the Devil a long time ago; say in the beginning of the nineteenth century, before the Industrial Revolution?

MAILER: If we sold our soul to the Devil centuries ago in order to prosper materially, in this twentieth century we're not happy materially. We're not gorging like Romans. We are prospering electronically. And suffering materially in all the voids and stinks of plastic and pollution.

STRATTON: And lost our karma too, sold our karma along with our soul. We've sold our opportunity for transcendence. That's why we're terminal. You see what I mean? I think that if anything the Devil is winning. I think he's winning and I think he's gloating because he has more control at this point. I think he is the prince of this world.

MAILER: That's one idea I hold. What I pose against it immediately is that the Devil is also miserable, because finally the air conditioner is not the Devil's paradise.

STRATTON: True. But there are those other alternatives we may get into in the next twenty, thirty years, you know. That when people get sick of technology and air conditioners and all the sterile dead aspects of plastic, they're going to revert more and more to Satanism and to orgies, to bloodletting and to shit, all those things —

MAILER: All right. But ask yourself: All those things you're talking about, that you just named, are they equal to technology?

STRATTON: Are they equal to technology?

MAILER: Or are they the opposite?

STRATTON: The opposite.

MAILER: It seems to me you ought to have your Devil, just for the sake of this little matter, one place or the other.

STRATTON: Yes, I said that I think technology may be a tool of the Devil, a means to an end, the end being the complete leaching out of our souls.

MAILER: To drive people toward shit and blood.

STRATTON: Right. Right. This is Satan's cunning. In a technological and spiritually starved society, he may gain complete control.

MAILER: Well, let me think about that. And have a drink.

STRATTON: Okay. Just to continue with this idea, it may be that technology is a transitional stage as far as the Devil is concerned. I've got to believe God is more opposed to the dead spirit of technology than the Devil would be. I think that the Devil may have said to himself, Well, it looks to me like the only way I'm ever going to win final control over mankind is to offer them all those things they seem to want most, material comforts, wealth, prosperity and lack of suffering, to eliminate suffering from the world. People don't want to suffer, they immediately reach for a pill, mother's little helper.

So, my notion, anyway, is that technology, science, pollution, whatever, is finally probably a tool of the Devil that is going to starve and deaden the soul to such a degree that man will reach out for the funkiness, then for horror — back to Charlie Manson.

MAILER: I think you're passing over too much. To begin with, there's no reason to equate science and technology any more than we put art and bestsellerdom together. After all, there's no reason to assume a bestseller is a work of art at a lower level. That may be a legitimate way to characterize a bestseller, or the opposite may be true, that a bestseller is the precise opposite of art, and to the degree the work is a bestseller, it is meretricious.

STRATTON: Technology may be the opposite of science, then?

MAILER: Well, I think there's much reason to believe that it is. Science, for most of its history, was essentially a poetic endeavor. Every metaphor, if you stop to think about it, is an equation. If you say, "The sparrow is on the wing," that's a scientific remark, it's a way of saying that the center of essence in the sparrow is within the wing, the sparrow is *on* the wing. It's a way of saying that the sparrow exists in two manifestations at once, body and

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flight, just as light consists of waves and particles. The sparrow is on the wing. As you start to bear down on the language, you begin to feel the very vibrancy of the wing. The condition of being in two states at once. The sparrow is *on* the wing. You can fix on that point endlessly because it's a metaphor, an equation, a moment of balance. Originally, science had that quality, that its fundamental recognitions were, dare I say it? — poetic.

STRATTON: It was an art at that point?

MAILER: Absolutely an art. Technology is finally, I would suggest, a tradition, and a dull one. A statistical tradition. Technology derives from General Ulysses S. Grant, who said that if I bring enough men and enough ammunition to bear at one point on this line, and if I don't care how many troops of mine get killed, and I just keep pursuing this, if my ego is finally larger than any question that's presented to me, then I am obliged to triumph because I do not care. And he won.

Grant changed the nature of war. Before that, war always consisted of the obligation to win with a certain minimum of skill and grace. There was a code of war. Robert E. Lee subscribed to that code, he believed that you did not win battles at any price, that you didn't lose half your army to win a battle. Because at that point something dreadful would happen. Grant, having to contend with a miserable drafted army, people who did not want to fight the war, — the Civil War as far as the North was concerned was not too unlike the war in Vietnam, in the sense that the troops had absolutely no desire to fight — Grant just kept putting in more and more bodies to blast their way through the noise.

Now that's technology. Technology does not really care what happens in the aftermath, it wishes to succeed on this point. It does not even need to have theory in order to proceed, let alone art. It will push its way through. It is an ego manifestation, and — all right. There's nothing in this that says it's therefore opposed to the notion of the Devil. The Devil may indeed be ego. But we have to draw back just enough to ask ourselves one further question, and it comes up to me as follows. Where is God in all this?

STRATTON: Well, God may be the loss of ego.

MAILER: No, no, no. Face into technology. What's God's relation to technology? Do you believe in God?

STRATTON: Yes.

MAILER: Do you believe God is not dead at all? Is very much alive?

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STRATTON: Yes.

MAILER: God, I would take it, knowing you fairly well, is a principle of some judicious mixture of courage and love?

STRATTON: Right. Absolutely. And harmony, a certain kind of harmony, a physical harmony with life and one's place in life and in the cosmos that is opposed to technology.

God, as far as I'm concerned, is mystery, and anything opposed to mystery, that tries to answer out all the mystery of life, is anti-God. Technology wants to eradicate mystery. I think at this point if God exists, He exists as a revolutionary, He's got to be a violent and passionate spiritual revolutionary, because He's out of grace at this stage, very much out of grace.

MAILER: Not out of grace. Out of favor.

STRATTON: Out of favor.

MAILER: Out of favor of what? The universe . . .

STRATTON: No, with mankind, with technological man.

MAILER: We still separate here. Because I think we have to face the possibility that technology is a third force, come to us from the cosmos. That it may have very little to do with God and the Devil.

STRATTON: May be separate altogether?

MAILER: Virtually separate. To go back to one of my oldest and firmest ideas, what if the universe is finally a series of conceptions which are at war with one another? And what we think of as God is only one conception of this universe, out there, at war with other conceptions? What if technology is an invasion of this earth from without? Because technology gives us no evidence whatsoever of having any sympathy for the nature of our world, nothing to do with our desires for an earth on which we can dwell.

STRATTON: No, certainly not. Its aim would seem to be to make the planet uninhabitable in the name of making us all more comfortable. What is a higher standard of living if we are all dying?

MAILER: Well, if at that point — you see — at this point we're reduced to speculation. Either the Devil invited technology here or, what I find more interesting, God entered into a dread compact. At a certain point he decided that Satan had so invaded affairs on earth that God could never begin to lead man up and outward to the stars. So some compact had to be made with technology. Technology, that spirit come to visit us from afar. If we dare to personify our divinities, there's nothing extraordinary about such speculation. Evil often triumphs, because good makes a mediocre

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compact out of some dire necessity. Where we're far apart is, I don't believe in an omnipotent God. I believe in a God who's like us only more so. Who has a vision of existence of which we are very much a part. Because we will either fulfill that vision of existence, or we will fail God.

STRATTON: No, I can't agree. God is perfection. I don't actually believe in an omnipotent god as much as in a god whose nature is finally unknowable, as is perfection.

MAILER: The idea that the nature of God is unknowable, at this point, when the world's dying in the exudate of all its diseases, is a cop-out.

STRATTON: Not if you think of God in terms of a quality, a state of being toward which you're constantly trying to become closer, to get more in harmony with, as an ongoing struggle.

MAILER: You've been saying that you want to talk about drugs a little, and I think they're related to this question in a fashion. I think drugs bear the same relation to mysticism as technology to science.

We're coming to learn that most of the world's mystics, in one way or another, have or had their drug. The mystical societies most mystics have been revering for centuries did have, in one fashion or another, their drug ritual. So, it isn't so simple a matter as saying that if you take a drug then you're a technologist and not a scientist. It does mean that there is a use of drugs among mystics and mystical societies which was reverential, ceremonial, sacramental.

The use of drugs today, if we're going to employ an analogy, is again comparable to the war in Vietnam: If you have a great deal of money to spend and very few results to show, and if you can't find the enemy, well then, goddamnit, says Barry Goldwater, burn down the fucking foliage. Scorch those gooks, get them out of there. Denude the land and you will find what is there. That is what the allegedly best generation of our young are doing to their minds. They're saying, If I can't find the idea I was looking for yesterday, I am going to take twice as much tonight.

STRATTON: I'll take a thousand more mics of LSD and burn down the foliage of my mind.

MAILER: Burn down the foliage of my mind to find some of those ideas I can feel running around in there. It's a military operation, it's technological.

I don't think drugs are going to find God or the Devil. I think what they're going to create is the scorched earth of consumed

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karma. I believe, you know, that one has to be as reverential about drugs as about sex. The mark of an utter idiot, in my mind, is to find, let's say he's a man who falls passionately in love with a woman. He finds this divine cunt and he not only fucks the hell out of her but fucks the hell out of himself until his balls are as wet as gravel. You know, he is grinding his ass up over the stones to get in one more fuck for the ego. He's gone over. He is a gassed-out, farted-out goose. That is our drug addict. That's what the drug addict is doing to mysticism. If God is a rabbit, the drug addict is trying to kill that rabbit with a thousand flails.

In religious discussion, when we start to talk about this tripartite nature of the confusion, God, Devil and technology, and what is with whom, it may serve us to take one little look at cosmology today. One notion that the physicists presented to us about fifty years ago was the idea of the expanding universe. The galaxies were traveling outward. There's reason to decide that we live in a universe which expands and contracts. Curious, isn't it?

More than that, a universe in which stars expand and contract. Stars exhibit red light in their spectrum and blue — red lights as they expand, no surprise to any of us humans, and blue as they turn cold. As they contract more and more, they turn black. They become the essence of matter, become so compressed, so black, that a star which was once a million miles in diameter is now two miles in diameter, a mile in diameter. It becomes so compressed that finally it is the size of your thumbnail and weighs more than the sun. At least, that is what cosmological evidence and theory has brought certain physicists to thinking.

At that point, there's a gravitational mass so intense that it pulls in everything to it. It pulls in light. Einstein delivered the general theory of relativity, which was that light would be bent by gravity. Indeed it was, as the famous experiment in 1921 or 1922, was it 1919? showed — that light from Mercury in an eclipse was bent by the sun. Now, when we begin to consider these wholly concentrated implosions of matter which have more mass than the sun, they must pull everything into them. Everything disappears. You cannot ever see these particular stars, which are called black holes in space, because everything goes into it, and comes out where, somewhere else. Hm?

That is a more curious model of the universe than we're used to considering. Now physics deals with notions of matter and antimatter. Is it so outrageous then to speak of death as having a life which has as many laws as life?

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Existential Aesthetics

An Interview with Laura Adams



LAURA ADAMS: Since the late 1950s you've had a vision of God and the Devil at war for possession of the universe, a vision that has been the metaphysical and moral center of your work. Has that vision changed appreciably over the years?

NORMAN MAILER: I don't know the answer. When you deal with cosmology, the question becomes on the one hand enormous — do God and the Devil war in the galaxies? — yet is intimate on the other. Since we all have our own idea of God and the Devil, it's hard for the idea not to change, even fluctuate. I'd say that over the last ten or fifteen years I've kept going back and forth in my mind over a notion that's hard to formulate, and I don't know that I should try — it's the sort of thing that sounds silly unless you can write a book about it — but for the purpose of this answer, just let me say that if there is a war continuing between God and the Devil for humankind, for the *future* of humankind, then this war is much more complex than a simple confrontation. We have to ask ourselves what the role of technology is in all this, and I've had years when I've believed technology is an instrument of the Devil, other years in which I've seen God in a Faustian contract with technology. Technology is perhaps some third force, some element that's come into our universe from other universes. Now all this is too endlessly and chronically paranoid to try to get into it in the form of an interview. I think you can dramatize these notions in a major novel, but only a major novel. You

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we had a vision of God and the universe, a vision that has been of your work. Has that been yours?

MAILER: When you deal with the one hand enormous — the other? — yet is intimate on the idea of God and the Devil, even fluctuate. I'd say that keeps going back and forth in the form of a formula, and I don't know what that sounds silly unless for the purpose of this and a war continuing between the future of humankind, than a simple confrontation. The technology is in all this, technology is an instrument. I've seen God in a Faustian way is perhaps some third of our universe from other universes and chronically paranoid to renew. I think you can dramatize only a major novel. You

would wreck a minor novel by introducing such ideas. Therefore to talk about it in an interview is hopeless. It leads to people saying you have a windmill for a brain. Still I can see by the look in your eye that you're hardly ready to give up.

ADAMS: Isn't it an obsession, a form of paranoia, or even atavistic to think that there are cosmic forces manipulating us for their own ends?

MAILER: Well, I've never felt we are the simple creatures of these forces. On the contrary, I think they are fighting for our allegiance or even our unwitting cooperation. It isn't only that man needs God, but recall us to the title of that old French movie, *God Needs Men*. (Of course you couldn't use such a title today. You'd have to say "God Needs Persons.") Here's what I'm trying to say: To the degree I have any intense religious notion it's that when we fail God we are not merely disappointing some mightily benign paterfamilias who'd hoped we might turn out well and didn't. We are literally bleeding God, we're leeching Him, depriving Him of His vision. You see, I start with the idea that the explanation for our situation on earth may be that we are part of a divine vision which is not, necessarily, all loving, but on the contrary is a vision which wishes to take us out across the stars — a vision of existence at war with other varieties of existence in the cosmos. By this light, flying saucers may be, or may represent, a certain unconscious human awareness that there is this possibility in the universe, that there are other forms of intelligence which have nothing to do with us. Nothing even to do with our divinities.

ADAMS: Do you know the Arthur C. Clarke novel, *Childhood's End*?

MAILER: No.

ADAMS: In it the human race mutates into an essence, a form of energy, that unites with a kind of benevolent Oversoul which, interestingly, has used another race of benevolent beings in the form of devils to prepare the way for the human mutants. It appears that our fear of devils was based on a premonition that they would have something to do with the dissolution of our race. The unconscious awareness you spoke of reminded me of this. But isn't this notion that, as D.J. expressed it in *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, "You never know what vision has been humping you through the night," contradictory to the perception of good and evil in *An American Dream*? There it seemed that good and evil were for the most part clearly demarcated,

figure. Still I think there's no getting around it, she's the first weakness of the book.

ADAMS: But it's a highly metaphorical novel. One of the mistakes many critics made in first reviewing it was to take it too literally.

Isn't Cherry seen metaphorically as love, the reward of courage?

MAILER: Well, no. I don't believe a metaphorical novel has any right to exist until it exists on its ground floor. You know I never start with my characters as symbols. I'm unhappy if I can't see my characters. I mean, I not only have to know what they look like, and how tall they are, whether they're good looking or plain, but I also like to have some idea of what they smell like. So I had a pretty good idea of Cherry *physically*, a very clear idea in fact, but I would have been happier if her character had emerged somewhat more. I think Deborah, for instance, is vastly more successful. Deborah is worthy of a book in herself. In fact, at one time I thought idly of doing a book on Deborah, and then chose not to. But how she drew coincidences to herself. One of the things about *An American Dream* that's not often realized is my little theory, if you will, that as events become more dramatic so does the play of coincidence become more intense. You can reverse it. You can say that coincidence may fail to occur unless events are dramatic. I think there's a reason for that. If you believe in Gods and Devils, and I choose the plural because not only is God on one side, Devil on the other but they certainly have armies, adjutants, aides, little demons, angels, well, when important events occur why wouldn't they be concerned? Why wouldn't they be present? Why not try to tip the scales? Why wouldn't God and the Devil have their department of dirty tricks? You know, see them as some sort of sublime extension of the CIA.

ADAMS: That is why I see the novel as so highly metaphorical. The kinds of experiences Rojack has, the vision of shooting arrows into Cherry's womb while she's singing in the night club, for example, seem to me to exist in a dream allegory but not at the literal level.

MAILER: I would disagree. I'd had the experience of being in night clubs and thinking evil thoughts and really barbing them like darts and sending them to people and seeing them react. At the time I didn't know whether I was profoundly drunk or, you know, was I all alone in the world? But I had to recognize that there was a psychic reality to it. It wasn't just a fantasy. Since then, there's been any amount, my god, there's so much material

now to indicate that this is not at all unreasonable. For one thing, we do have telepathic powers, we talk about the human aura, about the ability to send hostile vibrations, everybody uses that phrase, but, you know, if you can send a hostile vibration, which is to say, a hostile wave, why not employ modern theories of light and say hate appears not only in the form of a wave but also as a particle? If you can do it with light, you can do it with hate. In other words, send a damn particle into someone. Why not assume you can sting someone with a thought so concentrated that they'll turn around and rub the back of their neck? I invite people who are reading this interview to try it from time to time. It helps if you're drunk, of course.

ADAMS: Is that what you've been doing to tape recorders all these years?

MAILER: Oh, I think there's a good reason why tape recorders bomb out on me. Why not assume we have electrical powers — we know there are pictures taken of the human aura in Russia. What is it called, the Kirlian process? Did you ever notice when you're in a real hurry to make a phone call, and you've got one of those button phones where you can dial quickly, that if you dial too quickly with too much desire, you never get your number?

ADAMS: Yes.

MAILER: Then you have to stop and say, "Okay, I don't really care if I get the number or not," and dial more slowly. Then the phone becomes your servant again. It's as if there's an electrical resistance to your electrical intensity.

ADAMS: I simply assumed the computer couldn't handle the digits as fast as I could push them.

MAILER: Well, I notice it with a dial phone, too. The phenomenon is not only in the speed with which you dial, but the intensity with which you want to get that call through. It's almost as if there is something in the center of electricity that mocks us. I've felt this with all sorts of electrical phenomena. It's possible I'm more charged, have more electricity about me. I don't mean that as any agreeable or attractive condition, it's bound to be disagreeable, but possibly I could have more effect upon electrical instruments than other people, a little more effect, ten percent more, whatever. At any rate, to go back to *An American Dream*, my point is that there wasn't a single phenomenon in that book that I considered dreamlike or fanciful or fantastical. To me, it was a realistic book, but a realistic book at that place where extraordinary things are

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happening. I believe the experience of extraordinary people in extraordinary situations is not like our ordinary realistic experience at all. For example, one of the reasons I've never written about great prizefighters in a novel is that the experience they have in the ring is, I think, considerably different from what we believe it is. More intense, more mystical, more "spooky" if you will, than anything we see on the outside. Who wants to write about a fight the way sportswriters do, or even as fighters discuss it after the fight: "I was waiting to set him up with a good right. He dropped his guard and I popped him." That's the way they talk. Only, it isn't their experience.

ADAMS: I grant you that the characters in *An American Dream* perceive and experience reality altogether differently from us ordinary folks. Still, it seems to me that their literal reality has a metaphorical level as well, just as your literal realities nearly always turn into metaphorical ones linked to the central set of metaphors regarding the existence of God or the Devil. I've come to see them as metaphors for our moral directions, which in the absence of absolutes become existential, unknowable as good or evil.

MAILER: My metaphors explain more phenomena to me than any theology I can adopt. I was an atheist for years because I couldn't stomach the notion of the all-good, all-powerful God who calmly watched all sorts of suffering which by any extension of our human imagination could not be productive of anything, not even productive of future karma. In other words that whole waste of human possibilities of the most grinding, grim, dull sort. It seems to me that the only explanation is God is not all-powerful: He's merely doing the best He can.

ADAMS: But how literally does God exist?

MAILER: I believe He exists literally.

ADAMS: How?

MAILER: It's not for me to know how or where He exists. It's reasonable to assume He exists in a great many ways, in places we can comprehend and a great many where we cannot. All I'm saying is that He does not have to be all-powerful. What is there that makes Him all-powerful? He was powerful enough to have created our solar system, perhaps. And if you ask what are His limits, that might be my guess. But this is babbling. It isn't important where God's limits are. What's significant is the idea that God is not all-powerful, nor is the Devil. Rather it is that we exist as some mediating level between them. You see, this notion does restore a certain dignity to moral choice.

dogma, or measure our moral value. So we don't have the right to say Richard Nixon is: A. good; B. evil. I might have my opinion of Richard Nixon, but I don't have the right to say that man is evil, any more than I have a right to say he is good.

ADAMS: Do you have a clear notion of the good?

MAILER: No. But I have, if you will, I have and I submit to the force of this word, I have a fairly well-formed *cloud* of intuitions about the nature of the good, and, like a cloud, it has to a certain degree a structure, and yet the structure is capable of altering quickly, depending on the celestial winds blowing and the less celestial winds. A cloud changes shape quickly but it remains a cloud. It's not just simply an unformed chaos.

ADAMS: You've said that an evil person is someone who has a clear notion of the good and operates in opposition to it.

MAILER: Therefore by my own definition I'm definitely not evil.

ADAMS: All right, but are you wicked?

MAILER: Unquestionably wicked, yes.

ADAMS: By your own terms, which is not knowing what is good or evil in any situation, but upping the ante each time.

MAILER: Upping the ante, yes. I'd say I may be one of the most wicked spirits in American life today. Maybe. America may be changing faster than I am.

ADAMS: Is it fair to say that your existentialism is leading us to know the nature of good and evil?

MAILER: It's leading us to — well, let me take a detour. People who submit to logical positivism, and go on from there into philosophies as difficult as Wittgenstein's, will answer if you ask, "Why go through these incredible disciplines in order to verify the fact that you're able to verify the wing span of a gnat but not of an archangel?" They will answer, "Well, it isn't what we are able to verify that is interesting, so much as that we go through a discipline which enables us to think cogently. We're less likely to go in for sloppy thinking thereafter." That's the value of it. I'd say by going in for my variety of associational, metaphorical thinking (which is, of course, the exact opposite) I may be able eventually to think speculatively without feeling philosophical vertigo. You see, it doesn't take any more illogic to posit that there's a god or devil than it takes to say there is none. The latter statement is absolutely as potent an act of faith. There's a marvelous line in *Jumpers*, the play by Tom Stoppard, to that effect. I paraphrase:

"Well, maybe atheism is a selfish act against God." You know, God and this God mous.

ADAMS: It's a terror,

MAILER: No. The terror is in you. It's not out there. That we are not God. That we're not good. That there's always been a God. Christianity, the Christian religion, is right. One does have to be reasonably clean, clean, everybody. The shape of state was nailed to it was carried by what's happened in our history where faiths, one by one, in a paranoid dream would all evil on earth be Devil.

ADAMS: That's paranoid.

MAILER: That's paranoid of all evil on earth, that. I think God might be evil. Because if God is to His great woe, of way that a general in those soldiers could

ADAMS: You've talked excrement.

MAILER: Where did I say that?

ADAMS: It comes up in the league of mine once to eschatology and I put it to your work. Now I put excrement and eternity with the Devil, does

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God." You know, once you contemplate the notion that there is
God and this God may be embattled, the terror you feel is enor-
mous.

ADAMS: It's a terror, but isn't it also paranoia?

MAILER: No. The terror is not that some force is working on you to
ruin you. It's another kind of terror: It's that nothing is nailed
down. That we are out there — that our lives are truly existential.
That we're not going to end up well. Not necessarily. You see,
there's always been this sort of passive confidence implicit in
Christianity, the confidence that things are going to work out all
right. One does have to die, that's true, but if one keeps one's nose
reasonably clean, one is going to heaven. That gave security to
everybody. The ship of state was built on that security. The ship
of state was nailed down. It didn't travel the stormy seas. Rather,
it was carried by the strongest pallbearers of the nation. And
what's happened now is we're entering an existential period in
our history where nothing is nailed down. All the American
faiths, one by one, are being exploded. We lived for too long in a
paranoid dream world that believed communism was the secret of
all evil on earth because it was the social embodiment of the
Devil.

ADAMS: That's paranoid.

MAILER: That's paranoid. But I don't believe the Devil is the secret
of all evil on earth. I believe something more complicated than
that. I think God might be the source of a considerable amount of
evil. Because if God is embattled, He could fail to take care, much
to His great woe, of people who are devoted to Him, in the same
way that a general might have to surrender soldiers on a hill. And
those soldiers could give up with great bitterness in their hearts.

ADAMS: You've talked about evil in one sense as God's shit, God's
excrement.

MAILER: Where did I say that?

ADAMS: It comes up in "The Metaphysics of the Belly." A col-
league of mine once remarked that it's but a step from scatology
to eschatology and I've often thought of this remark with regard
to your work. Now I'm interested in the relationship between ex-
crement and eternity. If God's shit is evil, but shit is associated
with the Devil, doesn't this imply that God creates evil?

MAILER: There are references in my work to the idea that shit and the Devil have an umbilical relation, but it's not my idea after all. Luther had a few notions about it.

ADAMS: As did Jonathan Swift.

MAILER: It's an idea that goes — it starts with the most primitive peoples. It goes all the way. There's a reason for it. Shit is what we reject, at least to the degree that the shit felt it deserved a better end for itself. In other words, a lot of our shit has nutrients in it, worth in it. It's just that the body couldn't take it, and so passed it out. Some of the best of the food goes out with the shit as well as some of the worst. That's what I said in "The Metaphysics of the Belly." All right. To the degree that we can loosen our imagination to assume this stuff might have a soul, after all we're beginning to discover now that plants have feelings and souls, so it may be that food, even though in a peculiar relation to life, not as alive as a plant, let's say, or as an animal, but still alive to a degree, has a mood, has a spirit, has something. If food feels it has been violated, suppose it can die with a curse. Of course, the Devil loves to be around and pick up those who die with a curse. Malcolm Muggeridge once had Mother Theresa of Calcutta on a television show with him. Muggeridge, who is by any measure a devoutly religious man, had just written a book about Mother Theresa and obviously revered her. He told me what she used to do in Calcutta. Her order of nuns would take people who were dying on the street and move them into her convent where they'd die anyway a few days later — they didn't begin to have medicine to take care of them or anything like that — but her notion was, and Muggeridge was moved by this, and I agree that it is a moving idea, was that she didn't want them to die with absolutely nothing. She wanted them to be able to come in and get a little attention before they died so they wouldn't go out with a complete bitterness in their hearts. Now that is a religious woman. The recognition that one not die with a curse is fundamental to any inquiry into what could be the possible nature of God and the Devil. If God is embattled, and can't give fair justice to all, then what of those who do not achieve what they saw as their own fulfillment and thereby become spiritual material for the Devil, if not in this life then in another? We haven't said one word about karma, but my first idea these days is that any attempt to speak of these things makes no sense unless you take into account the peculiar calculus of karma. We may have to recognize that we're not only acting for this life but for other lives. Our past lives and our

future lives. Paying future dues, for example, no sense to us or sometimes desperate condition in which

ADAMS: Karma is a years. It's a term of "The Belly" or "The Po have in describing your metaphysics described, like the Economy of Time

MAILER: I had come attention. In about went out to visit Lowney Handy what?" So he gave are not only reflection, the judgment life. If you exist in Gods or Devils, a lived a life that degree you lived dredged up all the swamp in your new good purposes longer, just a moment Jones went on about I was an atheist at That's the only thing head for years. "about it over and over think, "Yes, that c

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future lives. Paying dues, receiving awards. Reducing the cost of future dues, for example, by certain acts of abnegation that make no sense to us or our friends, yet ready to dare, on the other hand, sometimes desperate activities because we *are* desperate. The condition in which we live is hurting our karma.

ADAMS: Karma is a word you've used increasingly in the last few years. It's a term that you did not use in "The Metaphysics of the Belly" or "The Political Economy of Time," but which you could have in describing the nature of the soul. Is this something new in your metaphysics or is it a term for something that you've already described, like the way in which the soul exists, in "The Political Economy of Time"?

MAILER: I had come across the word in books but never paid any attention. In about 1953, I think it was in Robinson, Illinois, I went out to visit James Jones in his writers' colony and he and Lowney Handy were talking about karma and I said, "What's all that?" So he gave me the standard explanation which is that we are not only reincarnated, but the way in which we are is the reflection, the judgment, the truth, of how we lived our previous life. If you exist in a simple form of karma with no interference by Gods or Devils, a natural flux of karma, then to the degree you lived a life that was artful, your reincarnation was artful. To the degree you lived a life that destroyed the time of others and dredged up all the swamp muds, so you are a creature of the swamp in your next life. The beauty of this may be that there is now good purpose to the swamp. (This isn't Jones's talk any longer, just a more general explanation of karma.) At any rate, Jones went on about it and I said, "You *believe* in that?" Because I was an atheist and a socialist in those days. He said, "Oh, sure. That's the only thing that makes sense." Well, the line rang in my head for years. "The only thing that makes sense." I thought about it over and over and in the last three or four years I began to think, "Yes, that does make sense. Jones was right."

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MAILER: Obviously there are all kinds of marriages. I suppose I was referring to people who are relatively independent, and sufficiently narcissistic to want to live their own kind of life. For them to be able to live with someone else is not an automatic venture. But then you can always find men and women who get married out of deep dependence on one another. Such marriages are usually a tyranny on one side, an enslavement on the other. Sometimes they are awful marriages where it may be a victory for the weak mate to split.

FARBAR: Do you feel you learned something from each marriage? Does each marriage get better, or worse, or is it all the same?

MAILER: Oh, each marriage is different. Being married to a woman is the equivalent, I think, of living in a major culture. Should you find yourself married to one woman and then to another, you have gone through the equivalent of spending five years in England after five years in France.

I don't look back on these marriages with bitterness. It seems to me you often get as much as you lost. I even discovered there may be four stages to knowing a woman. First, there's living together. It's often thought equal to marriage. Not by half. You can live with a woman and never begin to comprehend her at all, not until you get married to her. Once you do that, you're in the next stage. The third, obviously, is children. Once again your woman is different. Say it's analogous to a culture going through major transformations. The fourth stage is knowing a woman once you're divorced. Then, indeed, you come to know something at last. So if it weren't for the fact that there are children, there would be something almost agreeable about moving from marriage to marriage, just as there is something exciting about spending five years in England and five in France.

But there are children, and that's the vortex of all postmarital pain, which is always so surprisingly huge. Because finally the children come out of a vision in the marriage. It doesn't always even matter how casually they may have been conceived. Children can be created out of desperation, out of laziness, out of apathy, as a sporting proposition. But, usually, children come out of some covert union, some feeling that you have something together which should be embodied in a child. Otherwise, it's a little absurd to conceive. Therefore, once you have children, if the marriage breaks you can speak of it as failure. The vision that's embodied in that child is now broken. Not to count the damage to the child.

Farbar

Monroe, you say of her few marriages (which is [unclear]) could recognize how [unclear], and probably have [unclear]. Why do you feel a few [unclear]?

marriage without question, life where they might [unclear]. When people [unclear], for they don't [unclear]. marriage has become [unclear]. Of course, I'm [unclear] that educated leisure [unclear]. Precisely in that part [unclear].

gambling against a so-called [unclear] make this marriage work, [unclear] scheme of things fight [unclear] greater desire for product of a marriage that's [unclear].

bad marriage? Is being [unclear].

are marriages where the opposite occurs. When the sexual impulse quiets down or dies even, the people become great friends. Carnally speaking, they're divorced, but they don't separate legally. They live together as dear friends. Such marriages are often nice. I've never been in one, but I imagine it could be very nice.

FARBAR: Let's change the subject completely. I wondered how you felt about lesbianism. If you had any thought that you could —

MAILER: It's funny, you know, I've always had a puritanical attitude about homosexuality, almost as if I couldn't afford to begin to get homosexual, because God knows where it would all stop. You know about that old Talmudic notion, that if you want to restrain an impulse don't just build a fence around the impulse itself, build a fence around the fence. By analogy, I've never been tolerant of the idea of homosexuality for myself. But I've always had the feeling that if I were a woman, that I somehow would enjoy lesbianism. I think if I were a woman it would mean very little to me to be a lesbian part of the time.

FARBAR: Is that because lesbian women you've known or read about are always saying they know how to do whatever it is they're doing better than men do?

MAILER: Well, obviously there must be fine sensuality among lesbians. Listen, what am I edging around it for? I have seen women together and it's lovely. Or, let us say, it is lovely provided it isn't finally designed to exclude men from every relation with women.

FARBAR: Last spring, in a piece in *New York Review of Books* on *Last Tango* you wrote about Brando and Maria Schneider being nameless when they meet each other, and this made their sexual relationship intriguing. As soon as some sort of relationship begins, and they get to know one another's names, it ends. Why do women enjoy anonymous sex?

MAILER: I think once a woman becomes anonymous in a sexual relationship — it's as if she's weightless. She no longer has the gravity of old responsibility. She can cut loose.

But I think one thing's rarely understood about promiscuity. In *Last Tango* there's that line "Fuck God," with which the picture begins — you can hardly hear it. Brando screams it as the Metro goes overhead. One of the profoundest motives in promiscuity and in perversion is fuck God. God, I'm defying you. A most basic human emotion. Now, whether we actually defy God when we think we do, or are unwittingly dignifying Him, even expressing His will, which has been kept from us for two thousand

years — in other words God rather than the pulse is there.

What we can count on as a special responsibility, I think only in anonymous sex. The literature of orgies is wilder? After men are made to make love to one another, maybe it's that whereas men have to

FARBAR: The opposite of that you are still married, that you are still married away from them?

MAILER: No, but it's a life to another. Because perhaps because they're

The logic of karma, other motivations, an artist, engaged in a competition with other gods. So the problem back to certain projects, prove his first attempt. Sometimes one wants you can do better or not. Perhaps hurt notions of God. You have the potential of most human under all the absurd there's a blocked access to some of the more across the board. Then you need a shit. Sin troubles with promiscuity wastes out, but take shit on them, and then Marilyn is, "Less is more than any science on

FARBAR: Well then, what in a much more holy

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years — in other words, it is the pagan who expresses the will of God rather than the Christian — that we don't know. But the impulse is there.

What we can count on is that when a woman throws off her social responsibility, her tendency is to be wilder than a man. Not only in anonymous relations but in orgies. Is there anything in the literature of orgy that doesn't suggest that women are always wilder? After men are used up, the women get together. They can make love to one another for hours until the men are restored. Or maybe it's that women sit upon an endless well of sexuality, whereas men have to keep rebuilding it.

FARBAR: The opposite of orgy is marriage, I suppose. Do you feel that you are still married, in some karmic sense, or some essence of you is still married to each of your wives, and you are never away from them?

MAILER: No, but it's possible certain relations continue from one life to another. Because of a great love or a great hatred, or perhaps because they're unfulfilled.

The logic of karma, it seems to me, is that God, whatever His other motivations, may as well be considered some kind of cosmic artist, engaged in a dialogue, at the least, about the nature of existence with other cosmic artists in other parts of the universe, other gods. So the point of karma may be to enable Him to go back to certain projects, just as an artist sometimes wishes to improve his first attempt. Sometimes what an artist does is perfect. Sometimes one wants to work it further, go to the point where you can do better or, if not, know you've failed and abandon the notion. Perhaps human souls represent some of the most poignant notions of God. You see, there's an extraordinary beauty in the potential of most human relations if we're willing to assume that under all the absurdities, all the spleen and waste and brutality, there's a blocked aesthetic conception. Maybe that's why I object to some of the more casual forms of promiscuity. I don't object across the board. There are times when you need a fuck the way you need a shit. Simple as that. Let's not pretend. One of the troubles with promiscuous fucking is that you not only get the wastes out, but take in waste from the other person's system. You shit on them, and they shit on you. I think one of the best lines in *Marilyn* is, "Less is known about the true transactions of fucking than any science on earth."

FARBAR: Well then, why do so many women look upon the sex act in a much more holy way than a man does?

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MAILER: They do, they don't. Some have absolute contempt for sex. Probably just as many women think of sex as evacuation as men. They enjoy sex, but despise it. One of the drives in women's lib is to insist that women are absolutely as cynical about sex as men and have the right to be absolutely as cynical.

FARBAR: Remember when the Pill first came on the scene and made a lot of young people very happy? There was a lot of screwing, and then gradually, the way it is now, there seems to be less joy in sex. When I was eighteen or twenty, I'd be screwing my brains out if it were possible.

MAILER: You were screwing your brains out because it was a criminal activity in your day, and so offered more pleasure than law-abiding activity. Which has been my argument about permissiveness in sex from the beginning. It's why I'm opposed to legalization of marijuana. Reduce the penalties, but don't have marijuana legal. The corporation will take it over. Marijuana with filter-tip cigarettes. You'll have vitamins in the marijuana, and every pollution of advertising. You'll come to hate the very thought of smoking because they'll be working their scheme on you.

By the same token, the moment you get too much permissiveness in sex, you get pulled into somebody else's manipulation scheme. My idea these years is that total promiscuity is the unstated need of the technological society. Its impulse is to accept indiscriminate fucking. It wants humans to become units. About the time we no longer distinguish between a man and a woman, he-she has become an interchangeable sexual part. We put it into the hole of those weaker than us, and get it put into our own hole by those stronger; we become a link in a technological chain of sex.

I've always hated the Pill. It reduces the fuck to a species of upper masturbation. Part of the beauty of the fuck was that you were taking a terrible chance. You could knock the girl up, and if you did, then by God you found out what you really felt about her, how phony were you, how true. When a woman comes to you and says she's pregnant, you know more about what you feel for her than you did before.

All right, the women will counter and say, That's good for you, finding your identity, but we're losing ours. Because we have to get butchered by abortionists. I've never been able to answer this. I will agree that the absence of the Pill was better for the sanity of men than women. I think women, if they are willing to look at

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themselves in such fashion, are in the embattled position. Since they are closer to creation, they have to pay more for the privilege. They hate it now. They hate it because we live in a technological world, where to be pregnant means that you're removed for a time from the major scene, which is to say the whole technological process. The last power of the human heart as we approach apocalypse is ambition. Everybody gets more ambitious to be in on more. If we can't wield the power, then we want to be in on the shaping of the power.

FARBAR: What about legalized abortion?

MAILER: I think when a woman goes through an abortion, even legalized abortion, she goes through hell. There's no use hoping otherwise. For what is she doing? Sometimes she has to be saying to herself, "You're killing the memory of a beautiful fuck." I don't think abortion is a great strain when the act was some miserable little screech, or some squeak oozed up through the trapdoor, a little rat which got in, a worm who slithered under the threshold. That sort of abortion costs a woman little more than discomfort. Unless there are medical consequences years later.

But if a woman has a great fuck, and then has to abort, it embitters her. A profound and awful transaction. The Pill didn't come into existence for nothing.

FARBAR: Do you see any future in a formal structure of marriage? Many young people in various strata of society are no longer getting married.

MAILER: We return to our beginning. I think marriage has a future of a sort. I think it's going to become a classical demand on people. Of course, few people are interested in classical demands. Those who are will look upon marriage with more regard than they have in a century. Because it's not going to be easy to imagine a man and woman getting married when they're young and both virgins, say at the age of eighteen or twenty or twenty-two, and then proceeding to live in happiness and fidelity for fifty or sixty years in order to die together. That is soon going to be equal in difficulty to pitching a no-hitter. And will be respected in the same fashion. The virtuosity of the demand is finally going to keep marriage alive. Not necessarily as a fundamental social institution, but as a grand curiosity. Because there will always be that human wonder. Maybe that was the way it was supposed to be. Maybe there is nothing more beautiful than one man and one woman managing to be that much to each other. What courage it takes, what extraordinary leaps, what a transcendent vision one

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MEDWICK: Well, do you think that men love differently than women?

MAILER: Let's try to separate sex and love. For instance, it's possible sex inspires more mystical feelings than love. I'm talking about love in the immediate sense, A loves B. Terribly concrete and particular. You love the way someone walks, the way they talk, the way they do all those things in the songs, you love the way they smell and you love the way they wear clothing, you love the way they laugh, you love the way they tell a joke, you love the way they say no to somebody — it's all the things they do. Whereas sex very often makes you feel close to God. Now if you love someone, and if you also have good sex with her, then you can feel very close to God as you love. In fact, it's easier to feel close if you have good sex with someone you love, because having good sex with somebody you don't like can leave you with an angry, confused, lustful feeling that may inspire you to more and more sex until you burn it out, and it drives you further and further away from any tenderness. To that extent you offer nothing to God, you're only thinking of the Devil. Sex also inspires, very often, a feeling that you're awfully close to the Devil. But I think the paradox of sex is that you can have sex with someone you don't know, on the first night, and feel closer to God in that moment than you're likely to feel again for five or ten years, even if you're never going to see the person again. You may say goodbye in the morning and never see each other again, a romance in the airport or something. Although I must confess I've never had a romance in an airport — can you imagine finding God in all that plastic?

MEDWICK: I'm not sure where that leaves love. How much of that feeling remains, that close-to-God feeling remains in a long-term relationship?

MAILER: Well, if one loves one's wife and loves one's children, after a while you begin to feel very close to God — not that your wife is God or the child's God but you're married to still one more aspect of the creation, whatever it is. That is, you touch God. That is the way in which most people become quietly religious, and say at the end of a period of many years, "Yes, I believe in God, I believe in God very much." There's been a quiet growth of sentiment without them necessarily thinking about it. They go along for years with their children, and at a certain point they find themselves praying. Let's say a child is ill, they're praying for the child's protection and they realize they've gotten very close to God because they've seen this extraordinary miracle of a child

The artist on Gels

growing every day, and changing and having some life that's just not explicable by the wife's wit or the husband's. So the creation becomes beautiful, and manifest. But as I say, that's not the way of the mystic. If you would, that's finding Christ through works.

The first time that someone has a profound sexual act, when it's all over, there's this shocked, stunned, incredible recognition: "Why God, God exists." Which is what Saint Teresa felt perhaps. I say it usually happens in sex rather than in love because it's got to happen quickly, a sudden revelation. So there are certain advantages to one-night stands. One brings none of one's baggage to a one-night stand and that makes it possible to have, once in a while, extraordinary emotions. The average one-night stand is, after all, not necessarily a small disaster, but unless it's very, very good indeed it leaves a terrible aftertaste. They can be exceptional once in a while; when that happens one often has this religious sentiment. It doesn't come from the person — you don't know the person — it comes from something in sex itself. Sex may be something that's outside of people.

MEDWICK: I can't seem to think of a woman who has written about sex in this way, or love in this way. I can think of five or six men.

MAILER: I would argue that women have an immense horror of exposing themselves. Let me give an example. When I wrote *An American Dream*, many people were offended profoundly by the sexual act that takes place between the hero Rojack and the German maid Ruta. It would have been impossible — if Ruta, and not Rojack, had been telling the story — for her to write about that act without revealing herself completely, and in a disadvantageous way. The man could write about it, because one-night stands are altogether different from a continuing sexual relationship where the man dominates in one way, the woman dominates in another, they share here, they're apart there, and it changes over a period of time. In the one-night stand there was, at least until very recently, the notion that no matter what they did in bed, the man was dominant in that he had scored the breakthrough and the woman had been taken, at least in the eyes of society.

MEDWICK: Is that changing now, do you think?

MAILER: Oh, a great deal. It's almost getting to the point where women are saying, "I scored."

MEDWICK: What does that do to the mythology?

MAILER: Well, I don't think one generation can wipe out what may or may not be biological and is certainly historical. But a woman

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is not going to admit as readily as a man that she had an extraordinary experience on a one-night stand. Ten or twenty years ago you'd hear of a woman who slashed her wrists — often what happened was that she had an extraordinary experience with a man she met for a night and never heard from again, and that made her feel she was crazy or evil or didn't deserve to live. I'm not saying that one-night stands are better than living in considerable sexual intensity with someone for a long time. I'm not saying that at all. I'm saying that it can be hard for the long-term relationship to be mystical. One reaches heights from time to time, and in fact one may go higher and further with someone one knows very well than one could ever go on a one-night stand, but since a one-night stand is often transcendental to the degree that you really don't know the other person, that they are *strange* — like the cosmos — it suggests that when you're living with someone you love, sex can't be transcendental in that particular way at all. Of course it gets its richness in other ways, but we've talked of that.

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Ethics and Pornography

An Interview with Jeffrey Michelson and Sarah Stone



JEFFREY MICHELSON: What do you think makes for great sex?

NORMAN MAILER: Great sex is apocalyptic. There's no such thing as great sex unless you have an apocalyptic moment. William Burroughs once changed the course of American literature with one sentence. He said, "I see God in my asshole in the flashbulb of orgasm."* Now that was one incredible sentence because it came at the end of the Eisenhower period, printed around 1959 in *Big Table* in Chicago. I remember reading it and thinking, "I can't believe I just read those words." I can't tell you the number of taboos it violated. First of all, you weren't supposed to connect God with sex. Second of all, you never spoke of the asshole, certainly not in relation to sex. If you did, you were the lowest form of pervert. Third of all, there was obvious homosexuality in the remark. In those days, nobody was accustomed to seeing that in print. And fourth, there was an ugly technological edge — why'd he have to bring in flashbulbs? Was that the nature of his orgasm? It was the first time anybody had ever spoken about the inner nature of the orgasm.

MICHELSON: Yeah.

MAILER: OK. Looking at it now, that marvelously innovative sentence, with all it did, one of the most explosive sentences ever written in the English language, we can take off from it and say that unless sex is apocalyptic, we can't speak of it as great. We can

* The first sentence in *Naked Lunch* as it was printed in *Big Table*.

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MAILER: Remember the
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MICHELSON: What is
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MICHELSON: Tell me
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MAILER: I'm not going
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revelously innovative sentences ever take off from it and say speak of it as great. We can

MAILER: Yeah. I used to have an immense amount when I was younger. I needed it. I had an immense amount to learn. Sexual vanity probably has an inverse proportion to sexual sophistication. When we're young, we have to believe we're the greatest gift given to women because if we didn't, we would know how truly bad we are. When I was a kid, I remember I had an older cousin who was immensely successful with women. And I was always obsessed with performance. He used to say to me, "You're wrong on that; performance has nothing to do with it." I never knew what he meant. It took years — he was considerably older than me — to come to understand what he was talking about. Performance is empty in sex. Performance is pushups. I mean, we've all had the experience of making love for hours, and getting that airless, tight, exhausted feeling, you know, my God, will she ever come? For God's sakes, please, God, please, let her come! (*laughter*) I have a bad back today and one of the reasons is that I worked so hard when I was younger.

MICHELSON: At sex?

MAILER: I didn't work at lifting furniture, I promise you. If I'd been a furniture mover, at least I'd have some honor. (*laughter*) No, I have a bad back because I was stupid. Because I tried to . . . you see, the minute you try to dominate sex through will, sex escapes you. The connection of female sexuality with cats is not for too little. You cannot dominate a cat with your will. If you do, the cat goes right around you. Sexuality is the same way: can't dominate it. So over the years as you come to recognize this, you begin to approach it from the side, so to speak.

MICHELSON: Tell me about your first experience with pornography. Do you remember when you were a kid and the first magazines you had?

MAILER: I think it was *Spicy Detective*.

MICHELSON: *Spicy Detective*?

MAILER: There used to be magazines called *Spicy Detective* and *Spicy* — I can't remember the others, maybe *Spicy Romance*. The girls always had marvelous large breasts, with tremendously pointed nipples. I don't know how to describe these breasts, it almost fails me. You couldn't call them pear-shaped, nor melon-shaped, somewhere in between. They were projectile-shaped. Literally, they looked like the head of a 105 Howitzer shell, about 4 inches in diameter, and went out about 5½ inches, with those tremendously pointed nipples. The girl always used to be tied to some sort of hitching post with an evil man approaching. They al-

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ways had one arm under their breasts. I remember that it made
 the breasts project out even more. They'd have a wisp of clothing.
 A torn panty would cover their loins. I've never seen anything I
 enjoyed as much. Now, I didn't learn much from it.

MICHELSON: Do you feel that there are any social benefits that re-
 sult from a sexually free press, or do you feel that sexually explicit
 material must be tolerated simply to protect the wider benefits of
 the First Amendment?

MAILER: Well, the first benefit is sexual sophistication. Talk about
 pornography always revolves around: Does it excite more violent
 impulses, or doesn't it? The women's movement is absolutely up
 in arms about pornography. An encouragement to rape, et cetera.
 I just can't agree. I think they don't know quite what they're talk-
 ing about. Of course, some kinds of pornography are on the cusp.
 I wouldn't have anything to say for pornography that uses child-
 ren as models. I'm against anything that sets people's lives on
 certain tracks too early. Using a child to make money from sex is
 obviously offensive. If you were a magazine that had pictures of
 children performing sexual acts, I wouldn't be in it. That's where
 I draw the line.

But you asked what the social value might be. Pictures of men
 and women making love is not going to hurt people as much as it's
 going to help them. It gives them — and I would include porno-
 graphic movies — an education in that part of sex which is uni-
 versal, as opposed to the part that's particular. Those tragedies of
 high school kids who get married too young, only to discover
 three, five, eight years later, with a couple of children between
 them, that they weren't meant for one another at all, and so split,
 come about because the sex is so compelling when they're young
 and they know so little about it. That's a profound error we've all
 made one way or another. We mistake the beauties of sex for the
 beauties of the particular person that we're with, that is, think the
 particular person is beautiful because of the sexual feelings they
 arouse in us. We don't understand those feelings are more or less
 universal, and could be felt with someone else. The faculty of
 choice is not present. Now when I was a kid, and I've never
 known a kid who wasn't absolutely riveted by pornography. I
 wanted more and more of it. I never saw enough of it to satisfy
 myself. That's because there's tremendous knowledge there, tre-
 mendous knowledge about human behavior. You cannot look at a
 pornographic picture without learning more about human nature.
 I can look at some girl who has, on the face of it, a stupid face, let's

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* She tells him of a man who makes drawings
 of her.

say — some of the girls who appear in pornographic magazines look stupid, some rather bright. But let's take one that looks stupid. Nevertheless, there's something in the very way she holds her hand (even if the photographer arranged her hand for her, she had finally to embody his order) there's something in the way her hand is holding a cigarette that'll tell you a great deal about her if you look carefully enough at these matters.

You also get a sense of the sexual behavior of a panorama of people that you couldn't possibly have in your own life unless you devoted your life to sex. One of the ironies of pornography is that it enables people to free themselves from chasing after sex. A lot of that knowledge can now be obtained in a secondary fashion, through pornography.

MICHELSON: Knowledge as opposed to pleasure?

MAILER: Yes. If we all had to go out and acquire every bit of understanding through our own experience, it would take us forever to learn anything. That's why, in fact, civilization moved so slowly for so many thousands of years. From Gutenberg on, there's been an incredible rate of acceleration. Now, people were able to acquire most of their knowledge by reading. They didn't have to go through the experience themselves. The worst thing you can say against pornography, I mean, the only argument I would use if I were determined to stamp pornography out is that it tends to accelerate the same things that are being speeded up by all other communications. Pornography, right at this present point, is a peculiar frontier of communications.

SARAH STONE: What exactly is accelerated?

MAILER: The consciousness of people. In the simplest literal sense, a kid of eighteen will now know what he wouldn't have known till he was twenty-eight.

STONE: Why is that against pornography?

MAILER: Well, if you say that everything is speeding up too quickly and we may end up destroying ourselves because we're advancing at too great a rate and don't really know what we're doing, then, in that sense, pornography is dangerous. But by the same measure, television is endlessly more dangerous. Conservatives who believe that human nature should be slowed up have a legitimate argument, I'd say, against pornography. But they're not consistent. Because if this is their argument against pornography, let them ban television first.

MICHELSON: Do you feel comfortable about appearing in *Puritan*?

MAILER: Not at all. Probably ought to think it probable I've had to beaver shots. I'm not really well. I get fine pay for ever, in terms of writer, because photo of a gorge in Baltimore! Rig an axe and drop the reader's nose. So there have I. I don't really write. In that sense, writer.

MICHELSON: I'll together.

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MICHELSON: Will become art, at which to base

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MICHELSON: I guess shouldn't be the

MAILER: Excellent

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MAILER: Mmm, then, Sarah, then, what we call habitation with riousness of the woman in a picture. Jeffrey is saying toward the best

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you're thinking of) that may be arousing, but you find that your moral nature disapproves.

MICHELSON: I'm wondering: Is smut to pornography, to good pornography, as trashy romance novels are to good literature? Is it just the lower end of the genre?

MAILER: It's certainly complicated. Take Sarah's criteria, pictures that are transparently cynical. The model's worn out, the photographer's worn out, disgusting. Yet that can be arousing in a funny way. For instance, in *Hustler*, often I find that the most interesting section is those cheap Polaroid pictures that untalented photographers send in of women who are not professional models.

MICHELSON: The reality turns you on?

MAILER: The sordid reality. My sexuality, I expect, is aroused by knowledge. The moment I know more than I knew before, I'm excited. Those gritty Polaroid shots in *Hustler* are often more interesting. They communicate. You know, the picture of some waitress who lives in Sioux Falls. I know more at that moment about Sioux Falls, about waitresses — even if they're lying, even if she isn't a waitress, there's something about the very manifest of the lie that's presented that's fascinating. It arouses your curiosity. Whereas superb pictures of models can get boring. There tends to be a sameness to them. Aren't enough flaws present. The very question of the sordid is . . . tricky.

STONE: In Woody Allen's movie *Annie Hall*, he's on the street and he walks up to this little old lady and says to her something like "Why are relationships so difficult?" And she says, "Love fades . . ." As a man who's had six marriages, what is your reaction to this dialogue? Do you think that love fades and do you feel that sex fades?

MAILER: I don't think that sex fades in marriage necessarily. Without talking about my personal life, I'd say that compatibility is nearer to the problem than sex. What I mean is people can have marvelous sex and not be terribly compatible. That sets up a great edginess in marriage. Some people, in fact, can only have good sex with people who are essentially incompatible for them. I might have been in that category for years, I don't know. If you're terribly combative, then you're drawn toward mates who are not too compatible. Anyone who has a violent or ugly or combative edge is not going to be comfortable with someone who is really sweet and submissive. They want something more abrasive in their daily life. Otherwise they are likely to lose their good opinion of themselves. There's nothing worse than being brutal to some-

body who's got whose ideas irritate them every day than living with the same, if you there will come opposite. Faults become unending knows how fragile is the membrane. We have the weak and go bative relationships great animal vig make it for long

MICHELSON: What? MAILER: Well, I think automatic love. I think self-torture in the world. I suppose, I'm one of other vices to come lie in bed, pull beautiful, tender emotions, why is I fabulous I am? Self-pity comes love is a reward and solve your problems enough of itself takes pity. However it is, some at those poor meet and find love

MICHELSON: Love MAILER: Truman Prayers. I gather that the worst thing answered. Which Everybody pray worthy of it. Love

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body who's good to you. Whereas if you're living with someone whose ideas irritate the living shit out of you, and you fight with them every day and feel justified about it, that can be healthier than living with a soul whose ideas are compatible to yours. All the same, if you do choose this fundamental incompatibility, there will come a point where it ceases to be fun and turns into its opposite. Faults in the mate that were half-charming suddenly become unendurable. Every one of us who has been in love knows how fragile — what's a good word for skin? — how fragile is the *membrane* of love. It has to be mended every day and nurtured. We have to anticipate all the places where it's getting a little weak and go there and breathe on it, shape it again. In a combative relationship, obviously, that's difficult. You have to have a great animal vigor between combative people or they just can't make it for long.

MICHELSON: What about love fading?

MAILER: Well, I don't think love fades; I don't think there's anything automatic about it. I think most of us aren't good enough for love. I think self-pity is probably the most rewarding single emotion in the world for masturbators, which is one of the reasons, I suppose, I'm opposed to masturbation, because it encourages other vices to collect around you. Self-pity is one of the first. You lie in bed, pull off, and say to yourself, I have such wonderful, beautiful, tender, sweet, deep, romantic, exciting and sensual emotions, why is it that no woman can appreciate how absolutely fabulous I am? Why can't I offer these emotions to someone else? Self-pity comes rolling in, and cuts us off from recognizing that love is a reward. Love is not something that is going to come up and solve your problems. Love is something you get after you've solved enough of your problems so that something in Providence itself takes pity on you. I always believed that whoever or whatever it is, some angel, some sour sort of angel, finally says, "Look at those poor motherfuckers. He and she have been working so hard for so many years. Let's throw him and her a bone." So they meet and find love. Then they have to know what to do with it.

MICHELSON: Love is a function of having paid your dues?

MAILER: Truman Capote has got this book he's writing, *Answered Prayers*. I gather from something he said once that its theme is that the worst thing that befalls people is that their prayers are answered. Which is not a cheap idea. Love is the perfect example. Everybody prays for love, but once they get love, they have to be worthy of it. Love is the most perishable of human emotions. It

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never fades. That's my answer to the question. There is absolutely no reason in the world why people can't love each other more every day of their lives for eighty years. I absolutely believe that. Without that, I have no faith in love whatsoever. I think it would be a diabolical universe if you're introduced to all these wonderful sentiments that illumine your existence but something is put into the very nature of it that will make it fade. That's the sentiment of a person who is full of self-pity: Love fades. That old woman was full of self-pity.

MICHELSON: Do you feel that there is a spiritual obligation to sexual relationships, and if so, what price do we pay if we don't live up to it?

MAILER: Well, it's always a spiritual obligation. But the trouble with the word spiritual is that we think of churches and priests and clergymen. I do think there's a spiritual demand in love, however, more a demand than an obligation. Love asks that we be a little braver than is comfortable for us, a little more generous, a little more flexible. It means living on the edge more than we care to. Love is always in danger of being the most painful single emotion we can ever feel, other than perhaps a sudden knowledge of our own death. La Rochefoucauld has that wonderful remark that half the people in the world would never have fallen in love if they had not heard of the world. I think that most people I know, maybe three-quarters of the people I know, have never been deeply in love.

MICHELSON: Talking about not being deeply in love, have you ever paid for sex, and what is your opinion about hookers and johns and the outright exchange of sex for money?

MAILER: Well, take it at its best. Because at its worst, there is nothing worse than paying for sex, and being thrown a bad, cynical, dull fuck by a whore who either has no talent, or no interest in you, or feels you don't deserve anything better than you are getting. That's one of the worst single experiences there is. On balance, counting the number of times I've had good sex in whorehouses and bad, I could almost do without it. But, you know, living fifty-eight years, you end up with a lot of experiences. I've had a few extraordinary times in whorehouses, which I'll have to write about some day, too. So I wouldn't put it down altogether. It's just that it's immensely more difficult, I think, to have good sex with a whore unless you're oriented that way.

There are a lot of guys who are not homosexual, but grow up in a male environment. They have four brothers, or they're jocks, or

just live in a male environment. They're less comfortable than I have been plowing "plowing" and "plowing" it; they're really going to be mixing it is tremendously men in whorehouses that's too quick to have to cut that order to get a real

MICHELSON: You couldn't afford to begin to get home you feel that horribly candidly, have you

MAILER: I've never said, "Oh, I got that man." I feel that one. It creates can be an artist's elements a little.

There are homosexuals and others who live between male and female, but, bly, than it is between a woman make love to the other — there literally fuck a man then they reverse that back and forth to it. But, in male bottom, back or front were you done whether you're gay ship.

Now, I think about us. I think that's to the degree that female-male comparison we have a male-female systems within us

question. There is absolutely no love that can't love each other. I absolutely believe in love whatsoever. I think it was introduced to all these people but something made it fade. That's the tragedy: Love fades. That old

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ation. But the trouble of churches and priests demand in love, how Love asks that we be a little more generous, a edge more than we care most painful single emotion a sudden knowledge of a wonderful remark that er have fallen in love if that most people I know, now, have never been

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its worst, there is nothing thrown a bad, cynical, talent, or no interest in better than you are getting. There is. On balance, had good sex in whorehouses. But, you know, a lot of experiences. I've got houses, which I'll have to put it down altogether. It, I think, to have good that way.

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just live in a male environment as so many smalltown kids do. They're less comfortable with women, and so if all their buddies have been plowing the same broad—and I use these two words, “plowing” and “broad” because that’s the way they’re looking at it; they’re really looking upon it as a field—the fact that they’re going to be mixing their semen with the effluvia of their buddies is tremendously aphrodisiacal to them. So sex can be intense for men in whorehouses. It doesn't mean that they're homosexual; that's too quick a jump to make. What it does mean is that they have to cut that close to the edges of homosexual experience in order to get a real send-off.

MICHELSON: You said to Buzz Farbar in a *Viva* interview that you couldn't afford to begin — this is a quote, you "couldn't afford to begin to get homosexual because God knows where it'd stop." Do you feel that homosexual impulses should be repressed, and quite candidly, have you ever experienced such impulses?

MAILER: I've never experienced them dramatically. I've never ever said, "Oh, I got to have that boy," or "I've got to go to bed with that man." I feel it's been a buried theme in my life but a powerful one. It creates its presence by its absence. I don't think you can be an artist without having a . . . well, let's try to define the elements a little.

There are homosexuals who have essentially male experience and others who have female. In a funny way, the difference between male and female in homosexuality is more marked, probably, than it is between men and women. When a man and a woman make love, they can take turns: one more aggressive, then the other — there are many ways in which a woman can almost literally fuck a man. The woman can be active, the man passive, then they reverse it. Many good sexual relationships consist of that back and forth. Nothing like the dialectic when you get down to it. But, in male sexuality, there is a tendency to either be top or bottom, back or front. They have an expression: Did you do it or were you done to? There is much more identification with whether you're going to be the male or the female in the relationship.

Now, I think all humans are born with a man and a woman in us. I think that's self-evident: we have a mother and a father, and to the degree that the mother is female and male both, we have a female-male component in ourselves. In turn, through our fathers we have a male-female side to ourselves. At the least, two sexual systems within us, psychically, at any rate. I also suspect male

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artists have more of a female component to their nature than the average male. I think that's why I've always stayed away from homosexuality. I suppose I felt the female side of my nature would have been taken over by homosexuality to a degree that would have been repulsive to me. What you get down to is that it's a man who's doing it to you. And the man in me does not wish to be dominated by another man, not that way, not that way.

Now the homosexuals whose masculinity comes out through homosexuality are very proud of themselves. I mean, those homosexuals will say, "We're more men than the average heterosexual. The average heterosexual makes love to a woman who is physically weaker than himself. But we men, we go out and we stick it in the asses of men who can fight back, we're real men." In prison, there's great pride in who's doing it to who, because finally what you may be doing is putting it up the ass of a killer — which would give me pause, I'll tell you that. So, when I was younger, I used to cover all these feelings by feeling antipathy toward homosexuals. I don't feel that now. I just think all that is not for me. Any more than becoming a Hindu fakir would be a way of life for me, or going down at the age of fifty-eight to Texas to work in the oil wells, that wouldn't really be a reasonable life any longer.

MICHELSON: A friend of mine who grew up in Puerto Rico said that there the onus is only on the catcher, not the pitcher. Puerto Ricans, he said, didn't consider people who fucked people in the ass homosexuals. They only considered people who got fucked in the ass homosexuals. So that's just a cultural bias.

MAILER: Didn't I say earlier that the difference between the male and female sides of homosexuality is greater than the male and female aspects of heterosexuality?

MICHELSON: As long as the Puerto Rican was in the male role, he was still a male.

MAILER: Certainly criminals, and ghetto people, and tough ethnics do have that attitude, there's no question to it. To some men, active homosexuality doesn't hurt their masculinity; it reinforces it from their point of view.

One thing on which I have a bugaboo is that Women's Liberation keeps talking about rape, rape, rape. So far as I can make out, more men are probably raped every year than women, at least when you get into true cases of rape where it's absolutely against your will. I'll grant that there are many marginal cases of rape between men and women, where the woman rather likes the guy, but doesn't want to do it tonight, and the guy insists, and lo and

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You see, o phy, especial courages fant pornography satisfy eleme don't — let n about footba touchdowns, shock, to say

behold, she ends up doing it tonight. But that's much nearer to lack of moral consent than rape. Women's Lib throws all those cases into rape. If you only count cases of true force, where there's absolutely no desire on the one hand, and absolute determination on the other hand, I'm willing to bet there are more cases of male rape every year than female rape. Because in the prisons, thousands of men are done to every year.

MICHELSON: I know you're now to the right of the Pope on masturbation. But in the past, have you ever masturbated to an erotic photograph?

MAILER: Of course. In adolescence.

MICHELSON: Why have you become so puritanical about masturbation?

MAILER: I'm not puritanical about it. Puritans put people in jail for their activities, or bring social censure against them. I don't go out with a flag and walk it up and down outside certain people's houses . . .

MICHELSON: Ban masturbation!

MAILER: . . . but, God, I happen to believe, just like the nineteenth-century preachers, that the ultimate tendency of masturbation is insanity.

MICHELSON: You think it does lead to insanity?

MAILER: Well, it doesn't lead to it instantly. People can jerk off all their lives and they're not going to go insane. I said the *ultimate tendency* of masturbation is insanity. Now the ultimate tendency of driving a car at 80 miles an hour in a 55-mile-an-hour zone is collision. But there are people who drive at 80 miles an hour until the cops stop them or indeed, never get caught, but neither do they collide. The ultimate tendency remains just that. My point, however, is that left to itself masturbation does not bring you back into the world, it drives you further out of the world. You don't have the objective correlative.

You see, one of the arguments I would bring against pornography, especially the pornography of my adolescence, is that it encourages fantasy and romance. If I had a fault to find with the pornography magazines in general, it would be that they tend to satisfy elements of fantasy and romance. In other words, they don't — let me see if I can find some analogy. If a kid dreams about football as a wonderful game where he is running for touchdowns, and that's all he ever visualizes, he'd have a rude shock, to say the least, the first time he got into an actual game,

was dumped hard and had a headache afterward. There's nothing like the first tackle or block you throw to wake you up to one fact: If you're going to love football, you have to love it *with* its punishment. And at that point, loving it that way, you have a profound relation to football. To love with the full awareness of punishment is the nature of profundity. So, to the degree that pornography encourages people to believe that sex is easy, it's harmful. But I can't see this as a social harm, since everything in the scheme of things encourages us to believe that life is easier than it is.

One of the fundamental tenets of this business of selling America, selling modern life, is to present modern life as *nicer* than it is. As an example, you have these ads that show the happiness of dishwashing machines. Well, the nearest I came to have a major fight with my wife was the other night, she'd bought a new dishwasher and the thing smelled of plastic. It had the most hideous smell, that kind of antiseptic odor insane people douse themselves with. You know how certain insane people put sort of an antiseptic perfume on themselves. Ever smell that? That damn dishwasher smelled that way. I went into a rage. I said, "You've just bought part of the grand American scheme to drive us out of the kitchen. This thing stinks so bad that you'll never spend time cooking anything."

STONE: It smelled because it was new?

MAILER: That's what she claimed. But I'm telling you that smell's never going to go away. They're putting the odor in so people will go out and buy TV dinners. That's part of the scheme. That's what McDonald's, superhighways, and all general plastic crap is all about. Everything in the scheme of things drives us toward living in a way we don't want to live.

Pornography, to the degree it's sentimental and romantic, is fudging the issue too, not increasing knowledge, but muddying knowledge.

MICHELSON: Are you against fantasy?

MAILER: Against sentimental fantasy. That, I think, is our introduction to cancer. A ticket to the gulch.

STONE: What sexual fantasies get you hot?

MAILER: I won't get into it for a variety of reasons. Years ago a friend of mine agreed to fill out a sexual questionnaire. He had to go through every girl he'd laid, describe her in detail, what they did, their fantasies, their water sports. After he was finished, for

the first time in for three months.

Actually, I think you need fantas gives resonance two people are they're other people have to do the and woman are is fucking the visualizing a stu whether they know

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MAILER: Well, because beauty, finally, is a scalp, no getting around it. When a man goes out with a beautiful woman, he's more respected in the world. I can remember a few ugly women who were attractive to me. Ugliness can be sexually exciting . . . But I will say that I wasn't very happy to be seen in the world with those women. You could say that was demonstrably unfair to them.

Except I'm going to stick at this liberal point. I think there may be — and here we enter into waters that are much too deep for all of us — but it may be that beauty and ugliness are karmic. One reason people are so drawn to beauty is that it speaks of healthy karma, whereas ugliness suggests debts in previous lives that were too hideous to be paid in those lives. So the penalty is worn on the face in this life. Which is why ugly people have such a rage toward God at their ugliness.

MICHELSON: But still, it's much more important for a man to have a beautiful woman than it is for a woman to have a beautiful man.

MAILER: Yeah.

MICHELSON: Please explain the nature of the inequity.

MAILER: Well, I think if you believe, as the more radical Women's Liberationists believe, that the only difference between the sexes is an extra six to eight inches of male skin in a certain place, then it just seems vastly unfair and unnatural. But I happen to believe in the asymmetry of the sexes. The only equality of the sexes comes, I would say, out of the rough balance. Women are strong here, men there. That doesn't mean we can't agree on anything, or that women are not entitled to equality in a thousand ways they do not have it now. Women's Liberationists are not wrong when they say that women've been treated unfairly for centuries. They're right. But that doesn't mean that we're alike.

MICHELSON: Apples and oranges?

MAILER: Apples and oranges are entitled to the same treatment when they're presented to the consumer. But they are still apples and oranges, not one big orapple. Presumably, men and women are entitled to the same treatment before they enter eternity.

MICHELSON: How do you feel about your sexual generation, those people who came of age sexually when you did?

MAILER: We had kind of a nice generation if you're going to look at it from the point of view of sexuality. We were all pioneers. We saw ourselves as breaking ground, as sexually liberated. One of the things that appalls me about Women's Liberation is the way

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MICHELSON: prejudice?

MAILER: Well dice.

MICHELSON: Norman, I'd like to discuss the nature of inhibition, something that interests me. To put it bluntly, why is it that some women like to get fucked in the ass and some women find it distasteful? Some women like to suck cocks, some women don't. It surely is not purely physical.

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MAILER: You can't talk about it generally, you just can't. Everything we do sexually is as characteristic of us as our features. The question you ask is truly bottomless. You could say to me, why do some people have noses with an overhang, and why do some tilt up? Why do we respond to these noses in different ways? I could give an answer; I mean, a nose that tilts up often suggests optimism, confidence about the future, fearlessness, but a nose that turns over suggests a certain pessimism about the very shape of things, an attachment to sentiments of doom. You have to ask next: What is the nature of form? Why do curves do these things to us? But in sexuality, you also have to ask which period of one's life are we talking about? Anyone who's lived with a woman for a few years learns that a woman's tastes can change as much as a man's. There are women who detest being fucked in the ass, as you put it — you see, I refuse to use those words myself . . . The woman who wants nothing to do with a phallus in her crack one year is turned on immensely by it another year. I will make one general observation: It's very dangerous to stick it up a woman's ass. It tends to make them more promiscuous. I'll leave that with your readers. They can think about it from their own experience. They can test it out. Those who are scientifically inclined can immediately approach their mate and tool her, if they're able. Then they can observe what happens, watch her at parties, get a private detective, check up on her. So I guess I answered your question: A woman doesn't want it up the ass because she's doing her best to be faithful to that dull pup she's got for a man, and she knows if it blasts into the center of her stubbornness, that's the end of it. She won't be able to hold onto fidelity any longer. That's one explanation. It doesn't have to be true. But you might ponder it.

MICHELSON: Have you ever been surprised by a woman because she seemed very proper outside and then was very wild in bed? Or a wild woman on the outside and still wild in bed? Is there a relationship between inhibition and personality?

MAILER: No royal road to success. (laughter) I'm not sure that women have a sexual nature as such. I mean, think of the variation in sexual performance — to go back to that word — you've had over your life. I'm sure you haven't been the same with all

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women, better with some than others, obviously. With women, I think such changes are even greater. When I was a kid in Brooklyn, we'd walk around muttering, "Ah, she's a lousy lay." You know, sure, she was a lousy lay for A, B, C, and D, then E came along. And she was so good, he couldn't even talk about it.

MICHELSON: Let me ask you your thoughts about Plato's Retreat and other on-premise swing clubs. I don't know whether you've been or not, but you certainly know what it's about. This type of anonymous sexual expression was once exclusively the province of the gay community. Does it mean anything that it's filtered into the heterosexual community? That you can go, on any given night, with your wife and these places are full of friendly people from Queens, Long Island — you know, regular, human people are going there and having their —

MAILER: Regular human people as opposed to what?

MICHELSON: People with unconventional lifestyles.

MAILER: People with conventional lives very often are tremendously drawn to orgiastic sex. That's their artistic expression. That's the way in which they are fighting society.

See, I think if there's any guarantee to America, and I believe there is (I hate to say it because it's used so cheaply by all those people who keep shouting, "Our great America, our great democracy") but I think there may be a greatness to democracy. It rests in the profound wisdom that a society can't expand unless, implicit in it, is the acceptance that people are busy working overtime to destroy the society. By that logic, democracy is more dialectical than Soviet Communism. What we recognize is that if you have a society, then you need people who are working to destroy that society. Out of the war comes a metamorphosis, which ideally will be more adaptive to the nature of a changing historical reality than more totalitarian, monolithic states. So — as I say — one natural, normal, healthy function of people is to fight society. The way in which conventional people often do it is through orgiastic behavior. I mean, Saturday night they have a ball with their friends, who either live next door in the next ranch house, or they drive 300 miles to see some other swinging couple. On Sunday they all go to church together. And they're giggling a little. They're living two lives at once. They were having that ball last night, the four of them, now they're in church together. And nobody's going to know. Some people can only feel a sense of balance and satisfaction, happiness, I might say, if they're living two lives at once. Orgiastic life provides that. Orgiastic life provides a

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lot of solutions for people. But it is sheer hell for people who are deeply in love. It's almost impossible, I think, to have much orgasmic life if you're profoundly in love with a woman. You can do it, but it takes the edginess in love, and absolutely exacerbates it.

MICHELSON: You've spoken about something totalitarian in people who were proselytizing orgies.

MAILER: The moment there's an attempt to make anything a panacea, then it's totalitarian. Panacea suggests that there's one way to do it. So does totalitarianism suggest that there's only one way. But the cosmos was designed by some divine intelligence who foresaw that if there was only one way to do it, everybody would go there. The world would quickly tip out of balance.

STONE: Have you been sexually pursued by literary groupies? What's it like being fucked as an image rather than a person?

MAILER: Well, I've usually been drawn to women who aren't necessarily that interested in my work. My present wife had read one book of mine before we met. She hardly knew anything about me. It's probably analogous to the poor young rich girl, who wants to be loved for herself and not her money, remember all those movies?

MICHELSON: Sure.

MAILER: You definitely don't want to be loved for your literary fame because you know more about it than anyone else and you know that literary fame has very little to do with your daily habits. I mean, finally you're an animal who lives in a den and goes around, and finally, you know, has to be liked or disliked as an animal first.

STONE: Is jealousy a necessary part of an intense sexual relationship or do you feel that it's a disease?

MAILER: It's a very good question until you realize that you can't answer it. Because you end up with platitudes. It's my general experience that if you don't feel any jealousy at all, a woman will have profound doubt of your love. A little jealousy is marvelously aphrodisiacal, you know that, but real jealousy, when it takes over, is delusional, and has all the dirty pleasures of delusion. Delusion is one of the most profound forms of mental activity. If we have a delusion, we are, in effect, a detective on the scent of a case, picking up clues all over the place. We're trying to bring in the malefactor. So it enables us to go through life with an hypothesis. For some, it is unendurable to live without some hypothesis. So jealousy becomes one of the most satisfactory delusional schemes.

You have an hypothesis: study it. You listen to the one's senses. Jealousy gets it. People often come in their bad habits — I mean virtually everything in it. The proliferation of pleasures in a state of love: them up. Very often the delusional trip keeps our were before if we don't being on the receiving mickey-mouses you. You honey, no, I didn't turn

Then there's a lighter jealousy as a way of keeping home and Norris will say today?" Not that she doesn't. I don't know remember, somewhere at a o'clock, I was crossing the woman. Maybe I turned little act flew through the head. And at three o'clock herself, "What's that son of jealousy can be agreed God, that dear woman is OK.

MICHELSON: Do you think it's a disease?

MAILER: Sharpens certain isn't that love is blind. I you know, which probes the nature of how love works.

MICHELSON: One other question. What's the greatest work. What's the greatest work.

MAILER: I tend to do things that dignify them with Egypt is the one that's —

MICHELSON: The one you

MAILER: Yes — is the one

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You have an hypothesis: She or he is not faithful to me. Then you study it. You listen to the voice. You check out alibis. It sharpens one's senses. Jealousy gives us a ride we would not have without it. People often come into love with their senses drugged by all their bad habits — I mean, one of my fundamental theses is that virtually everything in American life works to deaden our senses. The proliferation of plastics first. So, given the fact that we find ourselves in a state of love with senses dulled, we have to sharpen them up. Very often jealousy hones that point. Taking off on a delusional trip keeps our instincts. We can feel more alive than we were before if we don't destroy too much en route. Of course, being on the receiving end of jealousy can be abominable. It mickey-mouses you. You're always saying, "No, honey, honest, honey, no, I didn't turn around, no, I didn't look!"

Then there's a lighter form of jealousy that is fascinating. It's jealousy as a way of keeping in touch. Once in a while I'll come home and Norris will say, "What were you doing at three o'clock today?" Not that she does this often, but once in a while. I'll say, "Nothing. I don't know what you're talking about." But then I'll remember, somewhere around three o'clock, *probably* it was three o'clock, I was crossing the street, and I noticed a truly attractive woman. Maybe I turned around and looked at her. It's as if this little act flew through the firmament and lodged in my beloved's head. And at three o'clock she turned around at home and said to herself, "What's that son of a bitch up to?" In that way, that kind of jealousy can be agreeable, can even give you a little glow, oh, God, that dear woman is sure tuned in to me. You see, so that was OK.

MICHELSON: Do you think being in love sharpens psychic connections?

MAILER: Sharpens certain connections at the expense of others. It isn't that love is blind. Love has intense, laser-like tunnel vision, you know, which probably would be a closer way of describing the nature of how love sees.

MICHELSON: One other question: Great artists take risks in their work. What's the greatest risk you've taken?

MAILER: I tend to do things that are chancy, but I wouldn't necessarily dignify them with the word risk. Maybe my novel about Egypt is the one that's —

MICHELSON: The one you're working on now?

MAILER: Yes — is the one most filled with risk. What do we mean

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such a situation, I would also want that. It's very real to me that your soul can die before your body. So I felt I can write about this man in a way other people can't. On the other hand, I knew very little about prison, knew nothing about Utah and absolutely nothing about the particular circumstances of Gilmore's life. That was a good balance for me. Let me put it an altogether different way. Years ago, I was considerably taken with how you never know the sure meaning of a Latin sentence until you hear the last syllable of the last word. In Latin if you want to say, "I drink poison from the glass," you can put it in any order you wish. For example: "Poison from the glass drink I." Then the listener wouldn't know who took poison until "drink I" is spoken. That means people had to be alert. It was very easy to trick your neighbor. Now the Romans were the first nation to live consistently in terms of world conquest, and perhaps there was a certain unconscious conspiracy to construct the language that way. So that only the people who were most alert, most unscrupulous, most tricky, and most concerned with getting their way would be adept in the tongue. It was, goes my hypothesis, a language for people seeking power and ready to use all means to obtain it. With that as a key, assuming my key is correct, Latin might become a more fascinating study. Whereas, to approach Latin cold, without a key, would fill me with dismay. In any novel I might write, I like that same possibility present — that I know something other people don't. Those are the books I'm drawn to write. I'm never attracted to a topic where I have no more to say than anyone else.

LENNON: It's become a commonplace to note that your nonfiction is written novelistically. Why?

MAILER: It's nice to end with a book that reads like a novel rather than the digested contents of the first stomach of the cow. Which latter is what most nonfiction is to me. Someone spends a lot of time studying a body of material, they digest it, and write books. They skip the confusions. That's not interesting. We never know the living origins of the conclusions. What is fascinating to me in another writer is how his mind works. If I obtain clues that way, I can improve my own mind. But to suppose an author can digest a subject so well that there is no need to think about the subject independently is disagreeable. So I don't like the way most nonfiction is done. Whereas the novel changes our lives to some extent. Marriages have broken up, for instance, because someone read a novel and decided the life of the character in the book was more

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That's why

LENNON: Car described it

MAILER: I this opposed by the material the other. I swer than I tained form the professi not two, the actly what which is the lege — or is not history, men who of say about tl covery. Th: hypothesis. The desire enable us to realize that: history bec working of fact to illur

LENNON: Ho years?

MAILER: I can Devlin, who and in fact, ter named A nine Irishm took a cubic long literary *Naked and* said, "It's a no gift for character, a no metapho life." I never main on my

is very real to me that I felt I can write about the other hand, I knew Utah and absolutely not Utah and absolutely not of Gilmore's life. That is an altogether different matter with how you never know until you hear the last word. I want to say, "I drink any order you wish. For I am I." Then the listener says "I drink I" is spoken. That is very easy to trick your imagination to live consistently. Perhaps there was a certain language that way. So I am, most unscrupulous, following their way would be a hypothesis, a language for all means to obtain it. I am correct, Latin might be to approach Latin cold, I am. In any novel I might say — that I know some-thing I'm drawn to write. I have no more to say than

that your nonfiction is

reads like a novel rather than much of the cow. Which someone spends a lot of time to get it, and write books. Interesting. We never know what is fascinating to me in the way I obtain clues that way, I am an author can digest a book about the subject in the way most nonfiction lives to some extent. Because someone read a book in the book was more

interesting than their own. Good novels are painful to read. That's why few people do.

LENNON: Can nonfiction ever be existential in the sense that you've described it in regard to novels?

MAILER: I think an historian could say, "I start this project with two opposed hypotheses. I'm not sure which is correct. As we explore the material, let me show you the arguments for one, and then for the other. In the course of it, maybe we'll arrive at more of an answer than I have now." Although, to bring that off in truly sustained form is so dangerous, and would so violate the canons of the profession of history, which insist that you go for one stance, not two, that it doesn't often happen. It would tend to agitate exactly what disturbs most people about history in the first place which is that they learn somewhere between high school and college — or is it between graduate school and life? — that history is not history, but a series of immensely sober novels written by men who often don't have large literary talents, and have less to say about the real world than novelists. That's a disturbing discovery. That historians are not dealing with fact, but with the hypothesis they developed in relation to a series of isolated data. The desire to make these facts glow as facets in a mosaic that will enable us to perceive the past is not often done. Once we come to realize that no historians do it more closely than novelists, then all history becomes a novel. Just as any novel is the history of the working of one man's imagination, and so is a real historical artifact to illumine a period for us.

LENNON: How have the metaphors you've used changed over the years?

MAILER: I can tell you a story on that. I had a dear friend, Charlie Devlin, who helped me greatly with *The Naked and the Dead*, and in fact was the model, considerably removed, for the character named McLeod in *Barbary Shore*. Charlie was a quiet saturnine Irishman who was living in a small rooming house where I took a cubicle to finish *The Naked and the Dead*. We used to have long literary conversations. At a certain point I showed him *The Naked and the Dead*. He tore it apart. He was a severe critic. He said, "It's a better book than I thought it would be, but you have no gift for metaphor." Then he said, "Metaphor reveals a man's character, and his true grasp of life. To the degree that you have no metaphor, you are an impoverished writer, and have lived no life." I never forgot this lecture and began to work with might and main on my metaphors. But I can't tell you how they've changed.