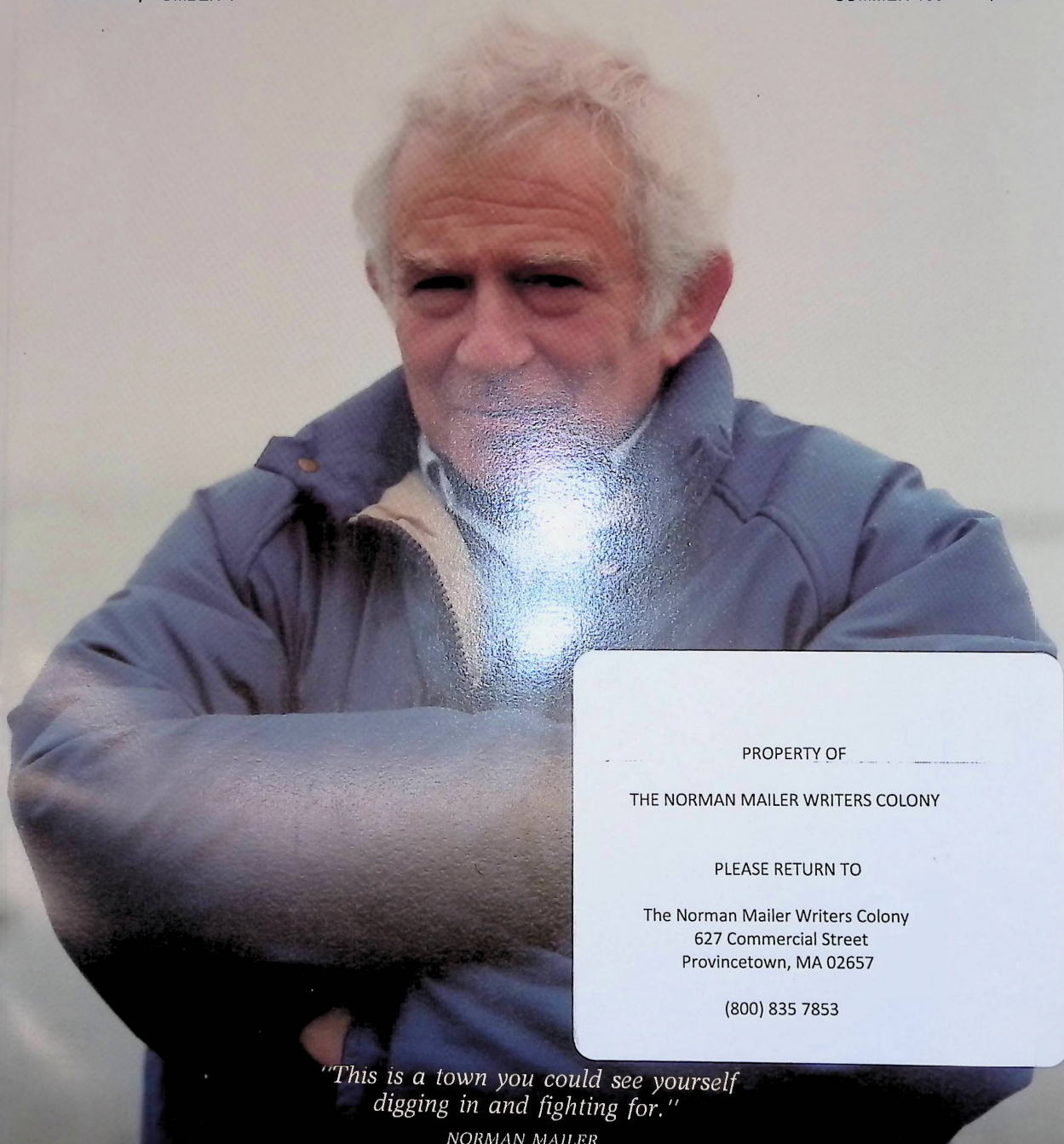


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NORMAN MAILER

HANDSOME AS AN OLD TRUCK

Edward Bonetti talks
with Christopher Busa

Edward Bonetti: Regarding *Tough Guys*, I thought the reviewers were kinda hard on Norman, kinda tough with him. It was the same with *Ancient Evenings*, a great book. It pisses them off that Norman can still be macho. But now Norman travels in that rarified air of celebrity. He's changed in the last ten years. He can't help it. There's an aura around him, an automatic thing that goes on in the blood. There's a kind of security of social class that is akin to the security that a biographer feels over the imaginative writer. The biographer and non-fiction writer can take strength from his material and can avoid facing the possibility of failure; the material only has to be gathered.

CB: What have you learned from Mailer?

EB: When a character functions on the page

independently of the author, he depends on magic, I learned from Norman, after I learned it from my own experience. When Mailer was working on *Tough Guys* the book, his publisher was on his back and he had to get the thing done. I said, "How the hell are you going to get all that done in such a short time, Norman?" He said, "I'm slaving my balls off and I'm hoping for a lot of magic." He wrote it in six weeks and the dialogue is sharp as voodoo darts.

CB: What part did you play in *Tough Guys*, the film?

EB: In Mailer's movie, I was in a scene that was supposed to be in Tampa, Florida. We shot it in the Barnstable County Jail. To get people sweating, they came by and squirted water in our faces. Nice people, those movie

people. I was in jail with Ryan O'Neal. He was lying down on the cot, after just being thrown in jail. I came up to him and said, "What are you in for?" He said, "Dealing." I said, "Coke's a bad bust in Florida, Dude." He said, "I should never have left New York." And I said, "Everyone has their own sad story." After six takes, the crew applauded. Ryan told me, "Jesus, Eddie, you're talking too fast. Most actors want to stay on the screen forever." He's got a sense of humor, and both Ryan and Norman signed copies of the books that the real convicts presented them through the bars. They were all watching, and kept quiet when the shooting started.

CB: Mailer has a great way of imagining a man's female lover in sexual encounters with the man's enemy.

EB: It's a central fantasy, the most volatile sexual situation in an adult male's life, mainly because of the residue of impotence, an Oedipal impotence that every man inevitably felt when he was small and women were large and the men who loved women were larger than him. It haunts the male character. I think it haunts Norman and he translates it into some ghost in his male characters. Who is this guy Tim Madden, the Ryan O'Neal figure in the movie? He's a writer, but a failed writer. He's a thwarted lover. His wife has left him, he wakes up drunk while the gulls on the bare flats eat away at his liver, like Prometheus being gnawed at, for stealing fire from the gods. I hope Norman forgives me, but I sense a lot of humor in *Tough Guys Don't Dance*. He had a good time writing a book he had to blast through fast.

CB: Whether you are a writer or a pauper, booze is always a curse.

EB: Everybody's got his demon if he is close to a creative act, because it's so abnormal to create, especially something good and worth while. I've been influenced as a writer by my friendship with Norman. He says I've a face like a Mack truck, but really as a tough guy, I'm a softie. When I was sixteen, I boxed Golden Gloves and the New England Amateur Athletic Union, and I beat the champion, who was twenty. I was in good shape then. Then I saw my father below the ring's apron, looking up at me with this expression that said, "What are you trying to prove?" How can a boy fight with that in back of him: a father that doesn't want him to fight? I said, "What the fuck are you doing here, then?"

CB: Like the boxing ring, the psychiatrist's office, the artist's studio, the poet's study, and the lover's bed, Provincetown seems to be a place where certain ordinary rules are suspended in order to establish a privileged atmosphere. For writers like yourself and Mailer, Provincetown occupies that defined, privileged space where subjective conditions can be developed at the expense of prevailing conventions, the bureaucratic tidal wash that dominates the usual discourse that passes for culture in this country.

EB: This country's industries are ownerless, but down here in P-town, even the village idiot has a name. You don't find suits down here—"suits" being Dick Goodwin's term for corporate types. There's a mood beneath all the changes that have happened to P-town, something I won't call eternal, but which I remember like the smell I first smelled coming off the Steel Pier, the boat I took with my mother from Boston, when she was fighting with my father, a smell—did you ever have the experience?—looking at a flat bay, about six or seven o'clock at night, the sun not quite beginning to set, and there's a waft that comes in from the ocean, pungent and vegetal, which comes from the east. That's been with me always. That's the beauty of the olfactory nerves, I guess, an element of hope coming through as if from the back side. A smell that can smell wonderful, refreshing. A suicidal anxiety is probably ameliorated by the smell

of that water. The smell of clean weeds, a growth that is green not so much like money as like the shiny dimes and quarters that the kids used to dive for off the end of the pier. There is so much that I love here that exists only in my memory.

CB: What was your father like?

EB: My father was a song-and-dance man with the Keith Vaudevillians. He had a streak of the artist and he knew that the artist's life was a life of difficulty, and so he discouraged me from following him into show business. Our family moved out of the North End of Boston. When I was born he was out in Ohio somewhere. My mother said, "You've got to come back and help." He'd always send us bread back, generously, until he was forced to come back and make more money. He told us, "There's a prize out there. You've got to work to reach for it. But you can't take it. You can study the piano, practice your ass off, but you can't go out and perform in a show." Now my sister has a professional voice and she sings in the shower. During the Depression, my father schemed, he had a small store, he played the numbers in the Italian neighborhood. I remember he burned my football uniform in the furnace because he didn't want me to get hurt in the game.

CB: Did you get to know your editor at Viking, Jackie Kennedy?

EB: I had dinner with Jackie in Hyannisport just before my little book, *The Wine Cellar*, came out. I promised her I would not mention her name during the act of publication, but now time has passed. I had a wonderful dinner with her, I behaved myself, not too much booze, and not too many people from the literary world because Jackie felt the literary world was so mean, as per example the man who reviewed my book for the *New York Times*, a hack hanger-on whose own book had just been rejected by Viking.

CB: He is damned and unloved and has bad dreams each night.

EB: The literary world, its crowds and groups, reminds me of the corporate world, and I've always instinctively shied away. The *Times* reviewer is typical of the butchers of literature one would prefer to avoid. What he didn't like, he didn't like, not for its own failings, but for the psychological threats it posed to him. That jealousy came out. I don't think there's any field of endeavor that carries with it so much potential to make enemies as literature. The reason is that to be good the writing's got to get under the skin. Like the Indian carving the totem, as Mailer says, the words must be cut gravely, and deeply, so they may last, so their meanings may endure like marks in hardwood. My books are skinny because I weigh every word. I tell people, "If you want to make my books bigger, either read them or piss on them, so they swell."

Edward Bonetti is the author of *The Wine Cellar*. He lives in Boston and makes frequent trips to Provincetown. His latest book is *A Baker's Dozen Plus*, a collection of stories and poems.

CAMERA ANGLES

REPORTERS ON THE SET OF "TOUGH GUYS"



NORMAN MAILER, RYAN O'NEAL & ISABELLA ROSSELLINI

BONNIE BARBER

Provincetown has been a creative haven for artists and writers for over eighty years, but the writer who has made the heaviest imprint on Provincetown's sands in the latter half of this century is Norman Mailer. At age 64, Mailer has mellowed considerably from his early days in Provincetown, a time when he was best known for throwing wild parties and for being locked up on drunk and disorderly charges after a night of carousing on Commercial Street—actions that served to enhance Mailer's reputation as the bad boy novelist of his generation, a reputation he seemed to relish and encourage. But the volatile Mailer has curtailed his combustibility of late to add a new title to his distinction as one of America's preeminent literary figures cum celebrities; that of major motion picture director.

With this new occupation came new responsibilities. Mailer had to prove to Hollywood studio heads late last year that he could bring in the film adaptation of his 1984 murder mystery, *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, on budget and on time. Mailer did better. He brought the film in under budget and completed it a day and a half under the film's forty-one-day shooting schedule, in mid-December. And it was all done away from the watchful eyes of Hollywood, in Provincetown, the sight of so many of Mailer's past triumphs and, sometimes, dismal failures.



photo: Joel Meyerowitz

GREGORY KATZ

In the middle of a driving November rainstorm, lighting technicians had turned the inside of Pepe's into what passed for a Florida restaurant in the hot sun. Pastels and bright colors dominated the decor, and waiters were dressed in white. Ryan O'Neal came from his trailer—an aide holding an umbrella above his head—and took his place at a table as Norman Mailer called for action.

But O'Neal didn't speak his lines. Instead, his eyes focused on me. His voice angry and tense, he said, "I can't do it. There's a stranger on the set."

I had been sitting behind a lighting stand trying to look inconspicuous, but suddenly the star wouldn't act because of my presence on the set. O'Neal sounded like a stuck pig. Mailer went to Ryan, told the actor who I was and that he had invited me to watch this scene, and I got up and announced I was leaving the set. In moviemaking, time is money to the nth degree, and I didn't want this dead time on my hands. As I left, O'Neal was denouncing the publicity people for not warning him that I would be there.

I retreated to a back room and sat quietly for ten minutes until a public relations specialist came over to ask me to come back. "Ryan says he can't do it without you," she said with a straight face. I came back smiling, glad I could help O'Neal face the day. It was an appropriate welcome to the Hollywood

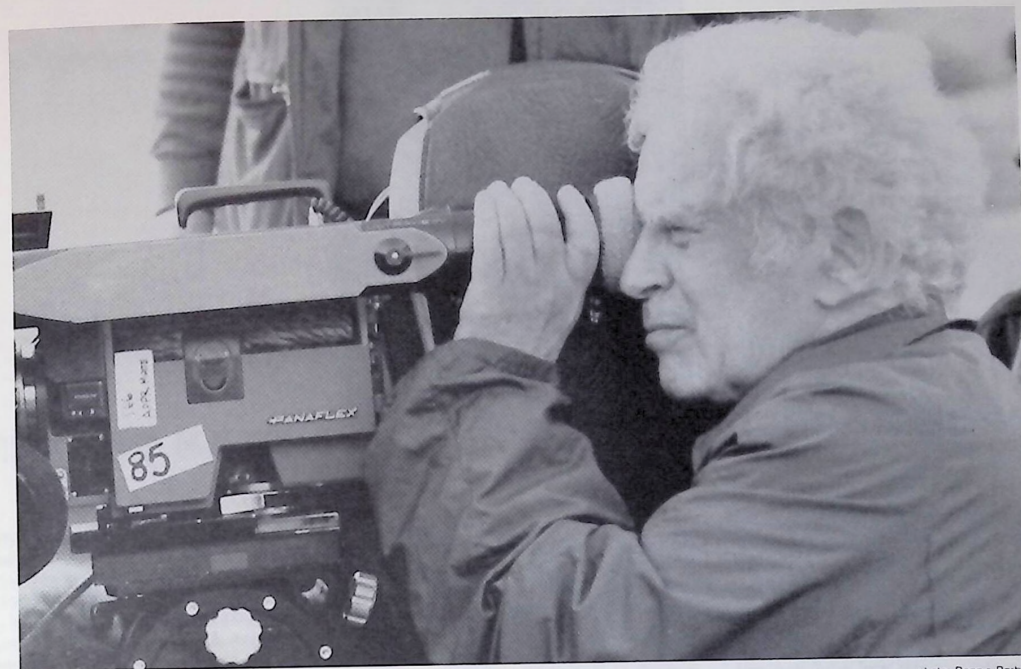


photo: Bonnie Barber

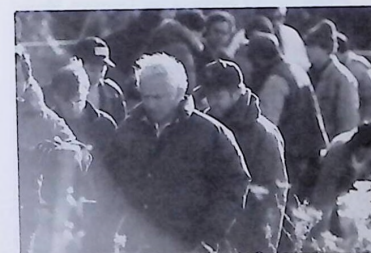




photo: Bonnie Barber

BONNIE BARBER

Mailer first came to Provincetown in 1942 as a Harvard undergraduate who dreamed of being a writer. When he returned to Provincetown in 1946 after a hitch in World War II, he sequestered himself in a Beach Point cottage to work on his first novel. That book, *The Naked and the Dead*, brought the twenty-four-year-old writer acclaim and adulation and firmly ensconced him as a rising American literary force.

But movies were always Mailer's dream, and he wasn't content to simply conquer the publishing world. He wanted to take Hollywood by storm too, and live the life of a successful screenplay writer. As he told a friend at Harvard, all he wanted was to be a good professional writer. That friend, George Washington Goethals, related in Peter Manso's book, *Mailer: His Life and Times*: "He said his aspiration was to be a good enough professional to go to Hollywood and write scripts, make some good bread, and screw a different woman every night."

After an unsuccessful foray in Hollywood, Mailer returned to Provincetown, in 1950. He had one screenplay under his belt, which was never produced by a studio, and a host of other projects that he had turned down. He did get a book out of his stint in Hollywood though. *The Deer Park*, which was published in 1955, chronicled the lusts, loves, and ambitions of the celebrity inhabitants of Desert D'Or and their groupies.

Mailer never abandoned his motion picture dreams, however. These dreams eventually grew, from a desire merely to write screenplays, to wanting to direct a big-budget film of one of his novels. When Mailer finally attained this dream last fall, he managed to secure the best of both worlds; he brought Hollywood to Provincetown for the making of *Tough Guys Don't Dance*. Although a more

inexpensive location in North Carolina was considered for the film's backdrop, it seemed inevitable that Mailer and his film crew would wind up in Provincetown. In transplanting a California film crew and cast to the narrow streets and the dunes of Provincetown, Mailer seemed to be asking his seaside mistress to reward him once again with her magic touch.

The film company that gave Mailer the financial means to direct *Tough Guys Don't Dance* was Cannon Films, a Los Angeles-based company headed by Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus. Despite the critical and commercial failure of three experimental, improvised films Mailer had directed and financed in the late 1960's—*Wild 90*, *Beyond the Law*, and *Maidstone*—the two Israelis were willing to give Mailer a chance to try his talents at directing a major motion picture. They struck a deal: If Mailer agreed to write the screenplay for *King Lear*, a film project of avant-garde director Jean-Luc Godard, who has a penchant for not adhering closely to scripts, Cannon Films would give Mailer a \$5-million budget to write the screenplay and to direct *Tough Guys Don't Dance*. Tom Luddy, a producer with Zoetrope Studios in San Francisco, who helped arrange the deal with Cannon, would be the producer.

When filming began in late October, Mailer was obviously elated to be fulfilling his directorial dreams. He bounded around Outer Cape locations, from Uncle Tim's Bridge in Wellfleet, to the Methodist cemetery in Truro, to Provincetown Airport, buried in a navy-blue parka to fight the often brutally cold weather, with a black knit ski hat perched atop his silver curls. Despite the biting chill, heavy winds, driving rain or snow the film crew encountered on any given day, Mailer's cherubic face was beaming more often than

not. He clapped his hands together frequently, although it wasn't clear whether this was the result of nervous energy or excessive enthusiasm. His excitement was contagious, his energy and vigor astounded crew members. Although many of the crew were half his age, they had difficulty keeping with Mailer's whirlwind pace. He swung orange and lemon-lime Gatorade during breaks in filming, and joked that he was testament to the product's claim of infusing those who drink it with energy and endurance. "If I drink enough of this stuff, I get another book out, no problem," Mailer chortled.

Even actress Isabella Rossellini, who reportedly was not enamored of Mailer's directorial style, tactfully avoided answering those who asked him about Mailer's directing, at Cannes Film Festival in May, by commenting instead on his boundless enthusiasm and energy. "Hmmm. Well, it was wonderful watching him having fun. He got up at dawn and loved making every part of the film," Rossellini was quoted in the *Boston Globe*.

Rossellini, who refused to give any interviews while filming in Provincetown, says that she never discusses a film she is working on until it has been completed, was the only actor disenchanted with Mailer as director. Wings Hauser and Frances Fisher also had disagreements and misunderstandings with Mailer on the set, and voiced their unhappiness in an interview for a *Newsday* article. Actor Ryan O'Neal, however, called Mailer one of the best directors he has ever worked with, and praised his skills as an actor's director.

Besides some strife on the set, Mailer also had to contend with a strike against Cannon Films by the International Alliance of Theaters (Continued on page 116)

GREGORY KATZ

P.R. machine.

Later, near the end of a twelve-hour day in Pepe's bar, O'Neal—wearing a Hawaiian shirt and looking tan—was sweeping the floor before a key scene with Debra Sundland, his leading lady. The scene was flat and tempers were short—everyone seemed to be thinking of dinner at Napi's instead of the action.

"Take eleven," called a weary technician. The first ten takes had been ruined: O'Neal's broom cast an unwanted shadow over Sundland's bosom, a camera battery died, a fly buzzed the set, and O'Neal accidentally splintered a shot glass he was using to drink Chivas Regal.

"This is the first time we've needed eleven takes," O'Neal said testily. Mailer, in a deep baritone, conceded the point: "We could have a question about Mailer's directing, at Cannes Film Festival in May, by commenting something special."

Then it clicked. The three actors each tried something a tiny bit different, and the scene came alive. "I like it; let's print," said Mailer. O'Neal, free at last, said: "He was right. I can't believe it: he was right."

Norman Mailer, director. He likes the sound of it. At first, it seemed odd that he would give up the typewriter for the director's chair. Why would Mailer—acutely conscious that time is passing and that he's getting closer to the end of his working life—turn his back on the novel for something as risky as a mystery movie? In days gone by, Mailer would have concocted an elaborate, art-oriented answer about the power of visual images. But now he's comfortable enough to tell the truth: directing is fun, and a welcome change from trying to pump life into an empty page.

"You know, when you're writing a novel it's as if you're in debt," he said. "I've been in debt all my life, and the sensation is not one



DEBRA SANDLUND BEFORE LOSING HER HEAD

you'd enjoy. You wake up in the morning, and the number, the amount of money you owe, is on your head. And with a novel, exactly the same thing is true. You've got that ongoing book, which is either going to go in the right direction or in the wrong direction. With debt, you think you've got to go out and earn some money, and you think, How will I gain enough money in this much time? With a novel you always think, If I take this route, will it lead into a cul-de-sac? Will I have to back up? And if so, there'll just be hell to pay. A novel is terribly worrisome, and your life gnaws at you. I wouldn't call the empty page so much frightening as nagging, as obsessive. Directing is altogether different because I find, surprisingly enough, there's very little fear in it."

For a man known for his outbursts and temper, Mailer seemed surprisingly jovial on the set. He regarded the making of *Tough Guys* as a military exercise that might or might not succeed. Mailer said he learned a crucial lesson from Gary Gilmore—the convicted murder whose life Mailer chronicled in *The Executioner's Song*.

"Gilmore said, 'Nobody said it had to be fair,' and that's an enormously useful line pertaining to a movie director," said Mailer. "I won't let myself get upset. If something goes wrong, I shrug. If something goes right, I shrug. The key thing is to start each day relatively as fresh as the day before. It's amazingly less tense than I thought it would be, probably because I'm sixty-three. I think if I had tried it thirty years ago it would have killed me, but now I just have the attitude that it will succeed or fail, and one does one's best. One of the marvelous things that makes this much easier than novel writing is that you don't bear total responsibility. If you fail, it may be your fault or it may be that the gods were disposed against you. There are so many

imponderables that can explode in your face at any moment. There are just so many catastrophes that are part of making a film—everyone can be working at his full talent and an important truck will go off the road, you'll lose eight days, and there's panic everywhere. It's very much like the army."

The entire enterprise reminded him of his army days. The need for stamina and good humor. The pressure to produce quickly without getting caught in the muck. The need for camaraderie and fellowship when it would be easy to be bitchy and cruel.

"What it really reminds me of is ideal war," he said. "It's having a campaign, but nobody gets shot; there's no blood, but there's all the fun of being in the army. The army was nine-tenths boredom and one-tenth fun, the kind of mad, manic fun Coppola caught in *Apocalypse Now*. Maybe a movie is that kind of fun, with the fact that there is no carnage. It is like a campaign: you eat outside standing up; everybody starts the day having breakfast together; it's a communal exercise. You move to different places every day; there are new problems every day; the campaign moves here, moves there; it's going to be over in forty-two days. It's like hunting with a camera in Africa."

But there's one key difference, as Mailer talks nostalgically about army life. In World War II, he was a foot soldier. This time around, to use the military analogy, he was the general.

"I was a G.I. at twenty-one—why can't I be a general at sixty-three?" he said. "I can't pretend that I know more about film than everyone else on the set, so I'm a democratic general. It's as if I'm politically appointed."

How good a general? What was it like living under Norman Mailer's rule? There was (Continued on page 117)

TOUGH TALK

A CONVERSATION WITH PETER MANSO

Edited by Raymond Elman

Peter Manso, long-time resident of Provincetown, has written for many magazines, as well as being the author of a half dozen books, including his recent controversial biography, Mailer, His Life and Times. He is currently working on a biography of Marlon Brando.

Raymond Elman: For almost as long as I've known you, it seemed to me that you were working on the Mailer book. I met you in the winter of 1972-'73, and you were already talking about doing a biography of Norman Mailer. How long has that been a project?

Peter Manso: I'd been thinking about doing a biography of Norman Mailer after I had edited a book on the Mailer-Breslin political campaign in '69, a compendium of Mailer's and Breslin's speeches, essays by various hands, plus the campaign's position papers, which I'd written week to week during the course of what turned out to be my introduction to electoral politics.

Christopher Busa: That's where you got your political background, via Mailer?

PM: Not really, although paradoxically the Mailer-Breslin campaign was probably the closest I came to getting any kind of background in orthodox politics. I'd just come from Berkeley—the legendary Berkeley of the sixties—yet when the campaign started I didn't know what a "white paper" was. On the other hand, I can remember handing out leaflets for Henry Wallace when I was eight years old. But, that's another tradition.

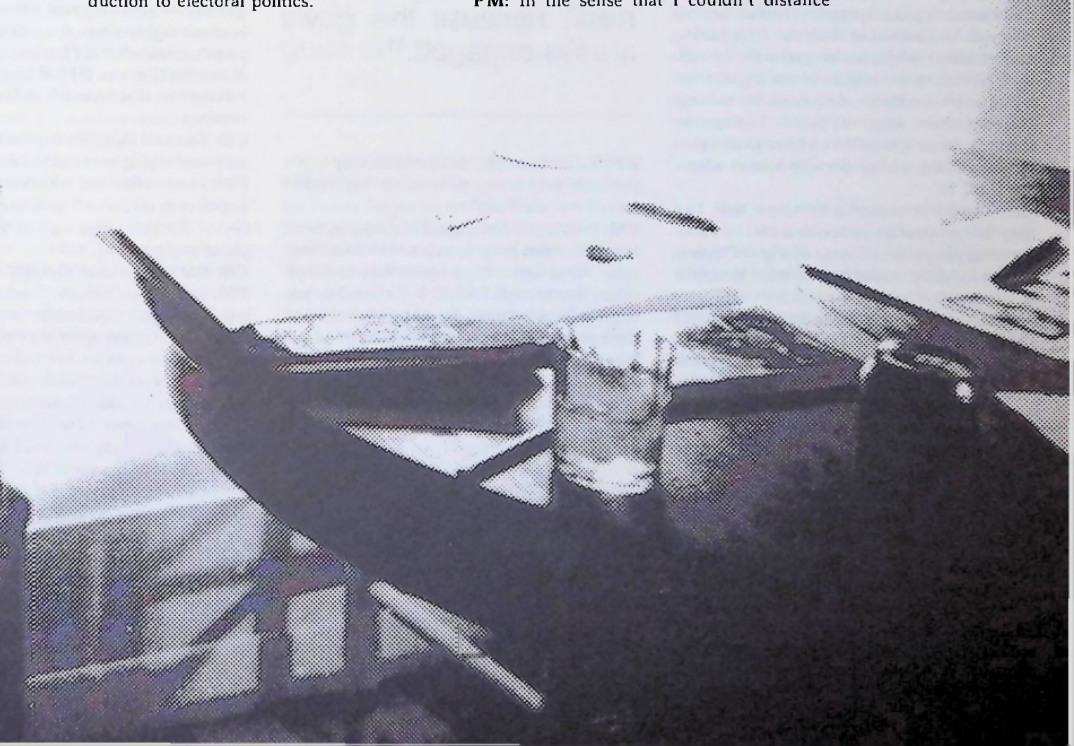
In any case, having done the anthology *Running Against the Machine*, I was offered a contract to do the bio, and so you remember correctly: I tried to write that book back in the early seventies, then gave up on it.

RE: Why'd you give it up?

PM: Several reasons. One, I didn't think I was mean enough. . . .

RE: "Mean?"

PM: In the sense that I couldn't distance



myself enough from Mailer, absolutely.
CB: You had a lot of notes, a lot of pages typed, a lot of materials gathered.

PM: Correct. I was going to set the book up in alternate chapters: one set of chapters about Mailer, the other set on Dashiell Hammett. Through their two lives I wanted to say something about maleness, styles of toughness, if you will. I don't mean to suggest that it was going to be a book of literary criticism. Quite the contrary. I saw and still do see Mailer and Hammett in different terms. Hammett's contribution to literature may even be greater than Mailer's, but I really don't want to argue that, if only because it's probably a losing argument.

CB: It's almost like Hammett is a character of Mailer's imagination.

PM: Hardly, if only because Norman's imagination is so self-reflective. *The Maltese Falcon*, Hammett's best novel, offers us the most marvelous maxim—"The gaudier the crook, the cheaper the patter"—and it's something entirely beyond Norman's comprehension. I once asked Mailer about Hammett, and he told me one of his quite misleading stories, which was subsequently disproven by another famous liar, Lillian Hellman, when I got around to interviewing her for the Mailer biography.

RE: When did you interview her?

PM: Just shortly before her death, before she went up to the Vineyard. Norman had spoken of how he'd once met Hammett at a bar in New York and how the two of them sat shoulder to shoulder through long silences until Hammett said, "*The Naked and the Dead* was an extraordinary book, and I think you're quite an extraordinary man." Well, memory may betray us all, but Hellman presented quite another picture: namely, that at the time Norman was let out of Bellevue after having almost killed Adele, his second wife, he called Hellman in the middle of the night, from a public phone booth, desperate for money, and Hammett, who was beside Hellman as she took the call, wouldn't let her go and give him a wooden nickel. So who knows where the truth is?

RE: The most common criticism that I've heard about your Mailer book is that by offering multiple points of view of a given event, the reader never really knows what the truth is.

PM: Leave aside, for the moment, that I did not want to inject my own voice because of my personal relationship with Mailer. What I realized was that the "truth" is always a protean proposition. Shall I invoke Heisenberg, the principles of quantum physics? Do you want me to point out that ninety-eight percent of all biographies are based mainly on previously written materials? Or that history, received history, tends to be an amalgam of received information, however it's couched? I wasn't going to do that. With the exception of book review samples indicative of how Mailer was being treated professionally, everything in *Mailer, His Life and Times* is original. As to the issue of my refusing to take

the reader by the hand with my own judgments or interpretations, here too I felt it best to put Mailer in his cultural context and let the material speak for itself. The act of shaping and editing these materials, not to say creating the book's text from over 25,000 pages of transcript, is an act of judgment in itself, as any trial lawyer will tell you. There's a certain authority to the invisible author, and I think this is precisely what Mailer can't stand about the book. He can't confront—or confute—the testimony of 200 individuals, his mother and sister among them.

"The premise of an oral biography is that no one's single version of an event can be taken as accurate."

"This is not a book about a man who simply sits at a desk, because this guy's always engaged."

RE: So, for example, there was no way to pin down the origination of the word "fug" in *The Naked and the Dead*?

PM: Would you like a quick and easy answer? Norman at one point gave me his version and said, "God damn it, go up to Yale and look at the manuscript." Well, it occurred to me to go to Yale because, God knows, I went to Arkansas, to California, to the wastelands of New Jersey and Brooklyn researching this thing, but I wouldn't put it past Norman to alter the manuscript before he gave it to Yale. Norman is going to be the final authority on

Norman Mailer. Come on! Norman is the biggest literary careerist of the 20th century. I know this, just as I know how his vanity motivated him to try to get me to change my manuscript, and anyone who has trouble with that notion is welcome to review his marginalia on my final draft.

But let's come back to your question, because I think it's a meaningful question. The premise of an oral biography is that no one's single version of an event can be taken as accurate. We all have an ax to grind, consciously or otherwise, and the answer is to take a page out of the CIA's book—it's called triangulation. You get multiple versions of an event, and you assume that the truth lies somewhere in the midst of the triangle described by those three different versions. Why did I do it that way? One reason is that I realized that there's no way I was going to do a literary biography of Mailer, because whether Norman likes it or not, his importance historically will not be that of a writer but that of a phenomenon. In other words, one of Norman's greatest criticisms about my book is that I don't take him seriously enough as a writer. Well, Norman, you can take yourself seriously as a writer, and most definitely I take you seriously, having given four years of my life; but when I began this book the approach was Norman Mailer as existential phenomenon, not as bookish writer. You can't think of Norman as you do of Saul Bellow, or Philip Roth, or Bernard Malamud. This is not a book about a man who simply sits at a desk because this guy's always engaged.

RE: If you had to do your book all over again what would you change?

PM: I wouldn't be as nice to Norman. Sanity lies in admitting your mistakes, and I have no qualms in admitting that although the book is about eighty percent accurate, there was some nasty stuff that I buried, and I did it out of love for Norman. If I had to do it over again I'd reinstate that material, and not only for accuracy's sake.

CB: You said that you did the book because you were trying to answer a certain question. PM: I had to find out why Norman had such a spell over me, which goes back to the question of Norman being an icon for a lot of people of my generation.

CB: Did you answer that question? PM: I think so, though, short of five years of psychoanalysis, probably incompletely. I learned something about the awful mixture of being middle-class Jewish with a mother truly and blindly in love with you, being overwhelmingly ambitious, narcissistic, and lacking in conscience. The combination spells lawlessness. It may also spell greatness. But what it does mean, inevitably, is that at a certain point you start measuring yourself through the eyes of others; you become a victim of your reviews and the parties you're invited to, and, finally, achievement becomes an end in itself, justified by the risks you take—or, rather, the risks people see you taking. And, you know, I would be a liar if I said that as a precocious college kid of seven

teen, with certain axes of my own to grind, I was not fascinated by fame. But, for better or worse, I don't believe that I have that peculiar hollowness or emptiness at the core which, more rather than less, I'm now afraid Norman does have.

I would insist that you have to take historically important figures and put them in a particular cultural medium. Norman has been peculiarly rewarded. His career was saved by the sixties, since the sixties was a period of the "Me Generation." Now Norman has become a Yuppie. It's so bizarre. The seventies and the eighties have been very unkind to Norman because they sanctioned his worst instincts.

RE: When did you first meet Mailer?

PM: The summer of '58, before the stabbing. I went to Norman, hat in hand. I was seventeen. He was still living with Adele at what used to be the Waterfront Apartments, now the Kibbutz. I went to him as another *Naked and the Dead* fan, the fledgling writer. I remember being very nervous, and I remember him as being very solicitous. I had just finished my freshman year in college, and I was going to see the master, as it were.

RE: Your father is a painter. Did he know Mailer?

PM: Yes, through the normal flux of P-town parties. Back in those days, Provincetown had a lot more parties, a lot more wild, all-night parties, and I think people got to know each other more easily than nowadays.

RE: When I read Mailer, *His Life and Times*, I noticed that you and Mailer have similar outside interests. Who influenced whom? You both like fast cars, weapons . . .

PM: Wait, stop. Can we go one by one? Some years ago, Norman owned a Porsche that he managed to destroy in record time because he has no sympathy with machines. Have you ever seen Norman Mailer on a dance floor? That's how he drives a car, like he's manhandling an eighteen-wheeler on an interstate. As for guns, I don't know a thing about weapons, even though they fascinate me. My editor, Michael Korda, is a well-known gun nut, and the two of us will often put aside a manuscript to talk about Uzis, but me—I don't own any guns.

RE: You had a pistol around at one point.

PM: Yeah, and I got rid of it. The downside of having a gun around is that you might use it. But here, too, your suggestion is off the wall. Norman, despite his publicity, stays far away from weapons.

RE: Let's talk about all this in terms of risk, then. Do you think it's appropriate to draw a comparison between Norman's involvement with boxing and your involvement with race car driving?

PM: Not at all. Norman likes blood; I don't, and it's a well-known fact in the racing world that I'm best described as a prudent driver.

RE: Did you ever consider yourself to be Norman's protégé?

PM: Sure.

RE: And did he regard you as a protégé?

PM: You'd have to ask him. The last thing I

want to do these days is to comment on how Norman Mailer regards Peter Manso. The important thing for me to recognize is that for many years I saw him as my mentor, which is why I'm so sad about our blow-up. False gods are dangerous. The discovery that one's hero is a fraud is among the most unbalancing experiences. It forces you to ask yourself how you could have been so stupid. The Norman of *Advertisements of Myself*, *American Dream*, or even *Armies of the Night* affected a lot of people, for this was the guy who, in the grayness and repression of the Eisenhower

"The last thing I want to do these days is to comment on how Norman Mailer regards Peter Manso. The important thing for me to recognize is that for many years I saw him as my mentor, which is why I'm so sad about our blow-up. False gods are dangerous."

years, vowed to become "consecutively more dangerous"; yet now he spends his time playing house nigger to wealthy East Side reactionaries, or reading about himself in *Liz Smith* and *People* magazine. Who are Mailer's friends? Not writers or painters, but the likes of Oscar de la Renta, Saul Steinberg, Donald Trump, and the like of Roy Cohn, who turned out to be Mailer's financial benefactor. Isn't that some index to our time, to the culture in which we now live? Lord, it is one of the disappointments of my life.

This is also the man who, as president of

PEN, unilaterally invited George Schultz to address that organization's international peace conference, while at the same time rejecting the rightful complaint that women were vastly under-represented on various panels. His response to such objections? "I didn't invite the Secretary of State here to be pussy whipped by a bunch of libbies." Norman is no progressive. Norman is no rebel. He's a student of fashion, which in better times was commonly known as an opportunist.

RE: Yet you admit that he was your role model.

PM: If each of us takes our education seriously, we have to admit our mistakes. Even more, we have to submit to their consequences. I no longer own a house in Provincetown, thanks to Norman, and God knows that what I have gone through with Mailer I could have lived without.

RE: How many times did it occur to you while you were doing the Mailer biography that it would destroy your relationship?

PM: Not enough times, obviously. It occurred to me, but there's this fiendish faculty called denial, and I suppose I simply couldn't imagine the possibility. That we were living under the same roof didn't help any either.

RE: Did you ever have conversations with Mailer about the possible threat to your friendship?

PM: At one point at the very beginning there was one of those conversations where things just sort of go by, but to say that Norman was opposed to the book would be preposterous. He was feeding me information and leads right and left, not to mention manuscript materials, letters, and photos. On the other hand, he had tried to prohibit me from seeing certain people, and I just said, "No way. I've got to see these people; they're central."

Overall, I was a fool, though. I became aware that every friendship Norman's had he's managed to destroy, and my hubris consisted of thinking I'd be different. What I find unforgivable is that Norman not only failed to recognize my love and seriousness in doing the book, but has sought to punish me for it.

RE: That's an attitude expressed by a lot of women who get involved with difficult men—that somehow they can be the woman who tames that man or who can live with that man knowing that they have a string of . . .

PM: Okay, call what happened a rotten divorce. Or say I was Norman Mailer's cocksucker. Go ahead, I dare you to print that.

RE: You'll become a folk hero. We'll even run it as a call out.

CB: I'd just like to say one thing on the subject of change. I see Mailer being relatively consistent, even though the subjects of his interest change. He's consistent in the way that he was exaggerated in his interest in psychopathology, and now he's exaggerated in his interest in power structures and people with social power.

PM: No, I will not let you make that assumption, because I don't see that. And I certainly

(Continued on page 124)

LETTER NUMBER 2

FROM THE HAMPTONS

By B.H. Friedman

You asked about 627 Commercial Street, Mailer's present Provincetown house and a principal location for the forthcoming film *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, based on his novel. After spending sixteen of nineteen Cape summers there, some stretching deep into the fall, of course I remember the house well. You also asked about Mailer's fantasy concerning it. That's harder. I'll start with reality.

The property, on the bay at Commercial and Allerton, fronts about 115 feet, running shallowly lengthwise. The house and an adjoining garage were built during or soon after the First World War—about the time of the founding of the Art Association and the eastward expansion of the town as an art colony—by Dr. Percival C. Eaton, a wealthy Pittsburgh pediatrician interested in the arts and later active in the Association. Eaton didn't trust local contractors. He brought in his own and knew just what he wanted—a grand house, a Pittsburgh house, a house that had little to do with Provincetown. And he got it—perfectly winterized and initially slate-roofed and stucco-faced—a house with a full basement and walls as thick as the Mellon Bank's. On the ground floor: a generous living room with a fireplace, an adjoining library and powder room, a comparatively large dining room, also with a fireplace, a kitchen, and a laundry/"mud room" with a shower and side entrance. On the second floor: five bedrooms and three baths. An attic, under the pitched roof, stretching the length of the house. Just to the west, still part of the property: the garage. (To the east and on the inland side of Commercial Street, Eaton fixed up existing cottages, now separately owned, for his servants.) After Eaton's death, presumably during the Depression, the main house became the Collins Guest House—a warren of bedrooms, upstairs and down, including the attic. In the mid-fifties, after Lily Harmon's divorce from "the uranium king" and insatiable art collector Joseph Hirschhorn, she bought the property, restored it as a one-

family home, converted the garage to a guest house, and opened up the attic as a studio for herself. On the exterior of the house and garage she went beyond restoration. She covered the deteriorated stucco with red brick and surrounded the property's lawn with wrought-iron fences and gates. The entire place was now as impregnable as the basement.

Abby and I bought the property early in 1967, fully, very fully, furnished, with too many wooden pieces painted white and too much upholstery in pastel colors. For several seasons we lived with what we got, then began (but never finished) stripping more than adding. The slate roof gave the house so much additional weight (actually tons) that it boomed when the tide was high, slapping against the bulkhead. We replaced the slate with cedar shingles. Portions of the deck washed away every winter. We buried "dead men" (not Mailer's kind) under the deck and attached these huge sections of tree trunks to the deck with steel rods, tightly turn-buckled. We cleared out a potting room next to the dining room overlooking the deck and installed a section of the mahogany bar, thick underneath with chewing gum, from Boston's recently demolished Touraine Hotel. We thought about shingling the entire house and eliminating its neo-Georgian entrance but never got around to it. Harmon's guest cottage became my studio.

Thus, the property changed over some sixty-five years, and might have changed more, before Mailer's purchase. And thus, it contained ghosts from before World War I, ghosts from before Provincetown-as-art-colony, ghosts of Eaton's Pittsburgh, ghosts of tourists from all over, ghosts of Harmon's New Haven, ghosts of Abby's and my Manhattan. When we bought the property, Lily Harmon said the locals still referred to it as "old Dr. Eaton's place." When we lived there, they called it "the Ha'mon house." I suppose that when the Mailers moved in, people rang the bell ask-

ing for the Friedmans, and that eventually when the Mailers move out, only then, will it become "the Mailer house" or maybe "the place where *Tough Guys* was shot."

Ghosts! But nothing as spooky or fantastical as what Mailer himself created by living on the property jointly with Peter Manso and Robert Cohn. Manso, the hanger-on and on biographer of Mailer. Cohn—what?—the hanger-in, despite disgraced celebrity during the McCarthy hearings and subsequent indictments, disbarment, and finally, fatally, AIDS. Such a triangular marriage of creative idolatry, and politics was doomed. I was relieved to hear that at least Cohn was a short distance away from the others—in my former studio, restored and enlarged. But what about the Mailers and the Mansos? How had they split the main house? Vertically? Horizontally? No, I heard, they shared everything from the basement to the attic, except for separate refrigerators. After reading *Tough Guys*, I wondered whose dismembered body would end up in whose refrigerator.

I return to Mailer's novel, watching his pen boil as I flip through its pages, looking for the house I remember. Early on, Tim Madden, the central tough guy, a hard-boiled writer, sits alone in a bar, "divines" that Jessica Ponca "drawn to substantial property. Fine mansions on good green lawns with high wrought-iron gates . . ." A page later he is telling us "about the most imposing house our town . . . fenced about in high wrought-iron." Later, Madden goes to his "querent" that study on the third floor where [he] used to work looking out on the bay. . .

The house is furnished much more fully with scraps of history, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and mysticism than with furniture and furnishings. No macho writer! Madden would be interested in the latter. . . of course, "Most of the furniture had been chosen by Patty [the wife who has left him] and her taste was flouncy and full of Tam Beach money—that is, white furniture and



A HOUSE WITH HISTORY

Photo: Marian Roth

splashy hues in the cushions and the draperies and the throw rugs, loads of flowers on the fabrics, many bar stools in puffy leatherette—pink, lemon-lime, orange and ivory for her boudoir and her drawing room. . . I'm happy that Abby didn't abandon our plain Thonet bar stools—they would have struck a flat puffy note.

Halfway through *Tough Guys*, Madden talks to Jessica "for a long time about property values in Provincetown" (seemingly as

popular a subject there now as in the Hamptons): ". . . frontage, I told them, was the factor. We had one hundred feet of bay frontage, and the length of our house ran parallel to the shore, rare in our town." And following the novel there's a disclaimer, beginning, "While Provincetown is a real place, and is most certainly located on Cape Cod, a few names and places have been changed and a couple of houses invented. . ."

Well, by the end, after half a dozen murders,

including decapitations of two women, after many scenes of sexual violence, both homosexual and heterosexual, after the consumption of enormous quantities of alcohol and drugs, I want to trust Mailer's powers of invention. And, surrounded by the natural uninvented Edenic innocence of the Hamptons, I can't wait to see his [my] home movie. B. H. Friedman, a former summer resident of Provincetown, is a novelist, playwright and biographer.

TOUGH LADY



Photo: Marian Roth

A Conversation with Pat de Groot

Edited by Christopher Busa

Pat de Groot: I was born in London, England. My father was English, my mother American. They were divorced when I was six. When I was ten, at the onset of World War II, I was sent to live in New Jersey, with my uncle. In about three months, I made myself over into an American kid. I spent time in Arizona, where I worked on a ranch with cows and horses. I was outside all the time I wasn't sleeping, and that appealed to me then in the same way it does now. I went to college at Pembroke for two years, and then graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a B.A. in English and Journalism, in 1953. I didn't like either of those cities. In college, I spent a lot of time, during winter and spring, on Mt. Washington and around that area, as skier and part-time ski bum. In the summer, I came to Provincetown.

Provincetown Arts: We suspect that childhood adversity is a common phenomenon in the lives of artists.

PdG: Trouble drives you into yourself. The bad times are often more productive than the good times.

PA: You first came to Provincetown as a teenager when your parents rented the Dos Passos house in the east end. Did you have any awareness then of the writers and painters around you?

PdG: I wasn't particularly connected with the art colony. I was connected to the place physically. I was more into feeling the world through the bottom of my feet—the flats, the sky, the dunes, and the color. All that turned me on. I even made some timid attempts at painting then, but I didn't have artist friends or any notion that I could take that route to

find myself. I did work in the Provincetown bookstore when I was sixteen. I did nothing but read. They fired me. I spent time off with Charlie Mayo on his tuna fishing boat. Later, Nanno worked for Charlie when he wasn't painting.

PA: After college, how did you survive?

PdG: Well, I had an idea I wanted to go to Paris. I had a friend there. My parents were so horrified by my hooking up with that individual that they talked me into going to Paris. I got work on *The Paris Review*. They were then on their third issue, and they needed help in the office. I lived in a tiny room with a stove and a tin trunk for a kitchen. I met writers who were there in the early fifties. I was not very hip and was hideously shy. I wasn't around as much as I could have been.

I did get into Samuel Beckett's work. I had read *Molloy*. At the time, a ten-page excerpt, including the "sucking stones" section, was being put together for issue number five. I had to type it. For ten pages, in one paragraph, he moves these stones in and out of his pockets and his mouth, working on a complicated logistic with the order of sucking each stone and where to put it after it is sucked so it won't get sucked again before all sixteen stones have, in turn, been sucked and put in the proper pocket. It took me a long time because I constantly got lost. I read and read this piece. Those stones stay with me and somehow influence my work.

PA: And when you came back?

PdG: I got a job with Farrar, Straus in New York. I started in the production department. I took a course at N.Y.U. from Marshall Lee, in book design. He was a real innovator in that field. He took apprentices in his design office at H. Wolff Book Manufacturing Company. I applied for the job and spent the next three years learning everything about book production from the ground up. I worked for most of the major New York book publishers through that office, so when I left, it was not hard to get freelance work. I learned design from Marshall. He was a good teacher. This was the only formal training I had.

PA: When did you meet your future husband, artist Nanno de Groot?

PdG: I met him briefly when I was eighteen, because he and Elise Asher lived next door to the Pinkerson's, where I spent a lot of time talking to Alan Pinkerson. I met him seriously in June 1956. I was visiting Ian. She told him I was here, and the next morning when I woke up he was sitting on top of a weir pole, on his feet like a bird looking out to sea, waiting for me to get up and get him coffee. We spent that week together. I went back to work in New York. I came up to see him almost every weekend. Late in the fall, we started living together in a small farmhouse in Little York, New Jersey. I commuted to work. He painted.

PA: He was forty-three and you were twenty-six: the classic moment for the older man, younger woman.

PdG: Nanno was ready for a young woman. In his words, he needed someone to feed on.

Someone to turn him on. He didn't play around, but he did change ladies every seven years. That seemed necessary, to keep him painting. One time he married a gay lady by mistake. That lasted six months. He loved women. I was his fourth wife.

PA: How did you come to build such a large house on the bay in Provincetown?

PdG: We spent five summers on Race Road in Mary Cecil Allen's cabin. Every year Nanno had a show at the H.C.E. Gallery. Together, he and Ivan Karp sold as many as twenty-six paintings in a summer. There was a scene, a lot of people, no money—but life was good. The cabin was a tiny space where Nanno managed to do most of his year's work. He needed a new studio, and we wanted to live here. In 1961, he sold some paintings to



GRAVE SCULPTURE FOR HUSBAND NANNO de GROOT

Joseph Hirshhorn. This land came on the market, and we bought it for \$6,000. It was an open beach. In the winter, we discarded the plans architect friends had drawn up for us. Nanno made a rough sketch with a 6B pencil, which was the beginning. I took a sharp pencil and used what I had learned from the architect's drawings to design this house. It is probably so big because we had never looked at houses, and we couldn't figure out how to make it smaller.

PA: You and he enjoyed the house for too short a time.

PdG: We had very little time here, yes. Thanksgiving 1962, we moved in. Then Nanno got sick, we had to go to N.Y.C. to get him treated, and I rented a place there. We came back in May. He made thirty paintings that summer. It was a very magical time in this house, too good to be true. He got sick again in September. That Thanksgiving weekend, J.F.K. got shot, and there was a terrible storm that went through three high tides. It took the bulkhead, the deck, and almost undermined the house. Christmas, he died. He is buried in the Provincetown cemetery. I carved a gravestone for him; it's a dancing lady.

PA: A good thing to dance on the grave of an artist.

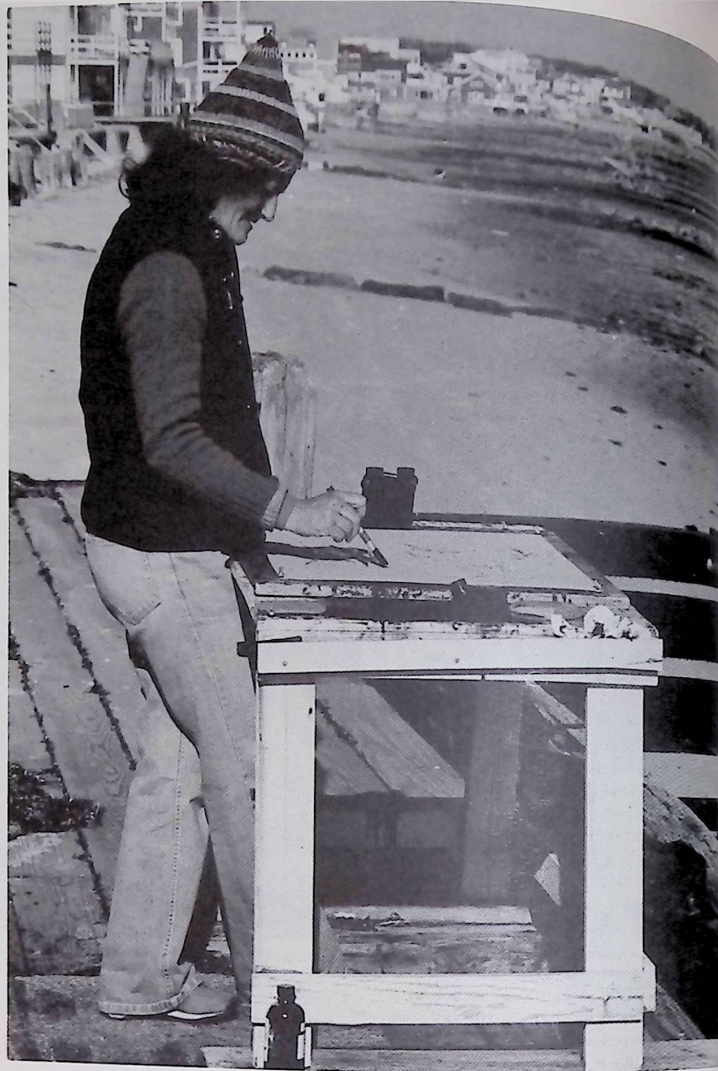
PdG: I had an idea that an artist is supposed to have something real on his grave. A couple of people pushed me to mark the place so they could find it. I had been making pencil drawings at the time. Originally, I had planned a phallic form, but when I got the slab of marble in the house, that seemed all wrong. I sat down one morning, and the present female figure just came out. I drew it to size and started chopping that day. Conrad Mallicoat loaned me a lump hammer and a point, and he made me a stand so I could work facing the piece at my own height. I had never used tools before, but I had no problems carving it. I worked on it for three months in 1969. The piece was an extension of myself. Nanno would be pleased to have a dancing lady on his grave. Particularly me. Maybe I would have continued carving if graveyard commissions had come my way. Instead, I went back to drawing.

PA: Nanno was the great love of your life. You must have had an extraordinary mourning period.

PdG: Yes. I freaked. I stayed freaked. I went west and skied. Visited with my writer friends. I worked to pay some debts. After maybe nine months, with the help of some new friends, I got launched into a second adolescence. I studied Zen Buddhism, I became deeply involved with jazz music, with the Black world of New York, and I explored psychedelic drugs. I spent a lot of time trying to figure out what art is about.

PA: Did you listen to jazz at the A-House in those days?

PdG: Reggie had live jazz in the summer. There was a big table in the middle of the room, and we were there every night. Reggie had a wonderful collection of paintings hanging on the wall, too. Bob Thompson, Salina,



PAT AT WORK ON HER DECK

Photo: Tina D

Gandy Brody, et al. In 1965, Bob painted here during the summer in the big studio. Gandy lived in the back room and painted mostly on the deck. Nina Simone played a gig in the Carriage Room for Reggie, and later Bob and Gandy brought her to the studio and Bob made some portraits of her. There was a lot happening.

PA: What made you start drawing?

PdG: Part of me always wanted to be an artist, but it was much easier for me to do it vicariously through Nanno. After watching Nanno paint, I couldn't paint. I was too close to the way he did it, and I had a long way to go to break away from graphic design. I needed to get used to working with a thing in my hand. I started doing doodle drawing with a rapidograph. Nanno had used the squeegee top of the Higgins India ink bottle, so I used that when I started drawing sea gulls in 1966. After that, I experimented with color, and I made some paintings. This work was very graphic, hard edged. I felt I was still attached to a book jacket state of mind. And what I did was always interrupted by having to go back to work in N.Y.C., seven or eight months in the winter, where I lived in a small place for \$26 a month. It wasn't until 1974 that I really got into doing some serious drawing. Paul Yakovenko had left a bamboo stick in the studio. I picked that up and started drawing birds and water.

PA: You have been faithful to that short, stubby stick for many years.

PdG: It's a good implement for what I'm doing. I sharpen it myself. I push at the paper with it. It is crude and clumsy, which adds to the accident aspect of the line. If I am on the stick will do anything I want it to do. If not, I get hideous, awful stuff. I never could deal with the brush; it's too soft. There's a resistance to a stick that I like.

PA: Do you still design books?

PdG: No. In 1974, my mother died, and I inherited a little money. I stopped designing book jackets. It's not that I didn't like doing them. I did, and I could get plenty of work by then and do it here. I felt that the format 5½ x 8½ inches, three-color separations, and

somebody always on the phone asking for something I hadn't done, bound me up. After fifteen years of doing this thing, I had to break away from it, extract my mind from a tight place. My friend Myron Stout warned me about changing my profession in mid-life, but I paid no attention. Instead, I began drawing full-time—sea gulls and water, on sand-colored paper, 20 x 26 inches. I made hundreds of drawings without thinking of selling them. I worked at a table on the deck outside my studio all winter. In the summer, I went to the sea gull rookery at Long Point in my kayak and drew more sea gulls.

PA: Your bird drawings have a Japanese quality. Did you study Zen ink drawing and calligraphy?

PdG: When I started to draw I had no real background in art. I was studying Zen Buddhism. It was this teaching I used to learn to draw, and this way of drawing became a practice, like meditation. The teaching was a guide

for weeding out the bullshit in my mind in my work. I do look at Japanese ink drawing, but my work looks Oriental because I put my mind in an Oriental place, and what comes out is a Western off-shoot of that thing; like what the Black people did in Christianity.

PA: You draw from the kayak.

PdG: The kayak functions as an uncomfortable chair I sit in to draw the cormorants on the breakwater. It has a backrest and a space for paper. I can lift it on and off the deck. It is convenient because I can maneuver around quietly. I only use it for drawing the fall—August, September, and October can work six hours at a stretch. The wind and the sun and the sea can be a problem, and sitting there with my legs stuck out in front of me is also difficult, but this is the one way I can get close enough to the birds to really see them. A big advantage is six hours of uninterrupted work. There are other times when

I get to enjoy the kayak, though.

PA: When you play the drums—we recall hearing them beat across the bay a half a mile away some August afternoons when the wind carries the sound from your deck to our ears, hauntingly—do you use your hands in a way similar to drawing?

PdG: I have to get into a juxtaposition with myself so that my hands can play the drums and I won't stop them. It is the same with drawing. My hand has to make the drawing, and I have to find out how not to stop it. I keep working until the rhythm or line starts to happen, and my hand is there and somehow the energy must come through without interference from this thing on my shoulders. Skiing fast through good snow, making tracks in the early morning—that is a similar thing.

PA: Your hands are covered with hard skin from paddling. Your muscles are toned, your face is weathered. You have studied Tai Chi for eight years, and you have a black belt in kemp-karate. Do you regard yourself as a role model for the independent woman making her way in the world?

PdG: No. All this is just my way of surviving.

PA: Do you consider yourself to be tough?

PdG: No. Only externally. When I'm not focussed on my work, I tend to disintegrate. Staying physically strong is something to do in between bouts of drawing. I live under the illusion that if I don't stay strong, I'll disintegrate.

PA: How did you get into karate?

PdG: At the time, I desperately wanted to hook up with a music teacher. I had no interest whatsoever in the martial arts. But in Provincetown you haven't much choice. Norman Armstrong came to town, and he convinced me I should study his art. He was such an incredible teacher and practitioner it didn't matter what he taught; you might as well study it. In the beginning, it was a way of getting in shape. Later, it became another big thing in my life. It was a long, arduous trip to a black belt.

PA: We once heard a drill sergeant address his troops, saying, "Now you know just enough to get your ass kicked in an alley."

PdG: I'm a runner.

PA: Where do you locate and confront your fear?

PdG: Any concern about what the line will look like is fear. Any judgement of what you are doing as you do it is fear. Fear makes the line and the drawing impotent. The same situation is true playing the drums in a band. What you know gets you working, but then you have to let go and work beyond what you know for something to happen. The edge people talk about is somewhere in between. If you go too far, you lose it. If you don't go far enough you never find it. In the martial arts you fear getting hurt. You practice speed and technique until your confrontations with fear get more and more sophisticated. In Tai Chi, you let your opponent attack you, and just before impact you turn so that his force lands on nothing; then with a small push you can use his momentum to send him flying. I think that in all these situations technique is how you converse with fear. But to confront fear is a time-stopping situation.

PA: In your drawing, the line is the occasion for you to delineate your fear. The line itself is the edge.

PdG: Well, the bird is the line. The line translates my excitement about how it is out there, what is happening with a bird in the air or with a mating pair in the water. There is a lot going on. I mimick the action of the water and the birds moving with the water. It's almost like tracing. And often I do this looking through binoculars.

PA: In your more recent drawings, you are putting the birds on water, depicting water. Do you think you will ever graduate to water without birds?

PdG: I've tried that. It's very upsetting to draw moving, choppy water. As long as there is a bird on the water, I can handle it.

PA: In the painting of Nanno de Groot, what interests us is the way his forms were set within a field of tension. For example, a red sail would be jellied in a sea of white, vibrating like gelatin congealing from a liquid state. The edges are held in a kind of tension that you can see.

PdG: I'm looking for a loose and easy line. When I first began to draw, it was terrifying. I knew I couldn't really draw, but I decided to draw. I made thousands of drawings. It was like beating your own head against a wall until you get through the wall. I still find my early drawings interesting, even when I didn't have any idea how to draw a bird, when the legs were a line with a knob on it. It took a long time, but my hand learned. The hand learns. **PA:** Few women have both made art and lived as strongly in nature as you have. Do you see yourself as a Georgia O'Keeffe of the Outer Cape?

PdG: I think it is very dangerous to think of yourself as anything you are not already. I don't like this female independent thing. Living alone is horrible, but I don't think it's any better living with someone you shouldn't be living with. I feel very cut off. Come April, after a winter alone, I almost feel I don't exist. I barely know what's going on, unless I haul myself to New York for a little while and look around. But then you lose weeks you could be working.

PA: When you exhibit your work, you often do large installations of many drawings, an entire wall of drawings massed together.

PdG: I'm not so interested in the single drawing as what can happen with many drawings. They fit together in the order I draw them, with the omission of the ones I destroy. On the wall they make a large body of work that has a rhythm all its own. Repetition attracts me. Last year, at my exhibition at the Group Gallery, the wall with 120 cormorant drawings read from a distance like hieroglyphics. I like that. I want my work to have the look of writing on the wall. There is a bird intimacy I'm looking for, a weirdness, an archaic peculiarity they have that is recognizable; not just recognizable, but familiar.